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The Death of a Cinephile?

Performing Identity and Cultural Capital in the Online Film Community of *Letterboxd*

MSc in Media and Communication Studies

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*For my Grandma,
Who didn't know much about films,
But loved her Turkish series.*

Abstract

This thesis investigates the evolution of cinephilia in the digital age through a case study of Letterboxd, a popular and culturally significant yet understudied social platform dedicated to film logging, reviewing and film discussion. Grounded in theories from film studies, this thesis adds a necessary media and communication perspective to explore how contemporary cinephile identity is performed, negotiated and shaped by platform-specific practices and community dynamics. This thesis draws from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital as well as frameworks of mediatization and participatory culture to position digital cinephilia as a reconfigured cultural practice, entangled with technological infrastructure and the democratisation of cultural authority. This project adapts a user-centred approach and, through qualitative research design, offers a nuanced account of how users engage with Letterboxd both as a social network and a space for taste and identity negotiation. This thesis combines semi-structured qualitative interviews and elements of media go-along conducted with 11 active Letterboxd users.

The findings reveal that while traditional cinephilia was tied to material and intellectual exclusivity, individuality and elitism, its digital form on Letterboxd is more participatory, affective, performative and collective. This study argues that rather than signalling the end of cultural capital, it is now accumulated through platform-specific practices and networked visibility. Acts like writing reviews, rating films or curating lists make new forms of value and legitimacy within digital film communities. Letterboxd democratises access to cinephilic discourse, but it does not eliminate hierarchies. They are reshaped through peer interaction, validation and a participatory feedback mechanism. This thesis ultimately repositions cinephilia as a fluid identity and socially negotiated practices embedded within the rhythms and rituals of Letterboxd.

Keywords: Letterboxd, Digital Cinephilia, Cultural Capital, Identity Performance, Film Communities, Participatory Culture

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Introduction

Close your eyes and think about the last time you went to a cinema: the silver screen glowing in the dark, the softness of red seats, and the unmistakable smell of salted popcorn. For many, this experience is becoming increasingly rare. Despite the noticeable rebound in cinema attendance, the numbers are yet to return to their pre-pandemic levels. According to the European Audiovisual Observatory (2024), in 2023, 861 million tickets were sold across the continent, 22,7% below the average sold between 2017 and 2020. High prices of film tickets, and more importantly, the rise of streaming platforms have, for many, replaced the ritual of going to movies (Tabbara, 2024; Ho-him, Li and Ding, 2025). Additionally, the development of amateur online reviewers and aggregators like Rotten Tomatoes or IMDb has undercut the traditional dimension of cultural authority and the figure of a critic. These shifts raise pertinent questions: if, as Susan Sontag (1996) once declared, cinema is dead, and if the critic is dead too (McDonald, 2007), then what of the cinephile? Should we stop talking about cinephilia altogether?

Online culture says a different story. “I watched one film this month. No longer a cinephile” (oliver, 2024) says a meme that circulates on social media platforms such as X and Instagram, while TikTok is overflowing with the so-called *film bros* declaring “*Fight Club* a peak cinema” (Young, 2023). These examples may appear marginal or exaggerated, but they also suggest something worth exploring. The aspiration, language, and rituals of cinephiles haven’t disappeared; they are simply evolving and migrating into the digital spaces. The clearest sign that cinephilia is not only alive but also thriving is the existence and popularity of Letterboxd. Launched in 2011, Letterboxd is a “global social network for grass-roots film discussion and discovery” (Letterboxd, n.d.) with a user base of 17 million users at the end of 2024 (Goldsmith, 2025). It functions as more than just a platform for reviews, it is a digital diary, community, and space for performing identity and cultural distinction. These participatory practices are moulding new forms of engagement with cinema, and they reflect larger transformations in how cultural value and legitimacy are constructed in the digital age.

Letterboxd has become a digital arena where film enthusiasts collectively gather not just to log films they have seen, but to perform digital cinephilia. Users can rate films using a five-star system (half star included), write reviews ranging from critical to comedic, and create lists that reflect the essence of their personal taste or a communally recognised playful theme. Each profile on Letterboxd then becomes a living and unique film diary, complete

with tags that signify who they watched it with or where. The users can also add a flair of creativity, either with the help of the lists function, where they can chart anything from “Weirdo Watchlist” to “lonely people in neon cities”, or they can curate an ever-visible square of four favourite films on their profile like a cinematic calling card. Letterboxd blends personal cinephilic identity with public display, transforming solitary viewing into a shared social ritual. With its design and features, the platform reflects a broader shift in how cinephilia is understood, performed, and invigorated (King, 2023)¹.

Other platforms for film evaluation might be better known, such as IMDb or Rotten Tomatoes, both of which have been studied (Behlil, 2005; De Valck, 2010; Jullier and Leveratto, 2012; Verboord, 2014; Jacobs, et al., 2015; McWhirter, 2016; Mandizabal, 2017). In contrast, Letterboxd presents itself as a more niche and understudied space, despite its growing popularity and cultural relevance (Goldsmith, 2025). What distinguishes Letterboxd is the focus on personal expressions and the community aspect of film lovers getting together. Choosing Letterboxd as a case for this study brings a new perspective to the ongoing academic debate on digital platforms for film enthusiasts (De Valck, 2010). This thesis sheds light on how platform-specific cultures affect how we discuss films and who gets to participate in these discussions by examining a significant, yet understudied, platform.

This thesis investigates how cinephilia is practised, performed, and negotiated within the digital environment of Letterboxd. In doing so, it brings together theories from film studies, media, and communication, introducing a new perspective to study cinephilia. Cultural consumption is not neutral and passive; it always tells a story of taste, legitimacy, and social positioning (Wright, 2011). This thesis draws from Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984; 1986) theory of cultural capital to further examine the construction of value and legitimacy within the Letterboxd community. In this context, cultural capital is not tied to institutional authority, but it emerges through participation and gains meaning only when recognised by peers. Traditionally, cinephilia has often been associated with higher taste and a more refined identity, often marked by knowledge and status (Hagener and de Valck, 2008; Mulvey, 2009). Central to this thesis is the idea that contemporary cinephile identity is not static or exclusive to elites, but is performed through mediatised practices. I argue that cultural capital is now performed and accumulated through platform-specific practices, constructing new hierarchies and norms within the cinephile community.

¹ For more information about Letterboxd see Appendix 1.

Traditionally, cinephilia has been understood and studied within film studies. The term at its core translates from Greek to *kine*, meaning to move, and *philia*, to love. However, at a time when everyday practices are performed in the digital space (Couldry and Hepp, 2013), the shift needs to be made to take a look at cinephilia from a media and communication standpoint. This thesis shifts the focus towards platform-based practices, digital interactions, and the role of technological advancements in shaping cultural identity. This thesis, adapting media and communication research, draws from platform studies (Gillespie, 2010; Jin, 2017a; van Dijck, 2021) and mediatisation theory (Couldry and Hepp, 2017; Krotz, 2017) to analyse how technological transformation and cinephilia are entangled. Most importantly, the research dissects how identity and everyday practices are negotiated in environments deeply woven into mediatisation.

Central to this thesis is the notion of identity performance. Following Hall (1996) and more recent works on digital identity (Hermes, 2005; Code and Zaparyniuk, 2009; van Dijck, 2013), identity is not a fixed trait but a construction negotiated through mediated practices and publicly observed by the community. In the digital context, Letterboxd serves as a stage for cinephiles to perform, signal, and negotiate their identity through curated watch histories, personalised lists, reviews, and interactions with others. In this thesis, I argue that identity performances go beyond expressive acts and can be understood as a strategic navigation of cultural capital and belonging within the broader social and architectural dimensions of Letterboxd, an understudied yet fast-growing digital platform.

Analysing how cinephilia is performed in the digital environment on platforms like Letterboxd matters because it offers a path to understanding broader technological and cultural transformation. It challenges the outdated ideas of elitism in cultural taste, which are also often indicated by a generational shift. It brings cinema closer to the audience, the audience that is inclusive and open to everyone. It breaks from the elitist space of cinematic perspective and makes space for viewers to engage and construct an understanding led by personal taste and reflections. Additionally, it matters because it reveals how users navigate traditional practices and rituals within a new media environment. The environment that influences individual identity. This thesis aims to help us understand how digital tools shape who we are and how we express ourselves, which is a core issue in media and communication studies.

To investigate the processes existing within the Letterboxd community, qualitative methods are employed. This thesis combines semi-structured interviews with the elements of media go-along. Much of the previous research on film digital communities has relied on textual analysis or data scraping, however, this thesis prioritises personal reflections and experiences of active users to investigate how users understand and perform their cinephilia. It aims to offer a richer and more nuanced insight into community formation and identity work in the digital space. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How is the notion of cinephilia performed and negotiated within the Letterboxd community?
2. How does Letterboxd facilitate the creation and performance of cultural capital within its community?

This thesis is divided into four main chapters, following this introductory section. The first chapter, Literature Review, aims to situate the research within scholarly debates on the transformation of cinephilia in the context of digital media. The second chapter outlines and justifies the methodological framework employed to address the thesis's research questions. It discusses the selected methods of semi-structured interviews with elements of media go-along. The chapter also reflects on the limitations and ethical considerations of this research. The third chapter presents findings put forward from data coding and frames them within a conceptual framework and empirical material. The final section concludes this thesis with answers to the posed research questions and offers suggestions for future research.

Cinephilia has not died, but instead it has transformed and adapted to the mediatised and more global world. By becoming more dynamic, performative, and socially mediated, cinephilia is now foregrounding itself on various digital platforms and online forums. This is the idea from which this thesis has started. Through the case of Letterboxd, this thesis argues that cinephile identity today is constructed through interactions with platform architecture, community norms, and individual expression. This evolving version of cinephilia makes one wonder and ask questions about the broader cultural shifts in how taste, value, and belonging are constructed and appreciated online.

Literature Review

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework that informs this thesis. Cinephilia, despite its rich history and long tradition, has long resisted a fixed definition. The shift into the digital age has further complicated its meaning and expression. With the rise of digital platforms, like Letterboxd, film appreciation has become a participatory, networked, and socially visible practice. This literature review situates the study within the broad research on cinephilia and then goes on to connect it with media, community, identity, and cultural capital. This relationship of key concepts aims to offer a foundation for empirical analysis.

The review is structured into three main parts. It begins with an overview of traditional cinephilia and its transition into digital spaces. It then introduces media and communication perspectives of mediatisation to understand the role of platforms, communities, and identity. This section also explores participatory culture and user-generated content (UGC) as important elements of contemporary cinephilia. Finally, it turns to the user's cultural capital and authority within digital film discourse on Letterboxd.

1. Cinephilia: Then and Now

At the core of this study is the concept of cinephilia. It has originated from the cinema tradition and was later adopted by film studies (Mulvey, 2009). The concept has been deeply philosophical, with a nature so elusive that it resists a simple definition. Over time, cinephilia has evolved from its roots in classical film culture to become a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. It is important to establish the definition of cinephilia because the term encapsulates the central question of this thesis: how film appreciation is practised, experienced, and negotiated in the digital context of Letterboxd. The following section will explore both the traditional understanding of cinephilia and how it has adapted to technological advances and the rise of digital culture. Positioning cinephilia as a rich and evolving concept sets the stage for later discussion on its evolution in the digital age. The central argument of this thesis states that while the digital age has significantly transformed cinephilia, it has not diminished it (Sontag, 1996). It has compelled it to adapt, preserving its core practices and emotional investment while enabling new forms of expression, community building, and the performance of cultural capital in online spaces.

1.1. Traditional Cinephilia

Despite being a portmanteau of Greek words *kine*, meaning to move, and *philia*, to love, “cinephilia [...] is not simply a love of the cinema” (Elsaesser, 2005, p.30). Since its early days in post-war France, in its classical understanding, it is presented as “life organized around films” (Shambu, 2019, p.34). Traditionally, cinephilia has been closely tied to geographical location, often limited to the metropolitan elites who had access and resources to afford the pleasure of frequent cinema visits. As Thomas Elsaesser (2005, pp.28-29) explains, it could manifest in ritualistic acts, such as choosing a specific place in a cinema, demonstrating the cinephile’s awareness of one’s surroundings. Initially cultivated by young French film critics, this form of film engagement was more than just personal devotion. It served as a means of acquiring cultural capital, a form of symbolic value of cultural competence obtained through specialised knowledge, taste, and access (Bourdieu, 1986). This contributed to the construction of the “omniscient cinéphile” archetype (De Valck and Hagener, 2005, p.11) that became central to the elitist mode of film reception. The authority and legitimacy rested on the shoulders of those who could perform the deepest understanding of cinema.

While cinephilia has often been celebrated for its philosophical and emotional dimensions, it has always involved elitist practices and material engagements. As Jenna Ng (2010, p.147) writes, cinephilia extended beyond “ritualistic and dedicated film watching” to include reading and producing criticism, participating in film clubs, and developing networks of admiration. Through critical writing, collecting films and posters, attending film festivals, cinephiles’ identity has been constructed by more than just watching films (Hediger, 2010). These practices were communal, but not inclusive. Access to cinephile circles requires possessing prior knowledge, symbolic fluency, and exposure to dominant canons often installed by hegemonic narrative (Shambu, 2019).

This cinephile engagement was shaped not only by intellectual predisposition but also by strong emotional attachments. Malte Hagener and Marijke de Vlack (2008, p.21) argue that potential loss and nostalgia are always present in cinephilia. Watching films was an affective experience, defined by the uniqueness of each screening. Cinephilia has been bound to the idea of the film as fleeting opportunities of viewing film on the silver screen and cherished because of its elusiveness (McGowan, 2024, p.1272). This positive longing and anticipation were balanced by the anxiety of disappointment. As Hagener and de Vlack (2008, p.28)

write: “[t]he gap between what is expected and what will be experienced, [...], seems to be an essential precondition for a cinephile experience”. This adds a deeply emotional layer to the intellectually understood traditional cinephilia gaze, making it fueled by longing, anxiety, and the desire for aesthetic transcendence (Keathley, 2006).

Despite the communal and affective dimensions, traditional cinephilia has remained exclusive. Cultural capital has played a crucial role in distinguishing cinephiles from the general audience, the latter being understood as casual viewers whose film consumption is limited to mainstream taste due to access and media saturation (Bourdieu, 1984). Cultural capital in traditional, elitist cinephile communities has been expressed through familiarity with broad film culture, especially auteur cinema, mastery of film theory, and the ability to discuss films within artistic, historical, and political frameworks (Elsaesser, 2005; Hagener and de Vlack, 2008; Ng, 2010). Their distinction has helped maintain a separation between traditional cinephiles and the casual viewer, reinforcing cultural boundaries and taste hierarchies (Aboulaoula and Biltereyst, 2021). Participation in this system has been about film appreciation performed in a recognised and elitist way. And over the years, from its beginning in post-war France, cinephilia has remained almost static, until the digital development came into play.

1.2. Towards the Digital Cinephilia

Tracing the origins of cinephilia is not sufficient to understand cinephilia today. It also requires an assessment of how digital technologies and online cultures are transforming its foundations. This matters for this thesis because it is within this tension between continuity and change that Letterboxd emerges as a significant space where cinephilia is preserved and renegotiated.

Applying the classic definition of cinephilia in the context of media convergence and global culture democratisation is a critical challenge. Over the years, attempts have been made to announce the death of both cinema and, as a result, of the cinephile. Most notably, Susan Sontag (1996) suggests that the commercialisation of the film industry and the rise of digital formats render traditional cinephilia obsolete, and the magic of film viewing will lose its meaning. However, this view has since been contested by several scholars who argue that such a proclamation is overly deterministic and premature (Elsaesser, 2008; Hagener and De Valck, 2008; Jullier and Leveratto, 2012; Mandizabal, 2017; McGowan, 2024). Instead of

disappearing, very much like cinema, cinephilia has changed, adapting to new technologies and viewing settings. This suggests that cinephilia's evolution, not demise, demonstrated the adaptability of film culture in the face of media shifts (Hagener and De Valck, 2008, p.29).

Elsaesser (2005) introduces the concept of *cinephilia take two* to account for these transformations. This marks the departure from the traditional, cinema-based model labelled as *cinephilia take one*. In contrast to the ritualistic and place-bound nature of traditional cinephilia, *take two* takes advantage of technological developments such as DVDs and, to a lesser extent, the Internet. It moves cinephilia from the era that valued elitist discourses and the scarcity of films to the celebration of accessibility (McGowan, 2024). *Take two* marks the transitional period, it showcases that digital cinephilia builds on past practices rather than breaking from them.

Building on Elsaesser's idea, David McGowan (2024) introduces a new phase of cinephilia. Labelled as *take three*, it acknowledges even deeper and more rapid technological transformation brought on by digital streaming platforms. The term captures the overwhelming scale of access made possible by streaming services that "frustrate[s] one's ability to explore and organise" film culture meaningfully (McGowan, 2024, p.1274). It also points to the corporation's role in dictating canons, understood as films available on streaming platforms. However, neither Elsaesser (2005) nor McGowan (2024) explicitly addresses the importance of digital film forums in shaping how cinephilia is experienced, performed, and socially constructed today. By looking at cinephilia only through the film-watching practices, they neglect how online platforms like Letterboxd reconfigure cinephile identity through participatory discourse, social interactions, and public display of taste. This shift signals that the traditional, elitist model of cinephilia is being redefined in more inclusive and participatory ways, a key shift that this research is trying to argue for.

This transition reflects deep structural changes within cultural production and consumption. First, the technological shift from analogue to digital has democratised access to film. Second, the globalisation of culture has expanded the scope of cinephile engagement, aided by media and transnational platforms (Vidal, 2017). Finally, the rise of participatory platforms, where "consumption is another way of production" (Jullier and Leveratto, 2012, p.151), enables users to critique, rate, archive, and share films. However, scholars' discussions about this transition often emphasise film viewing practices and "the difference between movie-going and home-viewing" (Behlil, 2005, p.112). When discussing the

influence of home film viewing on the cinephilia debate, Melis Behlil (2005) refers to the emerging group as *videophiles*. However, if we view online platforms as replacing traditional in-person film experiences, the term *videophiles* falls short of fully capturing the new behaviours of digital cinephiles. This narrow understanding cannot justify the existence of platforms like Letterboxd and their role in shaping contemporary cinephilia.

Alternative terms have emerged to better conceptualise this evolution. Hagener and de Vlack (2008, p.22) suggest *third-generation cinephilia* to reflect the cinephilia that gave up on physical space. Others emphasise the role that the internet plays in anonymous, decentralised, cinephilic expression by using terms *digital cinephiles* or *cinephilia 2.0* (Jullier and Leveratto, 2012). Their understanding of transformation highlights four key dimensions: information access, film access, judgment expression, and digital archiving (Jullier and Leveratto, 2012, p.148). These practices construct what they refer to as a *collective intelligence* a co-created understanding of film, not imposed by academic authorities but emerging from bottom-up participation presented on the example of IMDb (Jullier and Leveratto, 2012, p.149). Their model provides a valuable insight for understanding decentralisation and democratisation of cinephile culture, a major shift from the term's traditional understanding. However, it still lacks discussion on the performativity and identity-building functions of digital cinephilia. It does not fully make a meaningful contribution to how users articulate their taste and build community through visible actions and interactions.

Imperative for my argument is how in the contemporary media landscape, cinephiles get together and express their opinions. Digital cinephiles gather and seek film-related information in online spaces such as special film platforms (e.g., IMDb or Rotten Tomatoes), where they also exchange views on films or share files (Mandizabal, 2017). However, previous research has rarely classified these communities as cinephiles, often due to the traditional perception of cinephilia as an elitist and exclusive practice. This thesis argues that contemporary cinephilia, performed on Letterboxd, equally inherits and redefines the legacy of traditional cinephilia. It preserves aspects such as emotional investments, participating in criticism, or canon-making, but redistributes them across a more democratic and digitalised field. Building on Behlil's (2005) recognition of digital forums as a contemporary form of traditional cinephilia activity, I argue that digital platforms not only facilitate digital cinephilia, but they are also active sites of identity negotiation and community construction, and where cultural capital is acquired.

2. Digital Cinephilia: Mediatisation, Democratisation, and the Internet

To understand who a contemporary digital cinephile is, we must first consider the broader transformation in media and cultural life. Rather than seeing cinephilia as a nostalgic or endangered practice, this thesis positions it as a dynamic, evolving cultural identity reshaped by digital infrastructure and deep mediatisation (Couldry and Hepp, 2017). Cinephilia remains a personal and elusive phenomenon (Ng, 2010), often narrowly framed by traditional film studies. This thesis aims to analyse cinephilia within a broader media and communication context to uncover the transformation of the term in this changed human communication environment (Krotz, 2017). This includes the mediatisation of everyday practices, the architecture of digital platforms, the emergence of affective and participatory digital film communities, and finally, how all the aforementioned facilitate the way identity and cultural capital are performed and negotiated.

2.1 Mediatisation and Democratisation

As digital cinephilia increasingly unfolds in online spaces, digital platforms play a critical role in shaping how digital cinephiles construct and define their identities while simultaneously being part of a community. To understand the influence of new technologies on film culture and cinephilic practices, it is essential to introduce the concept of mediatisation. Film-related practices, from consuming texts and seeking information to expressing opinions, are mediated by digital technologies (Jullier and Leveratto, 2012). Mediatisation, as an approach within media and communication (Couldry and Hepp, 2013, p.197), allows us to study cinephilia from a perspective that extends beyond traditional film studies. Defined by Friedrich Krotz (2009) as a *metaprocess*, mediatisation can help understand how “everyday practices increasingly rely upon media and become ‘moulded’ by them” (cited in Hepp, 2016, p.919). It provides a framework to examine how technological change has transformed cinephiles’ experience and identity. Traditionally connected to physical theatre, the act of watching films entered a new era where digital platforms play a crucial role in cinephiles’ engagement and connection. Technological advancements have made it easier for individual cinephiles to find fellow film lovers and form genuine communities undisturbed by elitist cinephilia.

Mediatisation played a significant role in the democratisation of access and participation in culture and cultural discourse. Digital technologies have reshaped film consumption and paved the way for a democratised, globally interconnected community of cinephiles. Mediatisation processes transformed traditional film-viewing practices and allowed for new modes of engagement for cinephiles to interact with one another. In this context, I argue that Letterboxd plays a significant role in democratisation by providing a platform where digital cinephilia transcends its traditional boundaries and shifts cultural authority (Hjarvard and Petersen, 2013).

While democratisation is often conceptualised in terms of shifting power from professional gatekeepers to broader participation in critical discourse (Frey, 2015a, p.82), it is equally important to recognise its geographical dimension. Due to mediatisation, cinephilia or digital cinephilia is no longer exclusive to Western, middle-class, well-educated men (Shambu, 2019). Digital cinephilia has evolved beyond “an idea with a distinctly European pedigree” (Trice, 2015, p.611). Letterboxd challenges the historically Eurocentric conception of cinephilia by allowing users to share their views with a broad and diverse audience (Vidal, 2017), setting the stage for a redefined global landscape of film appreciation. Although previous research on participatory culture, particularly on platforms for cultural evaluation, both books and films, has been conducted in Western contexts, studies of regional cinephilia (e.g., Philippine cinema; Mandizabal, 2017) highlight the importance of considering a variety of perspectives when analysing digital film communities.

With this understanding of how mediatisation and democratisation transform film culture, it is imperative to understand the operation of the aforementioned role in facilitating these processes through digital platforms. This will aid in further illuminating the dynamics of identity formation within online cinephile communities.

2.2. Digital Platforms: Architecture, Participation, and Rituals

This research approaches digital film platforms as spaces of democratisation and emerging new hierarchies, where cultural capital is acquired through participation and engagement, and not solely through institutional affiliations. While both traditional and contemporary cinephilia emphasise “the moment of exhibition and consumption” (Trice, 2015, p.612), I challenge this narrow focus by highlighting the full cycle of film engagement made possible on digital platforms, from selecting the film to its reception and evaluation. As Jin (2017a,

p.3883) notes, “digital platforms have changed and influenced people’s daily lives, including their cultural activities”. Cinephilia, therefore, extends beyond film appreciation. It then becomes a cultural practice tied to social and cultural value creation, possible through online communities, where engagement and knowledge-sharing redefine what it means to be a cinephile. It becomes a performative and collaborative practice shaped by social interaction, platform architecture, and user-generated content (UGC).

This shift from traditional cinephilia to the one performed in digital spaces concerns not just where films are discussed but also how and by whom they are discussed and evaluated. The mediatization of film practices on platforms like Letterboxd has changed the dynamics of film criticism and community formation. This transformation is deeply rooted in what Henry Jenkins (2006) termed participatory culture. Through a set of practices on the participatory platforms, audiences are active participants with the power to create meaning and interpretations. Users are given the ability to interact with others, create content, and change cultural discourse from the bottom up. Letterboxd challenges established hierarchies of authority concerning cinephilic identity by redefining it as a collective performance of taste, status, and belonging.

Participation, as van Dijck (2013) argues, is inherently tied to the platform architecture. The tools and limitations imposed by platform design shape the ability to express oneself through reviews, ratings, and lists. This aligns with van Dijck's (2009, pp.42-43) earlier observation that participatory culture “increasingly demands room for ordinary citizens to wield media technologies [...] to express themselves and distribute those creations as they seem fit”. Through active and shared practices like reviewing and engaging with others’ reviews, users co-create the cultural meaning of films. In doing so, cinephilia transforms from a solitary passion to a collective endeavour rooted in collaboration. Individuals’ opinions and tastes are spread through networks, which also affect and challenge how that individual perceives and evaluates products (van Dijck, 2013, p.11). This has been previously studied with a focus on platforms for book evaluation, like Goodreads, where user-generated reviews and ratings have reshaped literary criticism (Verboord, 2010; Verboord, 2014; Moody, 2019; Worrall, 2019). Letterboxd exemplifies how participatory culture and UGC empower cinephiles to shape film discourse collectively and democratically, hinting towards a major shift from original cinephilic tradition.

This shift also challenges the traditional power held by professional critics. Previously, it was the critics who held the authority to inform the audience what was “good” or “bad”. This power dynamic has changed as a result of the internet and the development of participatory platforms. Now, the collective of people with autonomy has the power to share and discuss their personal opinions, where judgment becomes a matter of personal taste rather than an external, authoritative decree (Gillespie, 2012, p.56). It is now shared publicly and subjected to collective recognition. Ryan Gillespie (2012, p.62) argues that, “[a]rts and entertainment reviews tend to function in a similar way, but rather than evaluating the product according to its function and thereby its implicit standard, the evaluation often goes directly toward the feedback style of ‘I like it/I don’t like it’”. As Bjarki Valtysson (2010, p.202) adds, digital platforms have become the main arenas for cultural expression and public opinion because they can now “be mediated through electronic communication networks and thus alter the way people access and participate in culture”. This shift highlights how digital platforms are more than just places of individual expression. They serve as venues for active agents who reshape ways of engaging with and influencing cultural discourse.

UGC, one of the participatory forms, is essential to redefining cinephilia as a dynamic, bottom-up activity. This thesis argues that participatory culture and UGC are mechanisms through which users challenge the traditional authority and create a more open and user-driven form of cinephilia. On Letterboxd, users share personal reflections in reviews, which can be seen as produced content, that contribute to a networked system of cultural evaluation. Participating in content creation marks the shift from passive consumption to active audience participation, contributes to cultural production and interpretation (Phang, Zhang, and Sutanto, 2013; van Dijck, 2013). Previous studies looked at how online reviews influence consumers’ choices from an economic perspective, for example, their impact on box office performance (Duan, Gu, and Whinston, 2008). In contrast, this thesis focuses on the symbolic and affective dimensions of participation. It is not about influencing consumption, but on platforms like Letterboxd, cinephiles through UGC construct meaning and identity. Most importantly, their participation speaks to a collective social experience (Dahlgren and Hill, 2020). Letterboxd is a space where visibility and social interactions construct cultural presence (Verbood, 2014; Wang, 2024). Instead of serving only as a platform for personal expression, UGC is part of a larger networked system of cultural evaluation. In the digital universe, “every cultural expression, from the worst to the best, from

the most elitist to the most popular”, comes together to construct a new symbolic environment (Castellas, 2000, p.403).

This shift to active participants in film discourse is possible on digital platforms, enabling new modes of participation through content creation, community interaction, and identity performance. Being inherently social and expressive, such practices become ritualistic. Drawing from Couldry’s (2003) theory on media rituals, these mediated practices can be understood as practices that reinforce the idea that media are central to our social lives. They are not only habitual but meaningful performances that connect individuals to the community norms and shared values (Dahlgren and Hill, 2020). As Tommaso Trillò et al. (2022, p.2) argue, media rituals are “concerned with the relationship between people and the values” they sustain on the digital platforms. For cinephilia, rituals have always been associated with the time of film watching. This extends into the digital practices, and as Behlil (2005) explains, shared rituals foster a sense of belonging. While earlier work on online platforms for film evaluation acknowledged this ritualistic dimension of cinephilia, they often limited this understanding of rituals to the act of watching films (Behlil, 2005; De Valck and Hagener, 2005). This thesis shifts the attention to broader patterns of mediated participation, recognising the entire process, from film discovery to rating and reviewing, recognising that cinephilia engagement goes beyond the moment of film watching. Recognising this shift is imperative for understanding how digital platforms reshape how cinephiles build community, identity, and cultural value around films.

Early research on digital platforms for film lovers showed that they attracted a diverse range of users, spanning across geographical locations, age groups, genders, and professional backgrounds, attracting amateur cinephiles and professional film critics alike. For example, in Behlil’s (2005) study of The New York Times Forums, she argues that online forums replaced physical meeting places for cinephiles, such as film clubs. Already in 2005, Behlil (p.113) was calling for a redefinition of community to account for the fast-changing digital world, not only because online platforms made it easier to connect with like-minded cinephiles, but also due to the “unprecedented sense of camaraderie” found in these virtual spaces. This early study emphasises how digital platforms reshape the way cinephiles engage, connect, and create collective cultural expression through shared rituals and dialogue. This also hints towards the shift in terms of cinephilia where engagement and participation become “embedding particular media experiences into the spaces and places of regular routines”

(Dahlgren and Hill, 2020, p.18). This remains central in today's participatory film communities, such as Letterboxd. However, the dynamic nature of digital cinephilia is not adequately captured by Behlil's (2005) study, which was based on participant observation as a long-time member. I argue that a more comprehensive approach is necessary to understand how digital spaces actively shape the cinephilia community today.

In the more recent analysis of the MUBI Social Forum, Jennifer Hessler (2018, p.3) presents the cinephile community existing on the platform as "expansive and robust social networking". In this article, the website vision reads that the platform is like a small coffee shop where "[h]eated debates and passionate arguments are welcome" (Hessler, 2018, p.4). Even though MUBI is primarily a streaming platform, it combines both aspects of new cinephilia: film viewing and community. It provides subscribers with the possibility to interact with other users "in the standard forms of social networking" and additionally offers critical evaluation, film reviews, essays and articles, transforming the isolated act of film consumption into a collective experience (Menarini and Tralli, 2016, pp.139-140).

Other popular online film platforms, such as IMDb (e.g.: Escarcena, 2020; Wang, 2024) or Rotten Tomatoes (e.g.: Shepherd, 2009; Frey, 2015b) have been investigated by numerous scholars concerning review aggregation, film criticism democratisation, and film evaluation. However, despite its growing popularity and influence, Letterboxd remains an understudied film community-building platform. While existing studies have explored the role of online reviews and their authors and online rating systems, they often focus on textual and structural analysis of the website (Shepherd, 2009), rather than a bottom-up and socially driven cinephile network. This research aims to fill this gap by taking a closer look at how Letterboxd fosters a digital community through participatory culture and community engagement, without minimising the role of platform architecture (Bossetta, 2023). As van Dijck (2013, p.34) notes, "[c]omparative studies of platforms have shown how different sites' architectures cultivate distinct styles of connectedness, self-presentation, and taste performance". This study builds on that perspective by analysing how users actively construct and negotiate their cinephile identities through engagement on Letterboxd. Using interviews and digital ethnography, this study explores how Letterboxd's design shapes user participation, creating new forms of community and cultural capital beyond traditional institutional structures. By applying this approach, it expands the current discussion on online film communities beyond the established websites like IMDb or Rotten Tomatoes.

2.3. Affective Bond of Digital Film Communities

According to Rhiannon Bury (2017, p.628), “[c]ommunity has always been at the heart of participatory media”. Letterboxd provides a space where cinephiles can connect, collaborate, and co-create film discourse, cultivating a sense of belonging and shared identity, as platform users generally long for social connections with other fans (Massanari, 2015, pp.7-8). However, the “nostalgic understanding of community” (Figeac and Favre, 2023, p.1972) often overlooks the role of new media in extending offline relationships and fostering entirely new ones in digital spaces. This is important when considering traditional cinephilia rooted in in-person gatherings, such as film clubs or festivals (Elsaesser, 2005). Digital platforms demonstrate a continuation of this core element of cinephilia of communal bonds within a new, digitally mediated environment. However, this thesis challenges the notion that true cinephilia requires physical proximity or shared cinematic space. It argues that affective bonds, rituals, and shared practices reimagine ways that maintain continuity with the traditional cinephilia.

Letterboxd explicitly defines its community as being “united by a love of film” (Letterboxd, n.d.), emphasising “dynamic, collective emotionality that connects with people’s shared social experiences” (Dahlgren and Hill, 2020, p.6). The platform operates as an affinity space (Gee, 2017), where individuals gather based on their shared passion for cinema rather than personal relationships. Users engage by sharing reviews, curating film lists, and discussing movies, which contributes to the formation of a community through shared rituals and practices. This form of social connections on Letterboxd amongst cinephiles illustrates the principle of *homophily*, when individuals with similar interests naturally gravitate towards one another (Lizardo, 2006; Puetz, 2015). Said homophily enables the construction of dynamic and performative social identities, which points to the need to analyse cinephile identity and definition through the lens of digital formations. One can draw parallels concerning coming together on letterboxd with traditional cinephiles in cinema and group discussions; however, the purpose has been redefined because the former doesn’t do it for status, but for actual interest and love, highlighting democratisation and access.

Affect plays a crucial role in forming and sustaining these digital film communities. As Papacharissi (2015) argues, online activities may foster an emotionally cohesive community. What sustained this community are “feelings of belonging and solidarity” (Papacharissi, 2015, p.9). Important aspects that make it possible for individuals to express their belonging

are connective affordances, such as likes, comments and following. In this way, Letterboxd not only host a community of contemporary cinephiles, but it effectively produces one through emotional investment that “serves to launch and sustain people’s involvement” (Dahlgren and Hill, 2020, p.10).

2.4. Performing and Negotiating Cinephile Identity

Both the design and the community hosted by said platform influence how users’ identity is constructed and performed. Identity, as Stuart Hall (1996, p.2) puts it, is a “process never completed”. In this context, understanding the process of identification is important because the research largely speaks to a redefinition of traditional cinephilia to the one unfolding in digital spaces. Hall (1996, p.2) also goes on to say that this process is “constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group”. Identity, then emerges through mechanisms of alignment with and differentiation from community norms and shared values, redefined through affective digital engagement.

Digital environments offer a new space for identity to be constructed and performed. Particularly, community-led media spaces help “feeling the self as a part of a greater body”; they provide a “sense of security, belonging to a social, emotional, political body or community with affective bonds of solidarity” (Gündüz, 2017, p.86). Situating this in the larger arena of Letterboxd and cinephilic identity, performance and construction of self is then consistently reconfigured on interaction with shared norms or new found form of communal validation (Cover, 2012). An instance of this can be seen in the Rob Cover’s (2012, p.180) study of social networking platforms where self is constructed through not only shared acts but communal essence of validation of individual thoughts and practices like “choices around favourite films and other taste categories”.

While online identities are shaped by communities to which users belong, it would be naive to perceive the architecture of platforms as neutral when talking about the construction and performance of self. Drawing again from Cover’s (2012) study, the entire nature of being able to use features like sharing, subscribing, and interacting with posts acts as a way of passive validation or rather motivation for argumentation, that may renegotiate how individual users perceive or perform themselves. The architecture, when foregrounded in individual and collective identity, “like all signifying practices, [...] is subject to the ‘play’, of *differance*” (Hall, 1996, p.3; emphasis in original). Situating Letterboxd here speaks to the features of

making lists, offering comedic reviews, and framing four favourite films, which may contribute to how cinephilic identity is grasped through validation and contestation on this understudied platform. José van Dijck (2013) also notes in their analysis of social media self-presentation that online identities are performed strategically in response to the platform's design and limitations.

On Letterboxd, the self is constructed through shared cultural codes and activities that collectivise the users under a communal identity (Hall, 1989). The platform's bottom-up processes of evaluating culture through practices (Verboord, 2014) are essential to how users express themselves and gain recognition through participation rather than institutional authority. Users, by contributing to the film discourse through each rating and review, construct their visible cinephile identity. By engaging in shared practices, the performance of self then takes "the effect of the collective formation of taste at the moment when the aesthetic judgments supporting the practice are formed" (Gherardi, 2009, p.538) by a community, which in this case is digital cinephiles on Letterboxd. Highlighting the community and the platform in the context of identity is essential because it offers access to resources, which makes individuals feel heard and provides an opportunity to be a part of a more cohesive collective that aids the articulation of one's own identity (Jasper and McGarry, 2015). In this way, cinephile identity on Letterboxd is both individually and collectively negotiated. This showcases a shift from cinephilic identity as an elitist or intellectually run cultural category to one foregrounded in affective intensity, community belonging, and digital construction of the self.

3. Cultural Capital

Apart from foregrounding performance in community and platform, identity and self are also about "questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being" (Hall, 1996, p.4). To assess identity in a more nuanced manner, drawing from Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural capital becomes valuable here. His understanding of the concept emphasised the role of institutionalised knowledge in cultural authority, wherein cultural capital can exist in three forms one being "*institutionalized* state, a form of objectification [...], [which] it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee" (Bourdieu, 1986, p.17; emphasis in original). When applying this to the case of Letterboxd, the platform has decentralised this process, enabling users to accumulate status through peer engagement and networked visibility. This

shift not only democratises access to cinephilic discourse, which was traditionally concentrated in the hands of elites, but also redefines who has the power to shape cultural value in the digital age. This decentralisation occurs through everyday participatory acts such as writing reviews, creating film lists, rating movies, and interacting with others' content via likes, comments, and follows. These micro-level interactions allow users to build visibility and credibility within the community, imperative for collective identity and belonging, gradually shifting cultural authority from traditional critics to peer-driven validation.

In this section of the literature review, I will explore the evolution of traditional cultural criticism in the digital age and examine how Letterboxd actively shapes new forms of cultural evaluation.

3.1. Authority

As discussed earlier, initial cinephilia was synonymous with elitism and cultural capital achieved by status and education. It was closely tied to the authority of film critics who had the power to determine the quality of cultural products. The authority grants the holder “the legitimacy to describe, explain, elucidate, contextualize, and/or evaluate a certain cultural object or topic to a certain audience” (Frey, 2015b, p.18). This authority was reinforced through ties to institutions such as prestigious newspapers or established film festivals. Possessed by them, cultural capital was tied to institutional credentials. Cultural gatekeeping and expertise were validated and secured, and as Verboord (2014, p.922) notes, “[c]ultural audiences place their faith in critics’ judgments as these are perceived to be knowledgeable and authoritative”. They could be perceived as opinion leaders or influencers (Eliashberg and Shugan, 1997) with the power to shape film discourse practically unchallenged and to define a film’s cultural value and place in a canon (Frey, 2015b, p.18).

However, the rise of digital platforms and review sites fundamentally disrupted this structure. As participatory culture shapes cultural engagement and evaluation, authority is no longer exclusive to formally recognised critics (Koreman, Verboord and Janssen, 2024). Instead, platforms like Letterboxd allow everyday users to publicly express their cinephilic knowledge, eroding the traditional divide between critic and audience. This democratisation of discourse has sparked what could be referred to as a *crisis of authority* (Frey, 2015b) in which peer validation, visibility, and social engagement have replaced institutional endorsement in defining cultural value and identity. Multiple studies, surrounding the shift

from authority to democratic access, have explored how peer-produced criticism plays a pivotal role in decentralising cultural evaluation, coexisting with professional criticism, and reshaping the landscape of cultural authority (Gillespie, 2012; De Jong and Burgers, 2013; Verboord, 2014; Jacobs et al., 2015; Kammer, 2015).

3.2. Cultural Capital in Transition

While the erosion of traditional authority challenges established hierarchies, it does not signal the disappearance of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986). Instead, it transforms how this capital is performed, recognised, and accumulated within digital ecosystems like Letterboxd, where community validation and peer visibility shape new forms of cultural value. As Bourdieu (1986, p.18) notes: “[b]ecause the social conditions of [cultural capital’s] transmission and acquisition are more disguised [...], it is predisposed to function as symbolic capital, i.e., to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence, as authority exerting an effect of (mis)recognition”. Cultural capital is understood as “what we know, what skills we have, where we learned them, and whether someone or some institution has validated that we know what we know” (Williams, 2019, p.2711). Even though Bourdieu did not extensively write about cinema (Hill, 2004, pp.30-31), his theory on cultural capital can be applied in this study. It provides a useful lens for understanding how Letterboxd users signal cinephilic knowledge, negotiate identity, and position within taste hierarchies, and accumulate platform-specific cultural capital through engagement. All this ultimately leads to shaping new forms of capital in digital film culture.

Participating in Letterboxd is not neutral. It already marks users as culturally invested individuals with an essence of affective intensity towards films. The platform serves as a gatekeeper of a different kind, where users demonstrate their cinephilia and perform cultural capital through micro-level acts (rating, reviewing, reading reviews, etc.). These acts don’t just reflect individual taste but actively build platform-specific cultural capital, in which visibility and engagement become new makers of status (Cover, 2012). In doing so, users participate in a larger crisis of authority, where traditional critics no longer hold the monopoly in cinephilic discourse. As Culloty (2016, p.74) notes, “[...] user reviewing is an expanded field of reception in which various kinds of specialist knowledge along with personal and idiosyncratic dispositions are made relevant”. This suggests that the offline cultural capital is relevant in digital spaces (Levina and Arriaga, 2014). Cultural capital in cinephilia has historically functioned as a marker of distinction, where taste and knowledge signal

belonging to an exclusive community (Bourdieu, 1984). However, as Meir Yaish and Tally Katz-Gerro (2012, p.170) argue, “cultural preferences are initiators and sustainers of identities and group boundaries”, film taste does more than differentiate, it actively shapes identities within cinephile communities. On platforms like Letterboxd, these boundaries persist, though they are negotiated through participatory engagement rather than institutional gatekeeping. Platforms like Letterboxd do not erase cultural authority but reconfigure it around new modes of engagement and peer validation.

Scholars have widely employed Bourdieu’s theoretical framework to analyse the intricate relationships and dynamics of influence within online spaces. Natalia Levina and Manuel Arriaga’s (2014) study, for example, focuses on how platform designers could benefit from understanding Bourdieu’s theories of capital and field. Symbolic and economic capital were used by Murat Şahin (2024) in his study of a streaming platform, MUBI, to examine how the platform constructs its economic and symbolic capital by positioning itself within the cinema value chain, engaging with film festivals, and curating arthouse and independent films for a self-identified cinephile audience. Similarly, Letterboxd operates within the broader cinephilia ecosystem, but instead of curating films directly, it facilitates users’ engagement, which contributes to the formation of platform-specific cultural capital wherein the capital does not rely on traditional elitism anymore, but on digital peer validation.

3.3. New Hierarchies

The shift in authority and cultural capital discussed above directly relates to the mediatisation of film culture and the participatory nature of digital platforms. While the accessibility to “digital media promise[ed] to push the blurring of cultural hierarchies even further [than broadcasting]” (Mihelj, Leguina and Downey, 2019, p.1469), it has not led to a fully egalitarian film discourse. Instead, new forms of cultural hierarchies emerge (Kristensen, Haastrup and Holdgaard, 2018). They are not only shaped by platform-specific norms and architecture, providing mechanisms of visibility, but also by the communal acts of validation and argumentation. New hierarchies result from democratising access to the web and the information accumulated there that allows citizens to create an informed viewpoint (Frey, 2015a) and later voice their opinions (Koreman, Verbood and Janssen, 2024), irrespective if the opinion is in consensus or otherwise.

As Valérie Beaudouin and Dominique Pasquier (2017, p.1813) observe in their study on a French film reviewing platform, “[t]he rise in the hierarchy of amateurs designed by the website is thus based on social and cultural selection”. Similarly, other scholars argue that “digital media has, in significant ways, reconfigured the authority of institutionalized news media and the magazine press and challenged the position of established critical voices as gatekeepers and valorizers of cultural taste” (Kristensen, Haastrup and Holdgaard, 2018, p.5). Rather than institutional validation, credibility is increasingly determined through peer interactions. Likes, comments, and follows serve as new form markers of status (Fiers, 2020)

However, shared passion is often built not only on common interest and an emotional bond, but it is also often maintained through forms of visibility and peer observation. It is imperative to look at digital platforms and the community through the lens of surveillance because these environments are structured around constant mutual monitoring, where participation is often shaped by the awareness of being watched by others (Marwick and boyd, 2011; Duffy and Chan, 2019). As described in the previous section, practices and rituals are exposed to other users, which shapes the collective norms and community dynamics. In the subject literature, surveillance is often referred to as tracking and collecting data of users, to influence, manage, or categorise them (Lyon, 2007; 2017), pointing to the hierarchical system of power and top-down control (Albrechtslund, 2008). In digital and participatory spaces, this surveillance is often inflicted not by the platform itself, but by users who observe one another as part of social interaction (Andrejevic, 2002). The peer-to-peer monitoring is understood as “the use of surveillance tools by individuals, [...], to keep track of one another” (Andrejevic, 2002, p.488). These dynamics are central to understanding how identity is performed, but also how legitimacy and new hierarchies surrounding capital are negotiated.

This hints towards a larger redefinition of cinephilia, from its traditional and elitist foundation to a more inclusive, democratic, and participatory act. While the review largely argues that cinephilia has now been redefined through the existence of Letterboxd, it would be naive to suggest it as fact because in order to understand affectiveness, affinity, and engagement towards space, there needs to be a broader discussion with its users.

Methodology

In this chapter, I outline the methodological approach of this study used to explore cinephilia and a new form of cultural capital in the digital age through the case of Letterboxd. This study aims to clarify “the problems, risks, and possibilities we face as humans and societies, and at contributing to social and political praxis” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.4). To achieve this, it adopts a qualitative methodology centred on an in-depth case study. A case-focused approach allows for the production of context-specific knowledge that facilitates progression from basic to more advanced stages of the learning process (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.391), a fundamental aspect of social science. This thesis adopts a qualitative, case-focused approach to offer insight into how digital platforms shape users’ identity negotiation and value-making within online film communities. It further examines how cultural capital is accumulated through engagement with film discourse on a participatory digital platform.

As Flyvbjerg (2001) argues, case studies are instrumental in moving forward from descriptive to advanced understanding. For this study, I have chosen to focus on Letterboxd, a popular social network platform where users engage in film-related discourse through writing reviews, rating films, creating lists, and following others (Marsh, 2021; Hoepfner, 2023). The app also serves as a database of films, filmmakers and a source of news. Letterboxd presents an ideal case for exploring the transformation of cinephilia in the digital age because it serves as both a platform for film appreciation and a space where users create and negotiate cultural capital both individually and collectively. Despite its growing popularity (Goldsmith, 2025), scholarly interest remains limited. This thesis addresses that gap by investigating Letterboxd as a unique intersection of digital cultural participation and cinephilia, providing ground for contextualised exploration.

In the following sections, the research approach and design are introduced, along with the selected methods and their relevance to this study. This is followed by a the data collection and analysis process explanation. The chapter concludes with a discussion on methodological limitations and ethical considerations addressed during this study.

1. Research Approach and Design

1.1. Research Approach

This study adopts a social constructionist approach (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Burr, 2015) to examine how cinephilia is shaped, performed, and negotiated within the digital space of Letterboxd. Following Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's (1967) concept, I approach Letterboxd as a site where cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) is accumulated, executed, contested, and reconfigured through participatory practices (Jenkins, 2006). Rather than viewing film appreciation as a mere act of individual expression, I consider it a socially embedded collective practice. This view aligns with social constructionist thought, which argues that knowledge and meaning are not fixed, but created through social interactions (Burr, 2015). This process is possible by the platform structure, user engagement and evolving community norms. By applying a constructionist approach, this research recognises that what is valued in film discourse and how cinephilia is performed is constantly negotiated and renegotiated within the community. This perspective allows an in-depth exploration of the social processes through which meaning, cultural capital, and identity are constructed.

Since such meaning and value are shaped through interactions amongst platform users, a qualitative, ethnographic approach is particularly suited to uncovering how these dynamics unfold in practice. Qualitative research allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of a constantly changing, media-saturated world. An ethnographic perspective, in particular, offers tools to explore how digital spaces shape everyday practices, identities and values, which makes it ideal for exploring online cinephilia communities (Hine, 2015). A qualitative ethnographic approach is suitable for exploring complex social phenomena because it prioritises participants' perspectives, experiences, and the meanings they assign to their actions (Creswell and Poth, 2016).

1.2. Methods

Ethnography allows researchers to design and apply a multimethod approach constructed with methods available to the researcher (O'Reilly, 2012, p.1). In this study, two methods were combined to build a layered understanding of film discourse on a digital platform. Semi-structured interviews served as a main method and were complemented by elements of media go-along to incorporate a wider range of voices and experiences. Together, the combination of these methods allowed me to collect several perspectives on the same

phenomenon, contributing to a more layered understanding of how film appreciation and cinephilia are shaped and expressed within a socially mediated environment.

1.2.1. Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews serve as a primary method in this research. In this context, qualitative interviewing is particularly innovative, as previous studies on film platforms have heavily relied on content analysis or quantitative data. This study addresses this research gap by exploring rich insights on identity construction and negotiation provided by informants in ways that traditional methods cannot capture. Semi-structured interviews provide space for participants to express their “actions, experiences, feelings and thoughts” (Rapley, 2007, p.16) on a deep level.

Participants were selected based on their active engagement on the platform Letterboxd. The sampling process was guided by Peter Dahlgren and Annette Hill’s (2020) five parameters of engagement with film, as they manifest on the platform. These parameters offered a framework for identifying individuals who not only consume content but also engage actively by participating in the film community facilitated by Letterboxd’s social and interactive architecture. The second criterion was age: since the majority of Letterboxd users are under 35 years old (Lee, 2024), the research aimed to interview users between the ages of 18 and 35².

Finding interviewees is “central to the outcomes of the research” (Rapley, 2007, p.17). Interviewing users who self-identify as film enthusiasts and are active on Letterboxd offers a valuable lens through which exploration of cinephile identities and platform-specific performances is related to this study’s aims. Their sustained engagement on the platform and interest in film position them as ideal participants for this research. Participants were initially selected from known users, followed by an open call for participants³, and finally through snowball sampling. This combination of purposive and snowball sampling allowed for diversity and depth through familiarity with the context and a wider range of perspectives. However, participant recruitment reflected common challenges in qualitative research. As Rapley (2007, p. 17) notes, “recruitment routinely happens on an ad-hoc and chance basis”, which shaped the sample to some extent. The study aimed to provide in-depth insight into the

² More information about participants see Appendix 4.

³ See Appendix 2.

experiences of a specific group of active users, while not claiming to represent all Letterboxd users, it still provides valuable insight into platform-specific cinephile practices.

Eleven interviews, including one pilot, were conducted. Following the principle of saturation, the size was determined by “the range of meanings” rather than the number of participants (Edwards and Holland, 2013, p.65). Eight interviews took place in person, and the remaining three over Zoom due to participants’ location. Each interview lasted between 50 to 90 minutes. Interviews were conducted in English as a common language between participants and the researcher and were audio-recorded. This also included Zoom interviews where only the sound was recorded. After the pilot interview, small adjustments were made to the structure of the interview guide, however, the following interviews were conducted with the same interview guide for consistency while leaving as much space for my informants to express their experience and own narratives (Edwards and Holland, 2013)⁴. The guide was constructed around themes emerging from literature review and research questions, including platform engagement, community, identity, cultural capital and authority. These themes allowed the interviews to stay focused on the research’s core while ensuring that interviewees had space to present their narratives (Edwards and Holland, 2013). Manual transcription of all interviews was made as a natural next step in the process⁵.

1.2.2. Elements of Media Go-Along

Media go-along is relatively new in qualitative media research. However, it is particularly relevant for understanding users’ experiences with platforms and observing media rituals dynamically and authentically (Jørgensen, 2016). This method involves the researcher accompanying the participants as they engage with the media in real time. Together with interviews, media go-along offers additional insight into “authentic accounts of experience and practice” (Jørgensen, 2016, p.37). While interviews provide valuable insights into participants’ reflections on their behaviour, media go-along captures the real-time, embodied experience of navigating the platform, providing a more holistic understanding of how users interact with Letterboxd in their daily lives. In this study, the method was executed in a more direct way during in-person interviews. When participants referred to specific practices, routines or interactions, they were invited to demonstrate these directly on their Letterboxd accounts. This had two implications for the study. Firstly, it enabled the researcher to observe

⁴ To see the Interview guide see Appendix 5.

⁵ To see the full transcript see Appendix 6.

platform engagement as it unfolded. Secondly, it allowed participants to describe their actions more vividly, without relying solely on memory.

However useful, this method posed challenges during Zoom interviews. The participants were still encouraged to use Letterboxd during interviews, however, I had to rely on verbal descriptions of their actions. This limited the research ability to capture the embodied and nuanced interactions with the platform fully, yet still provided valuable insights into participants' self-explained engagement, albeit with some limitations in capturing the full complexity of the experience.

As part of the interviews, the media go-alongs were audio recorded. Additionally, handwritten notes were taken to ensure important details of the participants' demonstration were captured. To not discourage the participants or disrupt the flow of the conversations, they were not asked to provide screenshots of their Letterboxd profiles, nor were pictures of their mobile devices required to maintain anonymity and protect their privacy. Observations and recording from the media go-along were coded together with interview data to ensure complete analysis of verbal and observed user practices.

2. Data Analysis

After all data were collected, a researcher is left with what Michael Patton (2015, p.257) refers to as the “massive volumes of information to make sense of”. Thematic analysis was employed to address this. It is particularly suitable for analysing interview data as it focuses on identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning emerging from a dataset (Saldaña, 2013).

The process began with open coding. This step is useful in “reducing the data into meaningful segments and assigning names for the segments” (Creswell and Poth, 2016, p.148). First, the pilot interview was coded, which played a dual role. Firstly, helped with redefining the interview guide and secondly, established preliminary analytical direction (Bazeley, 2013). Once all interviews were conducted and transcribed, I proceeded with line-by-line coding (Bazeley, 2013)⁶. During this stage, a close engagement with data and full immersion leads to a better understanding of the collected material for analysis. This process generated eighty initial codes, that reflected the richness of participants' experiences and reflections. To reduce redundancy, these were then grouped and merged into twenty-one codes and then organised thematically. Descriptive coding was applied to support the process of grouping codes into

⁶ To see example of open coding see Appendix 7.

broader themes. This approach was particularly helpful since it summarises in a word or short phrase “the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldaña, 2013, p.88). By applying descriptive codes to longer quotes, it became possible to identify recurring topics in similar parts of the data, which led to shaping the final themes: identity and taste, community, cultural capital and new hierarchies, and platform.

All coding and thematic organisation were conducted using a Google Excel Spreadsheet, where a codebook was also created⁷. This allowed for a clear and structured tracking of codes. Although basic, this way proved to be highly useful and ensured a high level of immersion and reflexivity. In the analysis, participants are referred to by their chosen code name and their nationality is mentioned only when they appear for the first time. Later, they are mentioned only by their code name.

3. Ethical Considerations

Building a relationship of trust and maintaining ethical standards are essential in qualitative research and often lead to more meaningful data (franzke et al., 2020). This foundation begins the moment contact is made with potential participants. Everyone who responded to the call for participants received a personal message outlining the purpose of the study and the structure of the interview in more detail. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study and received a consent form prior to the interview⁸. All were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point without needing to provide a reason. At the start of each interview, consent was reconfirmed, and participants were given the opportunity to ask questions. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, they chose their own code names and were never asked to share identifying Letterboxd data at any point during the interviews. They were assured that all material, including recordings and transcriptions, would be used exclusively for this thesis and would be deleted afterwards.

⁷ To see the codebook see Appendix 8.

⁸ Consent Form see Appendix 3.

Analysis

In this chapter, I present findings of the study, drawn from the qualitative interview data and ground them in the theoretical framework discussed in the Literature review. Constructivist perspective on identity and cultural capital, viewed as dynamic and socially negotiated entities shaped through everyday practices and interactions, guide this thesis. The first section provides background for participants' understanding of cinephilia and contextualises further analysis in their journeys of film and Letterboxd discovery. This will aim to showcase how personal experiences, viewing habits, and platform engagement shape the meanings they assign to being a cinephile. The following section examines how cinephilia is performed on Letterboxd through platform-specific practices and media rituals, and what meaning each action carries for both community and identity construction. The third section provides an understanding of how taste and identity are performed and negotiated within the boundaries of platform and community norms. The last section explores the platform-specific cultural capital and how status, legitimacy, and value are acquired in Letterboxd's ecosystem.

1. Mapping Personal Cinephilia: Definitions, Origins, and Emotions

Before analysing how users express taste or build cultural capital on Letterboxd, it is important to understand how they understand and engage with cinephilia and articulate their relationship with cinema. Participants' backgrounds and personal journeys with film help contextualise the meanings they bring into the Letterboxd space and reveal broader patterns on how they navigate within the community. This section maps their emotional attachments to film, personal and institutional influences, and the varied meanings they assign to the label *cinephile*. By centring participants' stories, this thesis adopts a user-focused lens to explore how digital cinephilia is felt and performed, and how cultural participation is grounded in everyday life and constructed through digital platforms (Fiske, 1989).

1.1. Defining Cinephilia

Cinephilia has often been defined through encyclopaedic knowledge and a devotion to formal aesthetics. However, after conducting the initial interviews, it became clear that there is no fixed or universally agreed-upon definition of cinephilia among the participants; it is fluid and subjective. The term evokes a range of emotional responses and personal associations. One common thread emerged from all the interviews. For all the participants, cinephilia was defined by a genuine love for film as an art form, shown by “*watching an absurd amount of*

films from every genre” (Owl, Serbian). Rather than technical mastery, it was a personal and emotional relationship with cinema that defined their cinephilia. As Ingrid (Indian) explained: *“you need to be like really be in the film with your heart to be a cinephile”*. Similarly, Matthew (German) expressed that being a cinephile *“is not about the academic background. It’s about the passion that people bring to the medium or engage with the medium”*. The shared affection for films among participants was a major reason they engaged with Letterboxd, which aligns with affective theory, where engagement is understood as being deeply rooted in emotional experience (Dahlgren and Hill, 2020, p.7). Some participants understood aligning with cinephilic identity as an act of embracing the joy that comes with appreciating *“the way the movie is crafted”* (Owl).

The participants also engaged with the more traditional understanding of cinephilia. This resonated with Bourdieu’s (1984) cultural capital and taste as a marker of social positioning. Fool (American) described cinephiles as people who are *“super into the statusism and history of movies. People who like can look at a poster and tell you everything about the film”*, emphasising cinephiles’ identity rooted in knowledge and collection (Elsaesser, 2005). Similarly, Jiang (Chinese) reflected how cinephilia makes her think of superiority: *“when you [say] cinephiles, the taste of this group would be assumed to be higher”*. This suggests that the cultural weight carried by the term cinephilia involves navigating hierarchies of taste and knowledge performance, pointing to traditional elitism and inaccessibility. Some participants saw the term as traditionalist, resulting in their resistance to associate themselves with cinephilia or being called cinephile.

There was also a group of participants who felt uncertain about claiming the identity of a cinephile. The reasons for this choice, however, ventured beyond knowledge, performance and taste. For example, Humphrey (Swedish) and Ingrid saw themselves as cinephiles by definition, but the label didn’t resonate with them. For Humphrey, the term carried an unwanted connotation: *“it feels a bit like lame. It’s like a nerdly [connoted] label”*. Ingrid, too, questioned the knowledge and expertise that a cinephile should have, especially when it is reduced to a film canon. She reflected: *“I have a film club now, so when people are like, oh, you are not a cinephile, you have not watched Fight Club, I’m like, oh, please. I have watched many movies”*. This tension between what is traditionally expected and personal experience illustrates how internal feelings, external expectations, and performance negotiate identity.

These differences also point to the instability of the term cinephilia in the digital age. That is the very reason affect is imperative in understanding the negotiation of the definition. Moreover, the lack of a fixed definition of cinephilia among the participants is evidence that cinephilia is being renegotiated, pluralised, and platform-shaped in the digital age. Rather than attempting to stabilise a definition, this study explores how individuals construct, negotiate, and at times resist the *cinephile* label within the participatory digital environments. The following analysis of Letterboxd focuses on how users perform and negotiate cinephile identity through everyday practices. It builds towards a theorisation of cinephilia as an ongoing process of identity-making and performance shaped by the platform architecture and digital culture.

1.2. Origins of Film Love

After having outlined participants' understanding of cinephilia, it is now necessary to trace its emotional and material origins. Tracing how their love for cinema emerged, primarily from personal passion rather than professional or educational experience, highlights a crucial distinction between digital cinephilia and its traditional elitist form. Although participants frequently referred to cinephile-like knowledge or habits, none had formally studied film or worked extensively in the film industry. Some had adjacent professional experience. Fool worked in television, while Owl and Matthew took on organisational and selection roles at film festivals.

For most, love for cinema emerged from everyday life routines and rituals: family TV viewing, dubbed Hollywood films, renting DVDs, or following the national broadcaster's film selection. Nearly every participant mentioned a family figure who had introduced them to cinema. As Fool recalled: *"I think it started because my dad was into films and did a good job of exposing them to me. Nothing like super deep cut, but I definitely became interested in it"*. These origin stories speak to the amateur emotionally driven relationship with cinema, resisting an academic or elitist definition of cinephilia (Behlil, 2005). Rather than indicating a lack of cultural capital, these informal engagements reveal a form of cinephilia rooted in affective memory and film's presence as a personal companion in life. It showcases the intimate foundations for cinephilia, framing it as a personal experience and not purely intellectual or institutionally affiliated. As Owl recalled, watching *The Lord of the Rings. Return of the King* with her uncle left her overwhelmed by wonder: *"how is it possible that something like this exists in this world?"* Such moments of nostalgia showcase what Elsaesser

(2005) describes as the defining moment of the traditional cinephilia of longing for the fleeting encounter with films, pointing to the continuity of cinephilia experience in digital age.

The informal cinephilia built on infrastructural access and emotional attachments is for many participants an introduction to film. Their cinephilia often matures through encounters with institutional spaces such as film festivals or university courses. These experiences do not negate the *amateur cinephilia* narrative (Behlil, 2005), but show how it evolves and grows into a more curatorial or intellectual form. For the participants, starting a university course is treated as an awakening that helps them understand their love for cinema on a deeper level. Beaver (Armenian) shared her experience of taking a university course: *“I had a professor who was a director. You start to develop a passion for watching difficult movies, which gives you a different perspective”*. This experience reshaped her relationship with cinema, adding a theoretical perspective to the already existing emotional layer. Others mentioned attending film festivals as influential events for their film journeys. For Emilia (Polish), it offered *“a chance to see something outside of usual scope, a Hungarian movie that you would not normally watch”*. Interviews revealed that educational and curatorial institutions still function as sites of cultural legitimization with the power to redefine taste and to shift the passive film enjoyment to active and intentional exploration. The layers of emotion and then education show that intellectuality is not the sole source of cinephilia.

Building on previously mentioned amateur cinephilia, it is important to recognise that cinephilia is a product of availability and not just desire. Highlighting the Eurocentric understanding of traditional cinephilia, several participants contested the perspective by showcasing how local infrastructures shaped their access to film. Jiang emphasised the contrast between limited access to Western films in mainland China with her broader viewing opportunities in Macau. Beaver recalled watching state-curated, dubbed films on Armenian public television without access to cinema in the small village where she is from. These experiences reveal how access to culture is unequally distributed, aligning with Bourdieu’s (1984) cultural capital definition, where access to certain cultural forms depends on one’s position within the society. These constraints can often result in different levels of cinephilia literacy, understood as, for example, taste and vocabulary that participants acquire or lack. Although the sample does not allow for systematic comparison, such moments reveal the

entanglement of geography, policy, and personal film experience and how they create non-traditional and non-Eurocentric pathways into cinephilia.

Another societal aspect, like that of the COVID pandemic, was a turning point for a lot of the participants, when a simple habit of film watching transformed into a serious passion. Humphrey noted: “*during COVID, I was really bored. I think I watched like 400 plus movies in 2021. It’s a passion. It’s continuously evolving*”, which was also confirmed by Ingrid “*it started when COVID happened and all you could do was watch films so I started exploring the classics or seeking out non-commercial or festival films*”. Pandemic seen as a disruption, intensified and accelerated digital film engagement (Aboulaoula and Biltereyst, 2021). During this crisis, digital cinephilia became a coping mechanism and a self-construction process which created a new level of attachment to film. It also created a stronger need to connect with other like-minded individuals using only digital tools due to the social restrictions of physical viewing or discussions. At that time, Jason (Brazilian) discovered Letterboxd with hopes for the community aspect of the platform: “*I thought it would be a good social platform, more like a social network of movie lovers and cinephiles*”. This is also reflected in the popularity of Letterboxd during COVID, when the user base doubled in 2020 (Marsh, 2021). Jason’s expectation and statistics highlight how Letterboxd served not just as a film diary but as a space for social recovery and identity affirmation during a time of isolation (Sun, Rieble, Liu, and Sauter, 2022). The COVID pandemic served as an incentive for some participants and revealed the adaptive and emotionally charged nature of cinephilia. It is no longer an identity rooted in institutions but one that thrives in digital infrastructure.

Despite societal restrictions and disruptions in access, interviews revealed that film is rarely a solitary interest formed in isolation. It is shaped and influenced by relationships, geographical locations, and infrastructural opportunities. This challenges the traditional view of cinephilia as the domain of Western-educated elites (Shambu, 2019). Instead, it suggests a more diverse and democratised engagement with film culture (Vidal, 2017). Interestingly, the emphasis is put on the people who got participants into films. This sense of communal aspect historically associated with cinephilia, such as film club discussions, has evolved in the digital age, finding new expression on online platforms where personal connections and discussions continue to thrive, reflecting Elsaesser’s (2005) view on cinephilia’s ability to adapt to new media and participatory practices.

1.3. Letterboxd Discovery and Early Use

In accordance with the interviews, it can be seen that initial interactions with films and platforms like Letterboxd were rarely solitary and accidental. The discovery of Letterboxd varied slightly between participants, but most often included social influence, for instance, peer groups, partners, friends or simply a desire for community. This reveals social aspects of the platform itself and bridges online and offline film communities. Owl openly called this a social pressure:

“I didn’t want to do it at first, but I started hanging out with some people who had a very sophisticated taste and were using Letterboxd. I didn’t want to be excluded [...] so I installed it too”.

This suggests that the legitimacy of cinephilia is no longer defined exclusively by formal institutions, but negotiated through peer-driven platform participation. Cultural capital is now accumulated through platform engagement and the immediate social circles. This shift is important for this study, as it highlights how cinephile identity is performed and validated through social and digital dynamics rather than traditional gatekeeping structures of classical cinephilia.

Apart from the common ailment of peer pressure as a way to enhance the engagement of Letterboxd, the interviews also showcased the platform as an *affinity* space (Gee, 2017), where users are drawn through a shared passion for films. Initially, the platform functions as a space of belonging, described as a *niche community* (Ingrid) or a *very personal film diary* (Emilia). For Fool, the excitement of early use created a strong emotional connection: *“it was exciting to be on the app early on. It felt like a little secret thing, this is the next best app”*. Emotional attachment to the platform created early on is built on excitement, novelty and intimacy. It also echoes the emotional investment associated with the traditional cinephilia. It is the same idea of loving cinema as more than just entertainment, but a core part of one’s identity and cultural life. Noticing this continuity shows that even though the modes of engagement have changed to digital, the affective dimension of cinephilia persists.

From early moments of use, the platform functions as a personal diary to keep track of watched films and as a form of identity display. It is a space where one can express their cinematic worldview to others. Platform attachment and emotional investments are visible in Fool’s anecdote:

“I remember being tempted in those early moments to bring Letterboxd on dates because it was just so exciting to be able to point to find films that you never would have found in a million years”.

The platform becomes more than just a database. It is both a cinematic companion because of its diary function and a tool for cultural capital, social and cinephile connection.

Joining a new community is exciting, but often initial experiences on the platform are difficult and insecure. However, they are crucial for shaping how individuals form and perform their identities later on. New users do not arrive in a vacuum. They are met with pre-existing cultural norms, aesthetics, and expectations that shape how they engage with the platform. This is visible in the way participants described adapting to platform-specific forms of, for example, expression:

“I did not avoid writing joke reviews, and trying to be funny on the app was as it felt like most people were. So I gained a lot of followers early because I was writing in that style” (Fool).

Here, humour is universal and becomes both a strategy of self-presentation and an attempt to fit in (Doona, 2020). As Hall (1996) argues, identity negotiated through social interactions is a performance that is constantly adapting. The ‘joke reviews’ style, popular on Letterboxd, represents a shared cultural code shaped by the platform’s community. These *“silly little reviews”* (Ingrid) show that cinephilia on Letterboxd is not only about serious analysis and philosophical discussions, as understood traditionally. Rather, humour helps redefine cinephilia as something playful and social, where showing taste and film appreciation is done through style, jokes, and memes.

For many participants, Letterboxd altered how they relate to cinema. Logging is not simply a record-keeping tool, but a reflective practice, a way of thinking, remembering, and articulating one’s position as a viewer. As Humphrey put it, *“I feel like it made me take a more serious interest in movies. It wasn’t just to watch”*. This marks the transition from casual consumption to self-aware cinephilia. Developing a personal rating system or review style becomes part of a profile that is both expressive and performative. It reflects the accumulation of cultural capital, not through formal education, but through deliberate participation in film discourse in a public networked space (Bourdieu, 1984). In the words of

Beaver: “*on Letterboxd, it feels like my preference is as much as Robert De Niro’s*”, suggesting the possible end to elitist cinephilia brought by Letterboxd.

Letterboxd can be seen as a go-to platform for contemporary cinephiles (King, 2023). It functions as a main or sometimes even only space for cinephile activities among participants. Jason, introduced to Letterboxd by his then-partner, recalled: “*she saw that I used to log all my films on IMDB and she was like, no, you can’t do that. That’s a horrible app*”, and made him switch. However, Letterboxd’s role as a default cinephilia space was not universal. Jiang and Jaw, from China and South Korea, respectively, only discovered Letterboxd after moving to or visiting Europe, where its usage is more widespread. As Jaw put it: “*each country has different platforms*”. Still, for those who do use it, Letterboxd offers a sense of transnational belonging: “*you see a lot of people from other countries. Just being on Letterboxd, you’re like oh I’m a part of something with them, not just India*” (Ingrid). Letterboxd acts as a link in a worldwide cinephilia network, where users can participate in shared discourse beyond national boundaries, though still shaped by unequal access and platform imperialism (Jin, 2017b).

While the full implications of this will be explored in later sections, what becomes evident early on is that participants are not simply using Letterboxd. They are becoming part of the film community, and with that comes an adoption of particular ways of seeing, writing, and evaluating cinema. A particular way of performing identity. The platform becomes a space where, since the early encounters, the digital shift in film culture is not a break from traditional cinephilia but a rearticulation of its long-standing habits, rituals, and social aspirations. Digital cinephiles’ motivations echo the same needs: a desire for belonging, recognition, and connection through shared cultural taste. This formation of platformed cinephile identity involves emotional investment, community dynamics, and the ongoing negotiation of taste. It is at once deeply personal and inherently social.

2. Platform Engagement as Cinephile Practices

Knowing the origins of film journeys of participants and exploring geographical and historical foundations of personal cinephilia, this section turns our attention to how it is enacted, sustained and performed through platform-specific practices. Rooted in memory, access, and emotions, cinephilia is not static. It is shaped and reshaped by the digital environment in which it is expressed. For cinephiles, Letterboxd serves as a participatory

space where they can express their opinions, find validation, and contribute to collective knowledge building. Drawing from mediatisation theory (Couldry and Hepp, 2013; Hepp, 2016), media rituals (Couldry, 2003) and studies on platforms' architecture (Bossetta, 2023) alongside participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), this section examines how everyday Letterboxd practices become ritualised forms of digital cinephilia and helps renegotiate what it means to be a cinephile.

Cinephilia in its traditional form has long been associated with ritualistic acts, from attending film screenings in dedicated venues or during film festivals, collecting physical media, to discussing cinema in formal clubs or associations (Elsaesser, 2005). In media and communication studies, such rituals are described as symbolic actions that go beyond repetitive behaviours, allowing for the formation of identity and meaning-making through the use of media (Couldry, 2003). Within this framework, it is useful to distinguish between practices and rituals. To understand how cinephilia has shifted, we need to establish what users do and why and how they do it. Practices are identified to be platform-specific ways users interact with Letterboxd's architecture. It is more connected to Letterboxd's design and relates to what users do. Rituals are described as the patterned, emotionally resonant behaviours that structure their everyday media engagement. Here, the questions of how and why users engage with platforms are answered. This distinction helps with understanding how ordinary actions on Letterboxd acquire significance and become a meaningful expression of digital cinephilia. It also helps in navigating the dynamic definition of who a cinephile is, since there are some users whose only use of Letterboxd is to mark films as *watched*.

The architecture of Letterboxd invites a specific kind of engagement that shapes how users perform their cinephilia. Described as “*intuitive*” and “*very easy to use and to comprehend what [is] going on*” (Jason), Letterboxd is designed around film-centric engagement. This engagement begins as platform practices, logging, tagging, rating, reviewing, list-making, to over time often evolves into meaningful rituals. As emerged from repeated and symbolically loaded actions, rituals are always dependent on practices. However, not all platform practices become rituals, as they require a deeper emotional, communal, or performative investment or status. Practices and rituals serve a dual function: they structure individual expression and enable community participation, blurring the line between private reflection and public performance.

For most participants, the primary attraction to Letterboxd was the ability to track their film consumption using the diary function and the practice of logging films. However, what started as a practical tool quickly merged with the emotional meaning. As Owl explained, the feature to log and add tags merges with practical reflective rituals: *“you want to have like all additional information, because if you only put that it’s watched, then it won’t mean anything to you in three years”*. This reflection illustrates how seemingly neutral practice of logging and tagging acts as more than a memory-keeping. It also enables users to add significance to their watching history. The practice becomes a ritualistic method of self-understanding. It is a representation of a timeline that maps how their interests have shifted over time or how their engagement with certain genres or directors has deepened. Sometimes it can be a representation of real-life struggles, for example, *“you see someone watching a lot of Almodóvar movies and you think what’s going on in their life that they are watching Almodóvar right now?”* (Beaver). Logging goes beyond diaristic purposes and taps into a more performative role (van Dijck, 2013) by signalling emotional resonance to others, which can be seen as a modern equivalent of cinephiles sharing curated screenings or conversations in physical film clubs.

Letterboxd architecture supports this movement from practice to ritual. This ritualistic way of watching films follows the scheme: watch → log → rate → review → browse → repeat. It does not merely mirror the platform’s architecture; it becomes an integral part of how users express their cinephilia, and how they experience and remember films. This mirrors traditional cinephilia, where social life, identity and life rhythm were organised around the act of film watching (Elsaesser, 2005; Keathley, 2006). For some participants, even the act of watching a film is intertwined with the ritual of recording it into the platform, as described by Ingrid: *“I feel excited to watch a film because I get to log it and review it”*. Emotional investment can be seen in her words, reflecting the attachment that goes beyond just viewing, but to the broader ritual of sharing their cinematic experience. As Jeff (Polish) noted, *“I open it every day”*, signalling the ritualistic integration of the platform into her routine. Here, digital behaviours acquire a cultural and communal significance as they sustain collective solidarity (Cottle, 2006, p.414).

These rituals can be divided into three stages, closely tied to the film watching: pre-watching, mid-watching, and post-watching. Starting with the pre-watching, just as a traditional cinephile chooses the seat in the cinema, here the most significant element consists of

choosing a film to watch. Letterboxd becomes a familiar and meaningful part of preparing for the film experience, easing anxieties caused by “choice fatigue and oversearch” (McGowan, 2024, p.1274). Opening Letterboxd is part of the selection process, either through scrolling the watchlist, using the shuffle function, or browsing the main page to see what their friends have logged recently. Emilia and Ingrid highlighted how having a watchlist helps to overcome difficulties, saying *“just scroll there and maybe you can decide faster”* (Emilia), providing them with structure and comfort. Most of the participants shared that they often look at the general rating and even read some top *non-spoiler* reviews before watching a film. This shapes their expectations and primes emotional responses. As Emilia explained, *“people are like this is the worst film ever; then you go into watching this movie with a mindset, I should also hate it”*, demonstrating how community sentiments, like anger, admiration, or disappointment, are carried into one’s private experience of the film.

Mid-watch rituals emerged as particularly interesting. Letterboxd makes film watching a reflexive and socially mediated experience. It becomes intertwined with evaluation, as users reflect on the film’s quality and their future rating: *“when something happens I like. I am like, oh it just went from 3.5 to 4”* (Beaver). Sometimes the engagement deepens even further, with participants scrolling through Letterboxd’s reviews or seeking additional information. Matthew demonstrated this practice: *“I investigate further although I am watching a movie right now, so I look at what kind of director this is, what did the director do before, and what after”*. In this way, Letterboxd can both extend and enrich the watching experience. In this way, personal reflections are blended with collective knowledge. Watching a film is no longer an isolated and intimate experience existing only in the present (Ng, 2010), but it becomes a ritual of future sharing, shaped by platform practices and social visibility. Cinephilia is then performed not in the moment of viewing, but by the construction of how this moment will be remembered, framed, and noticed by others.

The post-watching stage starts with logging film, an action that for some participants carries a particular sense of satisfaction and ritualistic completion, as yet another title is added to their growing tally. For most, logging happens immediately after the film is over, marking the transition from the private to the public realm. It completes the watching experience and serves as a moment of emotional closure: *“it makes me feel good, it’s pleasant to log a film”* (Emilia). However, it is the rituals of rating and reviewing where more complex emotional engagement occurs. As expressed by Humphrey: *“I sort of engaged with [films] in a deeper*

sense. Since I have Letterboxd, it sometimes forces me to think about it". This illustrates how these actions are not just about recording an opinion, but they require users to reflect, analyse and process their emotional responses. As Humphrey explained, "*it's usually useful to look back at why I dislike the movie and sort of understand my thought process*". The rating process becomes an opportunity for self-exploration and emotional closure. Jason further emphasised this by stating that: "*it is about expressing how much fun I had watching that film, or how much it provoked me to think*". In this way, personal cinephilia is expressed and constructed, but made public.

The practice of writing reviews on Letterboxd echoes traditional cinephile habits of reflecting on film, but in a digital and democratic context (Frey, 2015a). No longer reserved for critics or defined by editorial standards (Verbood, 2011), reviews have become accessible, creative expressions where identity and taste are publicly performed. They range from humorous one-liners and emojis to lengthy analytical essays, suggesting both affective spontaneity and intellectual depth of contemporary cinephiles. Emilia observed: "*the vast majority of reviews are people trying to be silly online for likes*", highlighting how digital culture restructures the very concept of film reviews (Jacobs et. al., 2015). At the same time, reviewing remains a personal tool for reflection and emotional processing. For some, like Humphrey, writing reviews helps preserve the thinking process behind "*why I dislike this*", turning opinion into a record of encounters. On Letterboxd, reviewing becomes not just a cinephilic act but a visible performance of taste, memory and cultural capital, earning peer recognition through likes and comments.

Another practice popular among participants is creating lists. It can be seen as a contemporary extension of collecting films, just like in traditional cinephilia, collecting the physical copies of films and posters was practised. On Letterboxd, this practice takes the form of digital curation. Users compile lists reflecting personal taste, themes, or community trends. As described by Fool: "*I love making lists for my friends and just like people make Spotify playlists for people they're romantically interested in*". Others like Emilia use this feature for playful curation, such as: "*all the films that have shark in the name*". With this function, Letterboxd supports film discovery, just like in traditional cinephilia, the institution of the film festival was the window for cinephiles to discover films. For participants, ticking films from existing and curated by the Letterboxd community lists, like "*top 1000 or like the top 250 narrative movies, when you can take one of those off, then that's pretty satisfying*"

(Humphrey). This serves as a new form of canon and taste indicator within the Letterboxd community.

Across these practices and rituals, one constant emerges: Letterboxd mediates the performance of identity and community formation through emotionally charged, socially visible actions. Whether it's the satisfaction of logging a film, the catharsis of writing a review, or the pleasure of creating a list for a friend, these acts demonstrate that digital cinephilia is an evolution rather than a break from the traditional. The core and central need to share, reflect and belong is still present even though the setting has changed from cinema halls to platform feeds. In traditional cinephilia, screenings and discussions formed the ritual. Here, in digital cinephile, actions such as clicking the *log* button, typing a review, and giving a star rating have become the modern equivalent. Symbolically, they allow users to first mark their experience, and through that express belonging and signal their cinephilia to the wider community.

Across these practices and rituals, everyday interactions with Letterboxd become ways of performing identity and belonging. In the following section, I turn to the role of community in shaping the performance of taste and the construction of self among modern cinephiles. Rituals are always dependent on practices, but practices are not always related to rituals.

3. Performing Taste and Self: Identity, Surveillance and Community

“If you choose to log what you watch, you really can’t hide your tastes. And once you become aware of your tastes, then you start thinking how you want to be perceived, because people see you” (Fool)

Across practices and rituals, everyday interactions with Letterboxd become ways of performing identity and belonging. In the following section, I turn to the role of community in shaping the performance of taste and the construction of self among digital cinephiles. I argue that everyday interactions on Letterboxd become a performance of identity, shaped by both community belonging and surveillance. Said performances are embedded in the platform's architecture, which shapes users' activities and makes them visible.

To understand the dynamics through which digital cinephilia acts and negotiates identity, we must next analyse how they situate themselves within the broader community. That positioning is performative, for it is intertwined with the rituals described above. The

visibility of platform-specific actions makes Letterboxd a performing space and not just a film-logging platform, where users shape their cinephilic identities. Unlike platforms driven by algorithmic visibility, on Letterboxd, it is peer surveillance that influences users' performance and negotiation of identity. The community provides social meaning to these performances, but also becomes pivotal in terms of shaping and negotiating individual identity. The dynamics of belonging, visibility, and surveillance become essential elements of the platform's culture, affecting how users express their preferences and perceive self.

When asked about the concept of community on Letterboxd, participants often hesitated about how to define it in broad terms. Instead, they usually referred to their small, carefully curated networks of people they follow, most of whom they know offline. For them, it was less about the platform's global user base and more about sharing a familiar space with people they know and trust with their taste. As an affinity space, Letterboxd serves as a platform to find fellow cinephiles and make new, valuable friendships with people who share the same passion, as noted by Jiang: *"I kind of cherish the friends I added on Letterboxd."* For Beaver, it translated to staying in touch with friends who live far away: *"you just try to keep up with them, like watch movies they watch, to have something to discuss"*. At the core of the community lies the shared emotional investment in cinema itself, the love that becomes the glue that holds the community together. As Jeff explained, *"I like seeing people watching movies that I wouldn't watch, because I just love the love for cinema"*. These reflections show that cinephilia in digital space is driven not just by shared taste but deeper longing for emotional connection and belonging. Just like many participants' first encounters with cinema were through a close family member, they now seek to recreate that intimacy online. In this way, Letterboxd becomes more than a platform for sharing film taste performance, but also a space where affective ties (Papacharissi, 2016; Gündüz, 2017) and cultural identity are rebuilt through shared cinematic love (Figeac and Favre, 2023).

At the same time, this strong attachment to the created community makes users aware of being observed by others. The activities like logging, rating, reviewing, and liking reviews are visible in the activity feed and on the main page; their actions become more than just personal acts. This social signalling encourages a more performative style of engagement. Subtle self-curation allows users to maintain their presence and express their love for cinema. For example, Owl logs films once a day, even if she watched more movies during one day: *"I want my followers to see everything that I log. I want them to see all of my ratings"*. This

deliberate pacing of logging films is an example of how Letterboxd becomes a site for performing cinephilia. Engagement is not just individualised reflection but a curated public presence to remain visible, showing the active and constant participation in the cinephile community, where the amount and diversity of watched films are valued. These observations reveal digital cinephilia to be socially mediated and shaped by the community dynamics and social visibility. Community then can be seen as structuring power that affects how users perform their cinephile identities.

The performance of cinephilia often begins even before the film starts. Some participants shared that sometimes their selections are made with their Letterboxd profile in mind. This highlights the platform's influence on more than just film reflection, but also on what they choose to watch. The need to show their followers that they watch art-house or obscure films is shaped by a desire to project taste, knowledge, and belonging in the cinephile community. Fool: *"if I've just watched a bunch of like mainstream movies for a month, so just to remind my followers that I watch interesting movies as well"* and Ingrid: *"I chose like A Night of Knowing Nothing, like Payal Kapadia's film to watch it because it's a cinephile film and then I will be able to log that cinephile film on my Letterboxd"*.

This tension between authenticity and performance resurfaced in how participants described their rating rituals. Even though star ratings are often based on emotional reactions and entertainment value, they are also part of identity negotiation within the visible community. Users frequently engage in self-monitoring, comparing their instincts with the general rating on the platform before giving their own. Jeff explained this importance: *"I check reviews by other people, to see if I'm not a little weirdo who wants to give five stars and everyone's adding two stars"*. Similarly, others mentioned the general rating as something they consider before giving their number. This signals the subtle hierarchies that emerged within communal film discourse, where *"[you] compare your taste or your ratings to another person"* (Matthew) and don't want to stand out.

One particular element of Letterboxd is charged with judgment and performance: four favourites. This feature allows users to customise and personalise their profile by pinning four films that they consider their favourites on top of their profile. When opening one's profile, this is often the first thing visitors see, making it a symbolic self-portrait of users' taste. While it allows for identity expression, it also exposes users to evaluation, often by strangers. Humphrey reflected on this ambivalence: *"I felt very perceived, I guess, and judged"*

having a top four. So I thought it was just better to not have one". Similarly, Jiang admitted to difficulties with selecting only four films, which one is judged based on: *"I don't want others to judge me or classify me based only on the favourite four, but I am judging other people based on that"*. For those who opt for having four favourites, it operates as a mode of self-curation, as was shown during the media go-along. Simultaneously, it is a mechanism of surveillance, as others read choices as social cues. As Fool joked, a profile can be a *"red or green flag"*, and Ingrid noted, she sometimes uses four favourites to ironically mock *cinophile* presentations.

This reflects the shift from cinephilia built on personal passion towards a more curated and performative identity within a social network. This ambivalence between self-expression and self-curation captures a tension in digital cinephilia, where users, through set platform-mediated practices, inform the wider community about their taste and cultural consumption. However, they don't have control over how this taste and consumption are interpreted. This sets up a notion that through minimal but highly legible practices, cultural capital is accrued and sometimes questioned. In the advent of digital culture, the definition of cinephilia becomes more community-oriented. However, it still possesses elements of traditional elitism, showcased in different ways.

4. Cultural Capital and New Hierarchies

"It's similar to how museums decide which artworks to include or exclude. It's like some people decide what kind of film is considered good these days" (Jaw)

As the quote from Jaw captures, Letterboxd users are aware that legitimacy and value on the platform are shaped by shared norms of taste. These norms are not, as they used to be for traditional cinephilia, set by institutions or elite critics, but co-produced through user interactions. As it has been pointed out throughout this analysis in spaces like Letterboxd, cultural capital is no longer tied to institutional markers of education and profession, but instead, users accumulate it through platform-specific performance of taste and knowledge. Users have to navigate the complex dynamics of the platform to gain a platform-specific cultural capital, a form of value produced through visible, relational practices and ongoing participation in digital space rather than institutional credentials (Calderón Gómez, 2021). By performing said acts, users distinguish themselves from other users, helping establish status

and identity through cultural consumption (Yaish and Katz-Gerro, 2012). In simple terms, the performance produces cultural capital.

On Letterboxd, knowledge and taste become eligible forms of cultural capital through participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), visible in users' performances. Reviews and ratings are more than just personal expression or identity work. They also serve as tools for accumulating and reaffirming cultural capital within the platform's emerging value system. Participants described knowledge as something signalled through both style and depth of engagement. Emilia noted that long, analytical reviews appear as contextual expertise: "*they wrote this whole review with so much thought behind it*". Even though she critiqued this performative impulse to write "*a 500-word essay and to put it online just for likes or comments*", her observation reinforces that such displays are read as markers of knowledge and legitimacy. In contrast, Jeff pointed to a more stylised mode of expertise. For her, the most valuable reviews are one-liners, rich in both cinematic references and humour, in which people, instead of a "*knowledge dump*", share only a brief note on a film. As she put it: "*they know stuff but they're not overdoing it, in a way that wouldn't make you feel weird but that you would feel that you're learning something*". These contrasting modes reveal how Letterboxd supports the coexistence of multiple styles of cultural capital. Some users follow the traditional review-based model of expertise, while others utilise forms shaped by social media aesthetics and rhythms (De Jong and Burgers, 2013).

The other way for users to gain credibility and, as a result, perform cultural capital is through contribution to collective knowledge. In this context, users become legible as *credible* by offering insights that enrich a communal interpretation. Participants unanimously expressed appreciation for reviews that offer "*novel perspective*" (Jiang), "*broader perspective*" (Jaw) or "*explanations of hidden meaning*" (Jeff). Participants, rather than seeking professional expertise, turn to the review section on Letterboxd for accessible knowledge that feels closer to their own cinephilia experience. Ingrid admitted to choosing the platform's longer reviews when looking for an explanation of a character's action, describing it as "*easier than googling and reading some articles*". This illustrates how Letterboxd functions as a space for collective meaning-making and represents a broader shift in authority: from institutional voices to peer interpretations as a primary source of insight, validation and trust in the film community (Koreman, Verboord, and Janssen, 2024). This shift was perhaps captured best by Fool, who described Letterboxd as "*the Roger Ebert of our times*". Without referring to any

specific user, but to a collective voice of the platform itself, this represents the decentralisation of authority. Single critic no longer encapsulates the power to determine the reception of a film, but this power is distributed across a network of anonymous contributors, whose interpretations, humour, background, and emotional responses shape film discourse.

However insightful or stylistically engaging the review might be, its value is only realised when it is recognised, validated, and circulated through the platform's social feedback mechanism, such as likes, comments, and visibility in the activity feed. This peer validation reinforces a particular aesthetic of credibility (McIntyre and McQuarrie, 2016). As Matthew pointed out that long and packed with theory reviews often exceeds the platform's architecture and users' attention capacities: *"the longer the movie review is, the less suitable it is for Letterboxd"*. This leads to a conclusion on how platform and community dynamics influence platform-specific cultural capital: for knowledge to circulate and gain value, it must be recognisable and concise to circulate. It must be accessible. This reflects a broader shift from traditional top-down authority to a bottom-up, networked model, where value is distributed through participatory feedback (Levina and Arriaga, 2014). And all participants admitted to reading only reviews from their friends and the ones in the top liked section. Here, cultural capital is not static, but assigned by users themselves through ongoing interactions, constructing how taste and expertise may become meaningful.

Despite participants often claiming that the content that they generate, like reviews or lists, is primarily personal reflections rather than performance made for recognition or something that is going to be *"liked by hundreds of people"* (Emilia), moments of social validation still matter to them. For example, both Owl and Fool expressed pride and satisfaction when their reviews got likes or positive comments, even if community approval was not their initial motivation to participate. Fool remembered one specific time:

"I got a super lengthy response to a Star Wars review, and I was so touched because this person took a lot of time and agreed with my points. Just made me feel nice".

This ambivalence reveals the dual nature of participation on a digital platform: users might write for themselves, but value is co-constructed by peer validation, reinforcing the idea that user contribution helps shape and sustain the platform-specific form of cultural capital.

Letterboxd presents itself as an open and participatory platform, yet participants' reflections hint at the presence of informal hierarchies that shape what is considered valuable, credible, or "good taste". These hierarchies of both users and films are not formally enforced, but emerge through the community norms and shared cultural references. For example, several participants noted the higher status of various types of films, mainly arthouse, anime, obscure films and the rejection of "*typically popular directors like Tarantino or Nolan*" (Humphrey). This suggests that mainstream preferences from "*a non-film community*" (Jason), like a superhero franchise, may be seen as less legitimate. This very often translates to trust and respect within the community: "*I would not trust an opinion from a guy who rated a Marvel film like a five-star*" (Jason), but also position: "*it's more status to watch something more niche*" (Humphrey). On the other hand, users often search for balance and view people who watch, for example, only old or extremely niche films, as pretentious. As Fool put it: "*the accounts I respect the most are the people who watch everything and can talk and can see the value in everything*". These reflections demonstrate an awareness of how one's viewing history is visible on the platform can signal status or sophistication, but also rejection of what is popular outside the platform. The reflection showcases a substantial shift from traditional cinephilia as well, wherein what was popular inside the elitist groups held validity beyond the circle as well. The platform, in contrast, enables broader participation in film culture, and it simultaneously cultivates new gatekeeping dynamics shaped by performance and peer validation.

Many participants celebrated the democratic space provided by Letterboxd, where "*everyone can participate if they want to*" (Matthew). But the perspective does not always hold true. Others pointed to its structural limitations. As Jaw observed, Letterboxd reflects the preferences of its dominant user base, leading to a very "*westernised discourse*" and skewed film visibility. She also noted that while her Korean friends use other national platforms, they are absent from Letterboxd: "*it's maybe not fully international discourse*". Language is often a barrier, enabling some users to fully participate in Letterboxd discourse. Owl described how she had to switch from writing reviews in Serbian to English, because her mainly English-speaking friends could not engage with her reviews: "*people started complaining: we don't know if you are funny or not [...] so can you please write in English?*". This illustrates how language serves as a gatekeeper, filtering which voices are heard and validated.

Similarly, the language of the film can determine its position and popularity within the Letterboxd community. Jiang noticed that even widely popular Chinese films often receive little attention on the platform: “*on Letterboxd, there isn’t that much discussion on it*”, even though the film premiered at Cannes by definition, should be appreciated amongst cinephiles. Similarly, Owl pointed to niche Serbian films, even if widely watched in the country, rarely receive broader attention: “*people outside of Serbia don’t have any way to encounter those movies*”. These experiences point to uneven dynamics of visibility and voices on the platform, where participation is technically open, but recognition remains unevenly distributed across linguistic, regional, and cultural barriers. This reinforces new forms of cultural hierarchy, where global perspectives are filtered through a Western-centric lens, challenging the assumption that platforms like Letterboxd offer a fully egalitarian cinephile space.

To summarise, this section showed that Letterboxd enables its users to participate in cultural practices, which leads to the production and performance of platform-specific cultural capital. It is understood as a form of value that emerges from visible, relational practices shaped by the platform’s architecture and community norms, and not institutional credentials. Users acquire cultural capital by performing cinephile knowledge in a stylistically legible way, receiving peer validation, and contributing to collective interpretative discourse. It becomes clear that this value system is not neutral or universally accessible. It is shaped by dominant cultural preferences, creating a new form of soft hierarchy. But, it is worth noting that this creation of soft hierarchy does not negate the substantial shift from traditional cinephilia.

Conclusion

“I’m enjoying this so much. I would love all my friends all the time to talk with me about my Letterboxd” (Owl). This quote perfectly encapsulates the joy and the sense of belonging that define the Letterboxd community and the cinephilia that thrives in digital spaces. Far from being a dying relic of the elitist past, cinephilia has transformed into an accessible, performative, and community-driven practice. It has also become a fascinating subject of academic pondering. For me, it was also a personal journey that began with a simple love for Letterboxd. Throughout the thesis, it became clear that Letterboxd is more than just a platform. It is a space for identity formation, community belonging, and a place where one can express their film taste, knowledge, and cinephile status.

This thesis has argued that contemporary cinephilia, even though rooted in a traditionally elitist past, is constantly renegotiated and constructed within a digital environment. Central to this study was the argument that cultural capital is performed and accumulated not through institutional affiliation or formal education, but through participating in platform-specific practices. By analysing Letterboxd as a case, this study addressed the research gaps in existing literature by moving beyond textual analysis of online film culture to explore affective, ritualistic, and identity-constructing practices of digital cinephiles. To fulfil the aim of the study ethnographic approach and qualitative research methods were employed. Interviews combined with a media go-along provided data rich in both depth and quality.

No matter how rich the collected data may be, it does not mean anything without pairing it with theoretical grounding and careful analysis. In this study, the integration of Bourdieu’s (1984; 1986) theory of cultural capital with a constructivist perspective on identity provided a critical lens, helping to understand participants’ experiences and practices. The theoretical framework enabled a deeper understanding of how value, status, and taste are performed and negotiated within the Letterboxd community, and how it shapes users’ cinephile identity. This chapter begins with the answers to the research questions that guided this thesis. Findings are followed by reflections on the study’s limitations and suggestions for future research. The chapter concludes reflections on the study’s contributions to media and communication studies and a final reflection.

1. Findings

RQ1: How is the notion of cinephilia performed and negotiated within the Letterboxd community?

The emphasis on *community* in the research question is not accidental. The interviews revealed strong longing and strong desire among participants to find and connect with people who share a deep love for cinema. On Letterboxd, cinephilia is not a solitary passion or static identity. It is both a deeply personal and highly communal practice. Participants' reflections clearly showed that cinephilia on Letterboxd is a dynamic and negotiated identity. Cinephilia on Letterboxd is shaped through participation in visible platform-specific practices, such as logging, rating, reviewing, and curating lists. These practices are structured by the platform's architecture and become ritualised and meaningful through the emotional significance denoted by its users. Personal meaning and value is embedded even in the smallest interactions, like tagging, reviewing, or rating. They become acts of self-definition, embedded with personal histories and a way to signal cinephilic identity. The architecture enables expression, but it is the users who infuse these practices with affective and cultural weight.

Importantly, digital cinephilia departs from its traditional framing, defined by academically trained or institutionally legitimised elites. Instead, it is rooted in emotional investment and participation. At the core of this reconfiguration lies the democratisation of access. Digital cinephilia is now redefined through cultural openness, where value is generated by presence, passion, and peer recognition. Consistent engagement with films, reflection in reviews, and community belonging is how contemporary cinephiles negotiate their identity in a digital environment. Even participants who initially rejected the cinephile identity demonstrated consistent and passionate participation. This initial rejection was caused by the traditional notion of cinephilia as something elitist and unavailable for people without formal education and professional experience in film studies. However, this study showed that contemporary cinephilia originates from an emotional connection to film. This defines digital cinephilia, in the case of Letterboxd, as something shaped by personal experiences and emotional responses. It is not possessed, but rather performed and made legible through interaction.

This performance is influenced by the community in both affirming and pressuring ways. A tension arises between the ambition to authentically express oneself and the performance of

taste and consumption that does not make one stand out. The desire for authentic expression often clashes with the awareness of being watched and judged. Letterboxd's architecture ensures that users' activities are publicly visible and potentially scrutinised by others. This creates a space of constant peer-surveillance, often resulting in self-curation in search of community validation. Participants expressed satisfaction and pride when they received positive feedback, but also anxiety about being misunderstood or misjudged. Contemporary cinephiles now navigate and balance personal expression with community expectations. This makes cinephilia a collective and collaborative experience.

RQ2: How does Letterboxd facilitate the creation and performance of cultural capital within its community?

The traditional understanding of cinephilia is inextricably tied to possession of cultural capital and cultural authority. Historically, it has been a way to signal belonging to the elitist circle. With the rise of digital platforms, these dynamics have begun to shift. Platforms like Letterboxd have redefined how cultural capital is acquired and later performed and recognised. The core understanding of cultural capital remains the same. It is still about knowledge, taste, and cultural fluency. However, the focus is shifted from how it is learned, to how that knowledge and preferences are presented, performed, and received.

This thesis argued that cultural capital on Letterboxd is platform-specific, peer-constructed through everyday engagement, and recognised through mechanisms of social feedback. Users accumulate cultural capital through a performance of knowledge and taste expressed with ratings and reviews of films. These acts are public and stylised performances, reflecting how one communicates their knowledge or personal reflections. Reviews containing emotional responses, humour one-liners, long philosophical essays or technical explanations are later legitimised through likes, comments, and follows. In this way, Letterboxd architecture facilitates a form of peer-validated cultural legitimacy, shifting the gatekeeping role from traditional critics to the community itself.

What distinguishes this performance of cinephile cultural capital on Letterboxd is its collective dimension. Cultural capital is not something an individual possesses. Users gain credibility and enhance their cultural capital by offering a valuable insight, novel perspective or social commentary that adds to the community's shared understanding of films. Additionally, the participants noted that reviews are written to resonate with others. They are

not a simple expression of viewpoint, but they aim to be a useful, moving or relatable take. The reviews section becomes a space of mutual recognition, where users search for their critical or emotional reflection echoed in others' words. This reflects the shared investment in meaning-making, making cultural capital co-constructed and not just individually performed.

This cultural openness and collaboration do not erase hierarchy. Letterboxd presents itself as a democratic and participatory platform, it is a space where cultural hierarchies are reproduced and reshaped. The interviews revealed that certain genres and types of cinema are more preferred and receive more appreciation amongst Letterboxd users. The need to distance themselves from the general audience of mainstream or commercially successful films signals the reproduction of the divide characteristic of traditional cinephilia and cultural capital. Moreover, participants highlighted more structural limitations. Language, geography, and platform norms in a subtle way filter which films and voices gain traction. Western-centric discourse continues to dominate. This undermines the platform's full democratic potential and reinforces new, digitally mediated hierarchies. While Letterboxd decentralises authority, it also cultivates new forms of status, based on user interaction and platform-specific modes of taste performance.

2. Limitations

Even though the study offers valuable insight into digital cinephilia by focusing on individual experiences on an understudied but culturally significant platform, Letterboxd, several limitations have to be acknowledged. Firstly, the platform-specific nature of research means that findings may not be fully transferable to other film evaluation sites like IMDb or Rotten Tomatoes. Every platform operates under different platform logic, design and user base, which might result in different forms of engagement, community dynamics, and expressions of cultural capital. This limits the universality of conclusions drawn from Letterboxd users to other digital film communities. Future research could explore how the performance of identity and cultural capital varies across different platforms, enabling a deeper understanding of cinephilia in digital film spaces.

Secondly, the qualitative approach provided a valuable insight into particularly active and engaged users at a specific moment in time. While this allowed for a deep exploration of how cultural capital and cinephilia are performed and negotiated on Letterboxd, it also presents important limitations. Participants were selected based on their high activity and willingness

to share their experiences, which ignores the less active and less vocal users of Letterboxd. Their modes of participation might be harder to observe, but they still participate in constructing the broader ecosystem of digital cinephilia. Additionally, the sampling lacked strong and equal representation from a diverse range of cultural and geographical contexts. Although the study aimed to explore a more global and decentralised cinephile community, the participants were predominantly from a European background. Considering how film culture differs across the globe, expanding the research to include a more diverse sample in the future would allow us to examine the potential differences in how digital cinephilia is experienced and understood.

Lastly, the findings are based only on a snapshot of user behaviours and platform dynamics at a specific moment in time. This limits the researcher to present findings bound to the present without accounting for the potential impact of evolving platform architecture, for example, algorithmic changes or redesign. This results in findings that might not capture long-term shifts in digital cinephilia on Letterboxd, making it require a follow-up study.

3. Contributions

This thesis offers several contributions to the studies on cinephilia, digital platforms, and media practices, both conceptually and methodologically. It positions Letterboxd, an understudied yet culturally significant digital platform for film evaluation, as a space for cinephiles to connect and to express their identity within the constraints of the platform. By doing so, this research contributes to the ongoing debate at the intersection of film studies and media and communication. It reframes the traditional understanding of cinephilia as a nostalgic, institution-bound phenomenon into a dynamic cultural identity mediated through digital infrastructures. This study connects the aesthetic and philosophical traditions of film studies with the user-focused perspectives of audience research and digital media practices. The relationship, then, contributes to the field of media and communication studies, where such inclusion has largely been neglected or absent.

To better understand this transformation of cinephilia, this study adapted Bourdieu's (1984; 1986) theory of cultural capital. This contributes to a broader understanding of this concept in digital spaces. By applying cultural capital, this research demonstrated how cultural value and legitimacy, similarly to cinephilia, are no longer exclusive to institutional credentials or formal education. It extended Bourdieu's theory and showed how UGC, community,

platform-specific practices and rituals all accord for the formation of one's platform-specific cultural capital.

This research makes a meaningful academic and practical contribution by grounding its analysis in empirical material collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews with Letterboxd users and observational insights drawn from an adapted media go-along approach. In contrast to previous studies on digital film platforms, this study aimed to focus on the users instead of analysing digital film culture solely through text or discourse. The combination of participants' personal reflections and observation of their actual practices allowed this project to prioritise the affective and social dimensions of digital cinephilia. This human-centred approach provided a more nuanced understanding of digital culture and negotiations of identity that unfold on Letterboxd.

4. Concluding statement

Cinephilia is no longer a quiet and exclusive obsession of a few. It is public, participatory and most importantly, deeply mediated. Digital platforms like Letterboxd have opened the space for anyone with a love for cinema, not just to watch films, but to speak, connect, and be seen. This thesis has shown that cinephile identity today is performed and negotiated through visible everyday participation. Similarly, cultural capital, once tied to institutions and formal education, is built through interactions, recognition, and contribution. In this evolving digital landscape, the power to rewrite and define what it means to be a cinephile lies with users themselves. Yet, as digital media keeps shaping how we see and relate to culture and others, the work of understanding cinephilia, digital platforms and communities that sustain it, is far from being complete.

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Appendices

This section provides additional materials used and referenced throughout the thesis. It includes the details about Letterboxd, recruitment and consent form, participants' details, the interview guide, selected interview transcript, and an overview of the coding process conducted on the data collected.

Appendix 1: Letterboxd Details

Platform Name: Letterboxd

Website: <https://letterboxd.com>



Founded: 2011

Founders: Matthew Buchanan and Karl von Randow

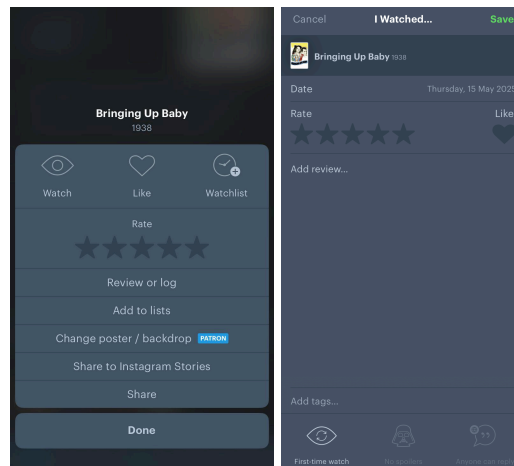
User Base: 17 million users globally (as of 2024; Goldsmith, 2025), according to [Similarweb.com](https://www.similarweb.com) 28,68% 18-24 and 33% users are between 25-34

Platform Description

Letterboxd is a social media platform dedicated to film lovers. It functions as a digital film diary and social network, allowing users to log, rate, and review films, create custom lists, and engage with other users' content.

Core Features

- **Film Logging:** Users track what they've watched, with time stamps.
- **Rating System:** 0.5 to 5 stars (in 0.5 increments).
- **Reviewing:** Open-text review fields tied to each logged film.
- **Tags:** Films can be tagged with personal or thematic keywords.



- **Lists:** Customisable lists to organise films (e.g., watchlists, favourites).
- **Favourites:** Four featured favourite films on each user's profile.
- **Social Interaction:** Users can follow others, like, and comment on reviews/lists.
- **Activity Feed:** Shows actions of followed users (logs, likes, comments).
- **Diary Function:** Organised viewing history (like a journal).

Social Aspect

- **Affinity Space:** Connects users with a shared passion for film (Gee, 2017).
- **Community Visibility:** Reviews and ratings are public and subject to peer feedback on the main page.
- **Validation Mechanisms:** Likes, comments, follows.
- **Platform Influence:** Design encourages daily interaction and public taste performance.

Appendix 2: Call for participants

The post shown below was shared on my private Instagram story as a call for participants. Those who responded directly are included in Appendix 4, and in the sampling bracket, they are referred to as volunteers.



Appendix 3: Consent Form



Lunds Universitet
Faculty of Social Sciences
Aleksandra Brania
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Consent form to participate in Master's Thesis at the Faculty of Social Sciences

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this student project, which takes place from January 2025 to June 2025. This consent form is for you to get a better understanding of the study and your rights as a participant. Information obtained through this research will be tentatively used in the write-up of the completion of the Master's thesis in Communication and Media Studies. The research will be conducted by Aleksandra Brania from the Department of Communication and Media at Lund University, Sweden.

Your Participation:

1. What is the purpose of the study? This study explores how the Letterboxd platform shapes contemporary cinephilia as both a practice and an identity. It examines how users engage with film discourse, participate in community interactions, and perform cultural capital, contributing to a community-driven redefinition of cinephilia. By analysing these participatory acts, the research aims to understand how digital platforms influence the creation and negotiation of cultural value in film culture today, as well as the decentralisation of traditional film criticism.

2. Request for participation: You have been asked to participate in this study due to your engagement with the platform Letterboxd and the age criteria.

3. How many people will participate? Approximately 10-12 people will take part in this study.

4. How long will it take to participate in the study? If you agree to participate in the study, your involvement will last for 60 to 90 minutes.

5. What will happen during the study? During this research study, the researcher will conduct a semi-structured interview with elements of a media go-along. Interview questions are related to your experience with the film platform Letterboxd. The researcher has a set of questions designed to help you relate your perspective. However, throughout the interview, additional clarifying questions may be asked. You will also be asked to demonstrate your practices and usage of Letterboxd on your mobile device. During this interview, you can refuse to answer any question or withdraw completely from the study at any time without penalty. There is no compulsion to participate or justify your withdrawal if you choose to. The interview will be conducted in English.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

The interview will be audio recorded. All of your information and interview responses will be kept confidential. Except for the researcher, no one will be able to access any identifying information associated with you. Your name and other identifying information will not be associated with any part of the written report of the research. However, your background information, such as your nationality, age, gender, profession and education level, will be used for the formation of the findings in the final paper. All your responses will be anonymised by the researcher, and your name will be removed and replaced with a code name. The thesis will be published with open access.

The consent form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You are not waiving any legal rights by signing this Consent Form Document. Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you voluntarily agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

You have the right to receive information about the personal data we process about you. You also have the right to have inaccurate personal data about you corrected. If you have a complaint about our processing of your personal data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer at dataskyddsbud@lu.se. You also have the right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory authority (the Data Protection Authority, IMY) if you believe that we are processing your personal data incorrectly.

Consent:

I, _____ agree that I have understood the terms of the agreement and I agree to participate in the study.

Thesis title: "The Death of a Cinephile? How Letterboxd is Redefining Cinephilia, Cultural Capital and Film Discourse".

Date:

Signature of the Participant:

Appendix 4: Participants' Details

Participants were asked to choose their own code names at the beginning of the interview as a form of an interactive ice breaker. They were asked to open their Letterboxd and look at their last watched film, selecting a name inspired by a character, actor, or other association with that film. This served two purposes. Firstly, it introduced a playful and personalised element that helped participants ease into the conversation and feel more relaxed at the outset of the interview. Secondly, ensured that participants had their phones in hand ready for the media go-along elements of the study.

Code	Age	Gender	Nationality	Occupation	Education	Location	Date	Mode	Duration	Sampling
Owl	25	F	Serbian	PhD Student	Master (Microbiology)	Sweden	11.03. 17:30	in person	1h 16' 48"	volunteer
Emilia	25	F	Polish	PhD Student	Master (Biology)	Sweden	09.03 12:00	in person	1h 7' 09"	snowball
Fool	28	M	American	Unemployed	Master (Media and Communication)	Sweden	11.03. 13:00	in person	59' 41"	volunteer
Humphrey	24	M	Swedish	Master student	Bachelor (Development Studies)	Sweden	13.03. 16:00	in person	1h 03' 50"	volunteer
Beaver	23	F	Armenian	Master student	Bachelor (Political Science)	Sweden	10.03. 15:00	in person	53' 01"	volunteer
Jason	25	M	Brazilian	Bank clerk	Bachelor (Applied Mathematics)	online	26.03. 00:00	zoom	1h 16' 33"	snowball
Jaw	27	F	Korean	Master Student	Bachelor (Geography)	Sweden	25.03. 11:00	in person	56' 12"	snowball
Ingrid	23	F	Indian	Master Student	Bachelor (Sociology and Human Resource Planning)	online	28.03. 7:30am	zoom	1h 4' 12"	snowball
Jeff	25	F	Polish	Help desk	Master (Polish Philology)	online	25.03. 18:00	zoom	1h 2' 5"	volunteer
Matthew	25	M	German	Master student	Bachelor (Media Studies)	Sweden	24.03. 13:00	in person	1h 21' 55"	snowball
Jiang	23	F	Chinese	Master student	Bachelor (Journalism and Communication)	Sweden	24.03. 15:30	in person	1h 17' 54"	volunteer

Appendix 5: Interview Guide

The Interview Guide was designed to be flexible and served as a framework to guide the interviews.

Interview Guide

Introductory questions:

1. Can you tell me about how your love for film started? Were there any defining moments or influences?
2. What do you know about cinephilia? How do you understand it?
3. Would you identify yourself as a cinephile?
4. Do you engage with film in other ways outside Letterboxd (e.g., watching video essays, reading criticism, attending festivals, and other film platforms)?

Platform, Engagement and Practices:

5. How did you first discover Letterboxd, and what made you start using it? How would you describe what Letterboxd is?
6. How do you typically engage with the platform? Do you mostly log films, rate, review, or interact with others?
 - a. Could you walk me through your typical use of Letterboxd? When and how do you use it?
7. Are there any specific ways you organise your thoughts about films on Letterboxd (e.g., lists, tags, reviews)? Why?

Community and Social Interactions:

8. Do you feel like a part of some community on Letterboxd? How would you define the community existing on the platform?
9. Who do you follow on Letterboxd? What makes certain users stand out?
 - a. Where are they from? Who do they represent?
10. Has being part of Letterboxd influenced how you see yourself in relation to others?
 - a. Does it create impostor syndrome? Inspire deeper engagement? Make you feel part of a larger culture?
11. Do you ever think about how your profile or reviews represent you?
12. Have you ever changed your perspective on a film after reading reviews or engaging with the Letterboxd community?

Cultural Capital on Letterboxd:

13. What do you think makes someone “knowledgeable” about film?
 - a. How does it look on Letterboxd?
14. Do you think there are certain unwritten rules or expectations about what is valued in film discussions on Letterboxd?
 - a. Have you ever felt pressure to engage in a certain way to align with what is valued on the platform?
 - b. What kind of reviews or engagement styles do you personally find most valuable? Why?
15. Have you noticed particular types of films, genres, or directors being more valued or appreciated on Letterboxd? If yes, why do you think that is?
16. What types of films do you watch? And how do you decide on what to watch? Does Letterboxd play any role in this?
 - a. How do you decide what rating to give a film? Do you ever reconsider ratings after seeing how others respond?
17. Can you tell me something about your taste in films? How does it show on Letterboxd?

Authority and Changing Hierarchies:

18. Do you think there is a difference in how films are perceived on Letterboxd and outside?
 - a. How would you describe the way film discussions take place on Letterboxd?

19. How would you describe the role of Letterboxd in shaping film discussions, and who gets to participate in them?

- a. What kinds of opinions or perspectives do you tend to come across on Letterboxd?
 - b. In your experience, how open is Letterboxd to different opinions and perspectives?

20. Do you think that Letterboxd has changed who gets to influence film culture? If so, how?

Closing questions:

21. Would you engage with film differently if Letterboxd didn't exist?
22. What role, if any, do you think digital platforms like Letterboxd play in shaping modern cinephilia?
23. How do you see the future of film communities and film criticism in a digital age?
24. Would you like to add anything more?

Appendix 6: Interview Transcript

Transcript of interview with Owl (O below), interviewer is marked with A.

A: Before we start the actual interview, I need a code name because the interview is going to be anonymised. So what I do is I ask my participants to look at their last logged film. And choose either a character from that film, or a director, or whatever you think works the best for you.

O: Okay, I love this. This is so cute. You made it so much fun. Okay, let's see. So anything related to the movie? I would go with... No, there are so many things. Oh, okay. Can it be related to their... Can it be the owl?

A: Owl, like an animal?

O: Yes. It's not the movie, it's related to the director's opus in general. Okay. I just vibe with that name now. Because this movie is not like the perfect one when it comes to code names, but David Lynch is. You know. I could be velvet, but then I remember the owls are not what they seem, and then it seems so cool to be the owl.

A: Okay. That was fun. So, first, I would like to ask you about your interest in cinema. How did it start? What influenced you? How many films did you watch in your childhood?

O: Okay. I have answers to all these questions. All right. So my interest in cinema started when I was seven or eight. I was at my grandmother's place. She lives in a village in Serbia. And my uncle rented *The Lord of the Rings Return of the King*. And I was in my boredom. I decided to sit next to him and stare at the TV. And when it finished, I was like, wow, how is it possible that something like this exists in this world? So after that, I was amazed when they told me that there are also the first two parts of that movie. So that was practically how I got introduced to moving images. But when I started watching movies more, it was some sort of bonding time with my dad. Every weekend, he would watch random horror movies on TV. I would just sit next to him and watch horror movies with him. And I was very, very young. So I guess my threshold when it comes to gore and violence is very high right now. But it was mostly because of my uncle and my father. Yes. That was the answer to how I started watching movies. And actually, I had my Letterboxd from the age when I started until when I was approximately 12. I had like a notebook where I was writing down everything that I watched. By the age of 12, I had watched 501 movies. And I have them written down. So it's very correct information. But there I also included different episodes of the TV show Hercule Poirot. I didn't know at the time that it was a TV show and not a movie. Because every episode is an hour and a half long. So you can like do 501 minus 20 maybe. So yes, that's how I watched a lot of movies as a kid. And I was going to the DVD club that was... It's like a DVD store in my hometown near my house. And I would go there every weekend and rent a movie and watch it from Saturday returning Sunday. If I had enough time, I would watch it two or three times before I returned it. So yeah, very young. Yeah.

A: Do you have any film education?

O: No. No. No. I have zero film education. Yes.

A: So the second part of my research is about Cinephilia. So, how would you define it? How do you understand this concept?

O: Aha. I think a cinephile is a person who watches an absurd amount of movies from every genre, to appreciate movies from every genre, no matter the genre. You enjoy the way the movie is crafted. You enjoy different aspects of a film as a medium. I mean, of course, we all have our preferred genres that are more entertaining or less entertaining. But at the end of the day, I would say that a cinephile is a person who likes film as a whole, not particular parts of it. I mean, when it comes to genres, yeah. So that would be, in my opinion, a cinephilia.

A: So by this definition, would you identify yourself as a cinephile?

O: Absolutely. Yes.

A: What does it mean to you?

O: I'm very proud of it, I would say. Because first of all, I have like infinite number of things that I can explore. I guess that will come afterwards when we talk about rating. But I feel that, if I watch a very good, trashy slasher movie, which was supposed to be trashy because it's a slasher, and if it gives you like a lot of entertainment and even a little bit of tension and something to think about, then it's going to be a great movie. And if I watch a musical that has like very good catchy songs, and if it even has something to say and some character development or something, it's going to be like a very good movie. So I would say that I managed with almost two decades of watching movies now to develop a certain taste for different types of movies and to be able to enjoy all of them equally, if they're well done, well written.

A: So you said you don't have any formal film education. Do you engage with film culture in ways other than Letterboxd, for example, film festivals and other experiences?

O: Yes. The first time I did something unrelated to just watching movies was when I made like short movie in high school. It was for some national competition, and I won fourth place. It was some ridiculous topic like safety on the internet. It took me two whole days to make a two-minute-long movie. But I was very proud of myself. And then, yeah, during my bachelor studies, I don't recall doing anything in particular. But when I came to Sweden to do my master's, I started volunteering at Lund Fantastic Film Festival. It's a genre festival in Lund. And in my first year, I was volunteering. And in the second year, I was on a selection committee for the short films. So we were, it was five or six of us in the group, and we needed to watch more than, I mean, in total more than 1,500 short films in order to select like a couple of short film packages. So that was, I watched around 130 maybe in total. And part of the job was also to write reviews about them, to read them, to discuss them, to contact filmmakers, to organize everything to be assembled in film folders. So it was like that. And I was also volunteering at the documentary film festival in Malmö, Nordisk Panorama, two years in a row, too. And also, I have my film club here in Lund. I'm a board member of Film Club _____. I'm in charge of promoting us on social media, more precisely, Instagram. And also, I'm on a board that chooses movies for each semester. No professional education, but yes, I have my movie CV, yes.

A: Do you use any other film platform other than Letterboxd?

O: No, I am actually, when I started like being more engaged in movies, I was using IMDB. But I really disliked the interface, and also I did not like rating system over, not rating system, rating community. And then I switched to Letterboxd when I was 21, I would say. In 2020, I think that I, or 21 that I installed Letterboxd, yes.

A: Why did you decide to move to Letterboxd?

O: Social pressure. Well, I was very used to IMDB to be honest. I didn't want to do it at first, but I started hanging out with some people who had a very sophisticated taste and were using Letterboxd. I didn't want to be excluded from our small Letterboxd community, so I installed it too. And then, like at the beginning, it is not as intuitive, but after like a day and a half, I realized how like that it has way better the interface is than IMDB, and I never returned to IMDB again.

A: How would you describe Letterbox to someone who has no idea what it is?

O: Okay. First of all, I asked them if they read books, and then I compared it to Goodreads, but for movies. But if they don't know what Goodreads is, I say that Letterboxd is a film app. They have like a big base of movies. And when you watch a movie and you can go there and log it, rate it, write a review if you want to. Then I always say that you can create your Letterboxd watch list over there, and that way, you don't need to write down movies in your notes app. That's how I sell it. And I say that you can follow other people and they can follow you, but you cannot interact with them, which is like a good side of Letterboxd, because you cannot engage in discussions. You can only like read somebody else's reviews, leave your own reviews and maybe write a comment, but it's not a private chat, so it's not as time-consuming as some other social media. So, yes.

A: So you said you had some difficulties at first on one day when you first joined?

O: I had one difficulty, and that was when you go into an app, you can mark that the movie has been watched. And intuitively you do watch, but that doesn't, it's not the same as logging a movie because when you log a movie into your diary, then you can add tags, and you can say when you watched it, you can write a small review. So it took me like a couple of hours, not hours, just like a couple of times for somebody to tell me, hey, now you need to like log it into your diary if you want to have like all additional information, because if you only put that it's watched, then like it won't mean anything to you in three years.

A: So, how do you usually engage? What do you do on Letterbox?

O: Waste hours of my life.

A: So, do you like opening it when you're bored?

O: Yeah, I open it when I'm...

A: Could you show me what you do in your life?

O: Just like, oh, I'm gonna open the Letterboxd now. Yeah, so I'm going to my Letterbox and then I'm on the front page. And then I usually check first what other people watched. I always actually like it, it never happens that somebody who I follow watches something and I didn't see it, which means that I go into Letterbox quite frequently, to be honest, especially because like I follow 97 people. So I'm always informed about what's going on. If somebody, like me, doesn't care about ratings that much, but I always like to go into a review and read a review if somebody leaves it, because, you know, not many people do that. And then before I would go into activity quite frequently see what my friends are doing. But that was while I was following like less than 30 people; now that I follow almost 100 people. Like, sometimes people just spam. So I don't go into an activity that much anymore. And then I usually go into search and start finding things, or if somebody, for example, I don't know, it's like a vicious circle. For example, _____ watched *The Brutalis*. So I would go to see how he wrote a review about it. So I would go into his profile to see, oh, what else did he do? What else did he watch? What else did he review? Or I would go into a movie and think, okay, Brutalis is

directed by a guy called Brady Corbet, whoever that is. And the name sounds unfamiliar to me. So naturally, I will go to see what else he made. I would realize that I don't know anything about him. So, but there is like some, so it's usually just like practically like doom scrolling. Yeah, it goes on forever. Yes. So I'm very grateful that it doesn't have like a section where you can chat with other people, because then it would be quite unproductive for me. But yes, that's what I do. Yeah.

A: How do you log films? And when do you do it?

O: Okay, it depends.

A: Do you log every film you watch?

O: Yes. Yes, I log every movie that I watch. But the thing is that I want it, it sounds so stupid. I want my followers to see everything that I log. I want them to see all of my ratings. So sometimes if I watch like movies couple of days in a row or like two movies in one day, I'm gonna wait with like, I'm gonna log first movie that I watched. And then with the second one, I'm gonna wait for a couple of days so people absorb the first rating. And then I log the next one. But sometimes that turns out to be almost a week. For example, I still haven't logged the *Ghost in a Shell* that we watched a week ago, but I will do it for sure. Probably after this meeting. But yes, I log every movie that I see. Most of the time, it's as soon as I see it. But if some other movies are waiting, then movies pile up, and then it goes on forever. But all of them are logged in the end. All of them I rate. Unless I watch a short movie, I don't have a developed rating system in my head for short movies because I haven't seen them that much. And if I start, for example, falling asleep during a movie, then I don't rate it because... Or like because it won't be my honest rating because it's not related to anything. Sometimes I'm just maybe tired or ate too much or slept too little. So yeah, in those two cases, I don't rate movies.

A: Do you have any system of organising films?

O: I mean, yeah. I put Letterboxd tags into all of the movies in that way. I have very specific tags that I put. I put tags for people that I watched with. And if I watch it in the cinema, I put the name of the cinema where I watched it. If I watch it at a film festival, I put a film festival. And if I watch it outside of Serbia or Sweden, I also put the country or city where I watched it. So I could like if someday for some it happened to me, for example, that I couldn't remember the name of the cinema in Vienna where I watched a movie called *Fallen Leaves*. So I went to my movie, and then there is a Letterboxd tag, look, and I could recommend it to my friends. So I like to have just that. I don't write anything else, only with who I watched it, where I watched it, and if it was a festival, then I mentioned the festival. And if it's a foreign country, because I like to see what I watched in, I don't know, Greece, in 2022 summer.

A: And why do you do it?

O: Because like many people of our age, I'm obsessed with numbers and statistics. And I like to have my life organized into little Letterboxd tags. It gives me some sort of structure and comfort in life. Please don't write that. I'm kidding. I'm kidding. It's a joke. It's a joke. Yeah, no, I'm kidding. It gives me some sort of satisfaction when I go into my Letterboxd tags, for example, and then I see, in Kino Lund, I watched 80 movies, which gives me a number like I function in my numbers. It's good. I wasted a lot of money on Kino. I have friends, I watched a lot of movies with them. They're very good friends of mine. I like my numbers.

A: So speaking of numbers, how many films do you watch? Be honest.

O: Per year?

A: Can be per year, whatever.

O: Okay. The previous year, I watched around; I can tell you the exact number if you want to. Okay. I can, I can find it.

A: The year in review.

O: Yes, exactly. The previous year, I watched 175 movies. And in the year before that, I watched approximately 100 more. But that's because I was working on a film festival. So I watched those 100 short movies. So I would say that like on a yearly basis, I watch, let's say, around 150 to 180. I watch lots of movies.

A: Does Letterboxd, do you think play a role in a number of films you watch?

O: Not anymore. When I started using it, it was more like that social aspect, where it was cool at the time when I installed it, too. I made friends practically through our shared interest in movies. So it was like cool to log movies, and then like somebody would be like, oh, I'm going to watch that movie. I'm going to text her, ask her about her opinion. It was like a way to socially engage with people. So I would do it at the beginning a bit more frequently. But now I've grown up a bit, and I don't have that much social anxiety anymore. I love to log movies because it's a nice way to keep them. But I don't watch movies to log them. I watch movies, and as a natural thing to do after that, I log them.

A: Do you feel anything when you log a film?

O: It depends. You know when I feel something? When I write a review for that movie. And then I'm waiting to see if somebody is going to like that review. And then I know who read my review and who did, because I don't write reviews that often. And it's usually like one-liners, something funny, haha. But like if I put some effort into expressing an opinion, then like I'm a bit like, oh, okay. I consult Google Translate to see if I put everything that every thought correctly in English and everything. And then I'm like, hmm, okay, let's see if somebody is going to read this.

A: Do you always write reviews in English?

O: I didn't use to. I used to write them in Serbian, but since I've been in Sweden for two and a half years now, most of my friends nowadays are not from Serbia. And people started complaining: we don't know if you're funny or not, because it's in Serbian, so we cannot read it. So, can you please write in English? And then I started writing in English because people who actually want to hear me, read my reviews now, are mostly English-speaking people.

A: What do you consider a Letterbox review? Should it be funny?

O: What I consider a proper Letterboxd review is like expressing your opinion there, like being brave enough to put your opinion. Sometimes, I'm not that brave. So it's very easy to watch Juno and write a nice review like Michael Cera, wow. Everybody is gonna agree with that. They're gonna like it, but it's a one-liner. It's like, I just wrote something that I thought was funny at the time, or it was some inside joke with the person that I watched the movie with. But like, proper review and I don't have many of those would be to actually sit down and say, hey, I think this was done very well, or hey, I don't think this was very good because or like, it doesn't even need to be related to a movie, but I need to express like an opinion.

A: I have a few more questions about reviews later, but first, I would like to ask you about...

O: I'm enjoying this so much. I would love all my friends all the time to talk with me about my Letterboxd experience.

A: But speaking about friends, do you feel like there is some community on Letterboxd?

O: Yeah, there is for sure. I mean, in Belgrade, there is. I remember when I just made it, and then we had a couple of those cool alternative cinemas. So some people would go there quite often, and you would notice those people, and then you go home and like you log your movie on Letterboxd, and you can see who logged that movie recently. And if you watched it in the cinema, you're gonna log it at the same time as somebody else who watched it there at the same time. So I would find a bunch of Serbian names, and then I would connect the dots. There is a big letterboxd community back home, I would say. And we all follow each other. There's one group of friends, and they watch movies, and they have their Letterbox, and your group of friends watches movies. And you have your Letterboxd accounts. And then one person from your group likes a review of one person from another group, and then through that, you kind of find out about that person. And then you find out about all of their friends, and then it's like everybody is kind of interconnected, especially when it comes to those like small influencers. You can find them especially on Serbian movie pages. Like, people from Serbia are probably going to write reviews on Serbian movies. So usually, the highest liked reviews are the ones from people who have some good takes. Because we have some niche Serbian movies that you can go to the cinema and see them, or on national television during Christmas. And people outside of Serbia don't have any way to encounter those movies. So it's people from back home who write the reviews. And then that way, you also find a person whose name is Korcilo is writing very cool reviews on a bunch of different Serbian movies. And you start following that person, then and then you realise, wow, this guy is a film director and his movie premiered at the film festival in Belgrade this year and stuff like that. There is a community, and we know each other thanks to it. And here, not as big, but there is some. I follow some people who are here, and you meet people, and then they're like, oh, I have Letterboxd. And then you figure out, oh, they watch this movie in Filmstaden today, or they watch this movie in Kino today, or oh, we were at the film club at the same time. And we didn't know each other back then, and stuff like that. That's what can happen here..

A: Who do you follow on Letterboxd?

O: My friends. It's mostly my friends and a couple of people from back home who are part of that Letterboxd community. We are not necessarily friends. Some of them I never even met in person, but I know about them. I don't follow any of those popular big Letterboxd names like Lucy or Carsten, or people who have a bunch of likes, reviews of popular movies. I don't follow them. And if it's somebody that I don't know, that person is like part of the community, there is a reason that I follow them. It's not that I will randomly just follow a person because they had a funny review. I'm not going to do that. It's going to be like somebody who's like in some way connected to me, because I care about their opinions.

A: Okay. Do you engage with people that you don't follow in any way?

O: Yeah, I end up on a lot of people's profiles because someone I follow watches a movie. When they do, you can see which reviews they've liked, and then you click on those reviews and think, "Oh, this is funny," or "Who wrote this?" Then maybe you read a couple more of their reviews and start to get a sense of their taste in movies. You kind of see whether they're similar to you, if they're part of a community from your hometown or here, or maybe they're followed by people you already follow. So yeah, I engage, but I don't necessarily follow everyone.

A: Because you keep your own small community on Letterboxd. Do you think being part of that specifically on Letterboxd has influenced how you see yourself when it comes to films and cinephilia?

O: You need to clarify the question. I'm sorry.

A: So, do you maybe feel sometimes it's just giving you examples that are not necessarily true? Maybe you feel sometimes like an impostor syndrome, or that you feel pressured to engage more? Maybe something more positive, like, oh, I feel like a part of a culture?

O: Yeah, okay, okay. Well, I definitely feel like I'm part of a culture because I've been using Letterboxd for a long time now. I actually introduced a lot of people to it. I watch a lot of movies, so naturally I log a lot too. Especially since I arrived in Sweden, I've been involved in film festivals and film clubs, so I've been discussing movies a lot more. I'm also much more secure now. I don't care as much anymore. For example, when I first created my account, I felt a bit pressured. Like, if I saw that someone who followed me rated a movie really low, I might've lowered my own rating so they wouldn't think I was cringe for liking it. But now I'm embracing it, I'm owning it. Like, if I watch *Wrong Turn 6* and have a great time, I'll give it 4 out of 5 stars. I've actually built a lot of self-confidence through using Letterboxd for so long. And that confidence has also been supported by how much I've engaged with movies in the past two and a half years.

A: Outside of the Letterboxd?

O: Exactly. And then, I talk a lot with other people. Since I introduced many of them to Letterboxd, in their eyes, I've kind of become "the movie friend." So often, people ask me, "Oh, what did you think?" or "Can you recommend something?" And that makes me feel relaxed enough to just express myself. It's particularly funny when it comes to controversial opinions, I actually love those. Sometimes you end up disturbing someone a bit with your take, and then it even leads to a conversation outside of Letterboxd. So yeah... yeah.

A: And of course, on Letterbox, you again create some sort of representation of yourself. How much do you think that is? To what extent? Do you ever think that, for example, your profile represents you?

O: I would say that it represents me quite well, at least like my taste in movies. I think that I don't know, I feel that some at least people that I don't know, I made like two years ago, one like review for one movie that became like the most popular review for that movie in like in the app. I mean, it's a Serbian movie, but still like and then like many people that never knew me, like would maybe find my Instagram profile and like text me that they think that it was funny or they would just like comment like some person named Božida that I never met in my life or know who that is, told me that he loves me or she loves me, they love me. In the comment on the movie, like with my review, it was like quite hilarious. So like I feel that, I don't know, people, I don't think that, I feel that some people even put like more appreciation in my, in like activity on Instagram that they should like it's, I'm not that I just rate my movies and I watch a lot of them, so I guess that's it. But yeah, I think that my ratings are a good representation of my feelings towards movies. Yeah.

A: How about your top four films?

O: Let's see. I mean, I didn't change them, I know. Okay, so it's... Okay, out of those top four, three movies kind of like broke my heart and soul and made me cry and shake and almost

vomit when I saw them. And they touched me so deeply that I feel that they kind of needed to be there. Fourth is not even...

A: What? It's not even a film.

O: Exactly. The fourth is not even a film, but I see it as a movie because it was a cinematic experience. I put it there because... Okay, for the record, it's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* anime that has 26 episodes. And I put it there because I have a very complex relationship with that piece of cinema. And when I watched it for the first time, I absolutely hated it. And then I finished it one day during random exam periods in the summer of 2022. And I woke up tomorrow and I felt emptiness in my stomach, knowing that I'm not watching it anymore. So I watched it again. I hated it again. And then I watched it again. And like from the fourth watch in those three months, I actually realized that I love it. But it resonated with me on ideas, some of ideas that are shown through this anime resonated with me on some deep level and I would like to think about it a lot. So I decided to put it here. Okay. Yes. Other three movies are *Mirror* by Tarkovsky. Which... do I need to...

A: It was more in a sense that... Do you think that represents you and is it something that you want to show to other people?

O: Okay. I thought that you asked me to explain why each of these four movies are over there. Okay, okay. Sorry then for yapping. Yeah, I would say that these movies... I like the selection of these four that actually represent me quite well. *Mirror* definitely. *Last Picture Show* definitely. *Evangelion* definitely. *Paris, Texas* to some extent. It's like the least personal one. But still, I think it's like an incredible movie so it ended up there. Yeah. Yes.

A: How would you define taste?

O: Wait, I wasn't thinking about it. I'm gonna think about it now. How would I define taste? Well, I don't think it's that complicated I guess. It's like a type of... This is so general. Like movies that I like. It's like you people who watch a lot of movies over time figure out what really suits them. Like if it's like I don't know. I, for example, really like... What do I really, really like to see in a movie? This is just like an example but I love those very unfortunate love stories where people are like just cannot... it cannot ever be. And then like it's like if there are so many different takes on a topic like that that if it's done correctly then it's gonna break my heart maybe. And like so but it's just like an example. I feel that this is a very ungrateful question and that I would just say that taste would be like something particular... Topics, films, ways the film is made that a person would enjoy. For example some people really like Wes Anderson movies but because they're very like symmetric, colorful, flashy, very quirky, very like... Some people really like to have a taste for quirky humor. And they won't watch it like a regular comedy. They want a comedy where it's gonna be goofy and quirky and stuff. So that's part of the taste. Some people really like, I don't know, the excitement that you get from like for example movies that are some mixture of I don't know comedy and violence for example like Tarantino or Guy Ritchie. I'm one of those people. So I really like it if somebody succeeds in merging those two teams into one movie and it works quite well. So it's gonna be fun and entertaining and tense. So yeah that's like I would qualify those things as taste. It's difficult to define it with one sentence.

A: Have you noticed or maybe are there any specific types of films or genres or maybe directors even that gain or have more appreciation or Letterboxd?

O: Yeah. So Letterbox community is in love with anime. It's not even a movie but they are in love with anime. If it's an anime, if it's especially like some more obscure anime, like I don't know *Serial Experiments Lain* or something like that. It's like the less you understand it, the higher rating it's gonna have. Like I don't know you have like bunch of random ass anime that have like higher rating than I don't know *Godfather* or something like that. So people love their anime. Also, people really like Asian movies in general. They like to rate them very high. Also, lately, people are giving very high ratings to movies that are somehow empowering women. You have the whole like sub genre of those movies where like women in some way like show that they're like better than men. And some you have *Promising Young Woman*, *Swallow*, *Bottoms*, like the whole group of movies that are somehow for the teen, they have for women to be, we are like very taking things into our own hands right now. And right now, those movies are gaining huge popularity, even though I think that, like most of them, they are not really well written, but people are kind of grasping for the topic itself. So those movies are rated pretty highly, even though they don't necessarily deserve it. And what else? Yeah, I would always say that it's like either some random Asian movie or anime, or like women's empowerment movie.

A: So, what do you think makes a Letterboxed community rate those films higher?

O: Okay for animes I have like very concrete answer because people who like when you have like some random ass obscure anime. My mom is not gonna watch that. My best friend from primary school is not gonna watch that. Like it's gonna be watched by people who are really into that type of stuff. And if somebody is really into that type of stuff, they're gonna rate it very highly because they love that type of stuff. And like the more obscure it is, like if somebody engages in watching it, there's a higher probability that the rating distribution is gonna be moved towards the right, because it was like already predestined for them to like something like that. When it comes to like a lot of Asian movies, they still manage to do something. I won't say differently, but something that Western audiences have not maybe encountered yet, because they don't watch older movies or something like that. So I remember like when *Parasite* was filmed, it was like that opened a whole new world of movies to so many people around me and so many people, like I know, I mean like everywhere like in the whole world people were on every social media, people were like talking about that *Parasite*. So like I feel that people are just like always like those movies like sometimes have some sort of creativity that manages to surprise especially for example American audience or like even like European one that doesn't like watches, that doesn't watch movies like to that extent and when it comes to women empowering movies I think that it's a lot because I mean we live in 2025 right now and there are many social networks like Twitter and things like that and then people are like Tik Tok and people are like hey see this school movie. This girl did this cool ass thing and kicked ass and showed all men that they suck and now you have like a new special subgenre that is like really accommodating those topics so I think it's natural. For example I know people also really liked *Poor Things* I have like personally a lot of problems with that movie but like people were like oh but like it's a feminist movie like it's a buzzword feminist movie and people are really like trying to like hold themselves to that buzzword and then they are gonna like if they like think that something is like feminist woke enough they're gonna like rate it highly because. I don't know if they enjoy it, I don't know.

A: It sounds a little to me that you say that the general Letterboxd community lacks some sort of knowledge about films?

O: I mean maybe. But it is also a weird sample. You have also cinephiles that use Letterboxd but also like Letterboxd is mainly used by generation of people that grew up on Marvel movies, they maybe won't watch like some I don't know, obscure Polish movie from 60s, but they're for sure gonna watch everything that is knew that is coming out there may be gonna be even proud of themselves that they finished a movie like *Poor things* because it's directed by somebody who is not a Marvel director. They're gonna have an opinion like everybody else has an opinion and because of that I feel that. I wouldn't say the general letterboxd audience is not that knowledgeable. It's more like if it's like a new movie that is kind of accessible to everybody that people can watch God knows on Netflix or something like that then it's like. If somebody watches movies on Netflix people like everybody are gonna watch that movie and if all of those people have letterboxd all of them are gonna have their own ratings and opinions and of course that movie then will have a rating distribution that I maybe don't really agree with. But when it comes to some more niche movies that are not on Netflix or that are popular then I will probably trust the rating more. Does this make sense?

A: Yes, it does make sense. So speaking about the ratings, how much influence does it have on you?

O: As I said it depends on for example if it's like a movie that is filmed in the previous, I don't know, six years let's say, I don't know why am I choosing six but that's somehow in my head maybe because like I created letterboxd around five six years ago. Also like I don't know when did Netflix start being a thing.

A: Oh, I can't remember when exactly but it's been a while.

O: I know nothing about anything. But yeah I would say that if a movie is released in the like last decade let's say then I won't really care about ratings. Because yeah for the reasons that I previously mentioned if it's like a very old movie or like not even very old if it's like even like an early 2000s movie. I'm gonna trust the rating way more because people did not rate it when it was released in the cinema. They watched it in retrospective like they sat down illegally downloaded it probably and they were like it was intentional. They did not watch it because it was like a fun date night or it was like I don't know we did not like Netflix and chill because we didn't have anything else to do. Like they watched it with intention so they would probably like for some reason they decided that movie it wasn't like they were like scrolling to an app and it like the title. They looked flash enough or they recognized Sydney Sweeney. It was because for some reason they wanted to watch that particular movie. So I guess that I trust more ratings when it comes to movies that existed before like film platforms than movies that are post film platforms.

A: How do you decide on what to watch and does Letterboxd play any role in that?

O: It does play a role I would say so because many people that I follow sometimes watch cool movies and then I find out about those movies and then like for example it's very easy like it's such a good app it's so easy like to get like you like a movie from one director. Then you check everything else that he made, then you can like watch based on that and like on Letterboxd it's very simple to do something like that. And also yeah as I said many people that I follow watch cool movies I find out about movies based on that and also like yeah that's

pretty much it, like. Or like during my doom scrolling, I see something that is very cool, very like wow wow this should be watched, and then like vibes are good and I sit and watch it.

A: Great, so because you said you look at what your friends watched or what they like. Do you trust your friends and their taste in films?

O: That's a very good question. I trust my friends. I won't use the word trust, but like when it comes to my friends, I know their taste, and because with some of them I've been friends for a very long time now, and we've watched many movies and movies together. And for example, for some friends, if they rate some movie very like give a very high rating I will probably assume that it's gonna be a good movie. But if some other friends give some movie a very high rating, then I might assume that I will really dislike that movie because like maybe my tastes just don't match theirs like taste. It's like it's simple, I have one friend who's a very close friend, but like all movies that are for me rated 10 for Anna, they're rated as with one or two and all her 10 movies are for me like less than five. So it's like it's quite opposite actually so I still can figure something out from her ratings, just like in the opposite direction.

A: How do you decide on a rating? What are the biggest factors or like factors that you consider?

O: Vibes of the film for me. I don't know like I've been rating movies for so long now that like I have in my head like developed some rating system for the movies. It's very difficult to explain it because it's based on my own personal likes, I don't know. So I would like a movie.

A: Maybe you can show me some of your ratings.

O: Yes, let's do it like that. Let's do it like that. Do you maybe want to go through movies that came out this year, or like last watched?

A: Maybe last watched?

O: Okay, so here.

A: So, like you can do like for example, the *Brutalis* that you have 2.5. Tell me why?

O: Yes, *Brutalis* got 2.5 because that's a movie that gave me nothing. I don't it's a three and a half hours long movie. It wasn't difficult to sit through it, even though I watched it in the cinema. I was quite engaged in a movie by the end. So I would say that it's very wrong to describe that movie as entertaining because it's definitely not. But like I think that it's still like it was not bad. Like I could watch it by the end, and I think that the first half of the movie has an intermission because it's like 4 hours long. The part of the movie before intermission like for me, was also like quite good. After that, it became like that it went nowhere. It's kind of collapsed into itself because like I did not understand which idea the movie was trying to deliver to me. The fact that some of the actors did a good job meant nothing to me because I really like the most important thing when it comes to movies and rating movies, that it's well written. If it's a well-written movie, I'm gonna like the movie. Even though like I don't, you can have like all the best actors. You can have like very good cinematography, beautiful colors, even good music, but that doesn't happen often with very bad movies. But that will mean nothing for me if the movie is not very well written. So yeah, I really like that movie, it went on forever. I couldn't see what it was trying to deliver. What was the main message of the movie? Like, I think that it was just like I don't think I think that it got lost by the end, and it didn't like it had a lot of potential, especially because like they had like could have had amazing cinematography. Like it's about the architect, like showing its brutalist architecture. They could have, like I don't know, it made sense for me that in that case, they would like I

don't know show the empty like emptiness inside of his soul to like that. Like because like it's people like very good directors very often use architecture to describe the inner feelings of our main characters to like some they're like little like internal lives are like this. But like this movie didn't do anything with that. So it was very difficult like it was five out of ten. It was good enough but like I won't watch it again and I won't remember it. But for example, I watched *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. That's a movie that is part of Australian new cinema. That's a movie that, like first of all, delivers a very strong message. It's very it's like the structure of the movie is not like very how to say like usual. It doesn't have like necessarily like oh this is like introduction and then like the movie and then conclusion like the conclusion is very open to interpretation and movie managed somehow through beautiful colors and beautiful scenery and beautiful girls and beautiful outfits to criticize like colonialism in Australia which I thought was quite impressive. It was so subtle. It was so well written. It was like the atmosphere of the movie was so amazing that for me it stayed with me. I liked reading so much about it afterwards and that movie actually left some impression on me and of course I'm going to rate it highly in that case. But I think that it was very well written and like all aspects of it were quite satisfying. So yeah I don't know if this meant anything when it comes to the answer of your question but those are two contrasts.

A: Thank you for this explanation.

O: Oh dear god I've been talking for so long. Okay. I'm so sorry.

A: Do not worry, it is so, so good. Speaking of reception of films do you think there is a difference on how films are perceived and evaluated within the letterboxd community and outside of it?

O: Yeah.

A: Tell me, please.

O: Outside the Letterboxd community, people who are in the Letterboxd community are just... people who use the internet. Like, if you have Letterboxd, you're probably also pretty online. You're not living in a bubble, you know what's going on, and it's kind of impossible not to be influenced by all the external information you're constantly absorbing. You know what's happening at award shows, you know what people are saying about certain films, you know if a movie is controversial. You even know something like... Barry Keoghan licking sperm from a bathtub. It's just stuff you can't unknow. So I think it's inevitable that you're going to be biased towards certain movies or topics. People who don't have Letterboxd are more like... I don't know, they see there's a new movie at the cinema, and they're like, "Oh, *Gladiator 2*! I really loved the first one, I'll watch the sequel," but they don't know about the whole Paul Mescal-as-priest-from-Fleabag lore. They might not even know what a thirst trap is. So they're approaching it maybe, I won't say from a more genuine place, but definitely from a different perspective. It's kind of... yeah. Hard to explain better.

A: Yeah but you mentioned certain biases and what people on Letterboxd kind of pay attention to. Do you feel like there are some rules or like expectations about what is discussed on Letterboxd?

O: Yeah. Can you repeat the question?

A: Do you think there are some sort of unwritten rules or expectations about how and what is discussed on Letterboxd?

O: Some movies are definitely going to attract more attention than other movies.

A: On Letterboxd?

O: Yeah, you have like movies that are like I don't know, especially like right now in the middle of award season and stuff like that. People are going to like a lot I don't know either hate on *Emilia Perez* because it's like off topics and like I don't know, well they're going to be like more keen to love some other movies because, as I said like you cannot isolate yourself from what's going on. So you're going to see the movie with like you're maybe even gonna probably gonna look up the movie at Letterboxd before you even watch it. You're gonna even maybe read the first couple of reviews. You're gonna already know that like some people hate *The Brutalist* because of Zionism or something like that or that people hate *Emilia Perez* because of that like I didn't watch the movie but I know this song where like penis and vagina do something. Like it's inevitable for you to like some things are already ruined.

A: Yeah, do you think that creates some sort of pressure to evaluate or engage in a certain way?

O: It definitely creates a kind of expectation. Like, if I see that a movie has really high ratings or something, I'm going to expect it to be, maybe not great, but at least a good movie. You never know, though. I expected *The Brutalist* to be good... or at least to like it. And sometimes you see a lot of polarising opinions, so you already know what one side thinks, and what the other side thinks. And you kind of tend to relate more to one of those sides, even before watching it. So maybe you go into the movie already a bit pre-decided, like, okay, I'm probably not going to like this because of whatever reason. I guess that's a bit of a bad influence... I don't know.

A: But speaking about opinions, do you think in your experience how open is Letterboxd to different opinions and perspectives?

O: You always have very loud people.

A: How is that loudness represented?

O: That loudness is represented through, I mean, people write their reviews, and people who write those reviews, especially the people, most of the time, we would look at the reviews that are the most popular ones. And those people are usually very opinionated. You have very opinionated people; most of those people are also very eloquent. They are going to be able to express their opinion regardless of if it's right or wrong in a very like you know very strong way. And then you see that, and then like you feel the pressure to be even more opinionated than that person because like I... Letterboxd somehow doesn't allow you, when it comes to those polarizing movies, to be indifferent. I feel that it pressures you a bit into, like going into, like you're gonna like see or like somebody and then people start fighting in comments. You cannot text, but you can fight in comments, and then somebody else is like Oh, but like what about this? Oh, but how can you hate that because it's like it's like a very, I would say not forgiving community.

A: Do you think Letterboxd influences the film culture in general?

O: Yeah, I would say so. I mean, especially now, like you see like on award shows, you have like Letterboxd team going and interviewing directors, interviewing actors. Asking them about their thought on what they like, you know it's like it's so popular right now for everybody who likes to engage with movies a bit more. I would definitely say that movies that gain some likes, I don't know, like I would never go to see *Wicked* if I didn't know that it had such a huge popularity in Letterboxd. Everybody was writing go, it's like actually a great

movie and I was like what the shit no way like Ariana Grande movies actually. So out of pure curiosity I went to watch it. Didn't particularly enjoy it but like I still like if it wasn't for Letterboxd I would never. Yes and also I mean sometimes I would watch something and definitely miss some stuff and then Letterboxd would point me out towards some state like attitudes that I did not like really.

A: For example?

O: For example I won't necessarily name the movie now but like it would it happen a couple of times that I would watch a movie and I would like kind of even not misinterpret but maybe misinterpret the intention of the director and then like I would read some reviews on Letterboxd that are like actually like explaining the. Not explaining but like discussing what like what the movie is actually about like give me some deeper perspective like oh okay this topic I definitely did not know this because maybe it was too subtle or I didn't have not enough knowledge on it or something like that. So I think that there are many things.

A: Okay closing questions then quickly. Yeah. What role do you think digital platforms like Letterboxd play in shaping modern cinephilia?

O: What roles do they play?

A: Yeah like what is the role like if any.

O: They have many roles. I mean I don't know it's like a like social network just like anything else and it's like on social networks people express their opinions and those opinions as I said are going to be like very similar between different types of so like people who have Letterboxd also have Instagram accounts also have Twitter accounts and it's like. Somehow all of that is merging like people like on different types like social media play like such a huge role I would say that like they actually manage to make movies popular or like they cancel you can cancel movies through Letterbox you know like people like come and give like a movie that they think is misogynistic movie or is like. Not fair towards like queer people or something like that they can cancel a movie immediately like it's gonna like it's gonna disappear practically. And so I would say now like way more than before that it has a lot of influence especially towards people who actually use it.

A: What's the future of Letterboxd?

O: What's the future... I mean I see it getting bigger. I see it like it's now bigger than it was. I especially because as I said it's not like anymore like just like very like people who are very engaged in cinema it's like many people nowadays have Letterboxd it's like it's like new social like a new way like. You can have your statistics over there you know and I feel that. It's it's gonna become bigger it's gonna like now it gained popularity and film festivals it's like they like people are referring to Letterboxd even my mom read like on some website like review like some like people like somebody were talking about movies and they were like oh yeah and like on Letterbox that like movie was like. Letterboxd community is strongly in favor of that move and she would be like oh I mean you have that app and I would be like yeah so like I feel that is gaining a lot more popularity now.

A: So actually the last thing I want to ask you if you have anything you would like to add to this? Other reflections?

O: I don't think so.

A: You have no more thoughts about Letterboxd and the community?

O: About Letterboxd and its community. Okay, let's see. Hmm. I mean, yeah, as I previously mentioned, I just think that it's not people who decide to actually write reviews on Letterboxd and whose reviews are very popular. They're very loud about their opinions, if they're not like just funny one-liners. And I feel that like. Yeah, I mean. As a community, it can be a bit quite toxic sometimes, I would say. Because like. You know it's. Actually I won't elaborate on that because I don't have a very good way to express how I feel about it. But yeah, I would say that that's it. You don't have any more questions?

A: No, that was just that one last.

O: Oh okay okay okay. No, no, no. I think that this is. Enough, I would say. Yes.

A: So we can end the interview here. Thank you for participating.

O: My pleasure. So much fun.

Appendix 7: Sample of Open Coding

O: Social pressure. Well, I was very used to IMDB to be honest. I didn't want to do it at first, but I started hanging out with some people who had a very sophisticated film of taste in movies.

A: In Serbia?

O: In Serbia, yes, yes, exactly. And were all, every time we would like go out to see a movie together, they would log it on Letterboxd. So I didn't want to be excluded from our small Letterboxd community over there, so I installed it too. And then, like at the beginning, it it not as intuitive, but after like a day and a half, I realized how like that it has way better interface than IMDB and I never returned to IMDB again.

A: How would you describe Letterbox to someone that has no idea what it is even?

O: Okay. First of all, I asked them if they read books and then I compare it to Goodreads, but for movies. But if they don't know what is Goodreads, I say that Letterbox is a film app. They have like a big base of movies. And when you watch a movie and you can go there and log it, rate it, write a review if you want to. Then I always say that you can create your Letterboxd watch list over there and that way you don't need to write down movies in your notes app. That's how I sell it. And I say that you can follow other people and they can follow you, but you cannot interact [with] them, which is like a good side of Letterboxd, because you cannot engage into discussions. You can only like read somebody else's reviews, leave your own reviews and maybe write a comment, but it's not a private chat, so it's not as time consuming as some other social media. So, yes.

A: So you said you had some difficulties at first on one day when you first joined?

O: I had one difficulty and that was when you go into an app, you can put that movie is watched. And intuitively you do watched, but that doesn't, it's not the same as logging a movie because when you log a movie into your diary, then you can add tags and you can say when you watched it, you can write a small review. So it took me like a couple of hours, not hours, just like a couple of times for somebody to tell me, hey, now you need to like log it into your diary if you want to have like all additional information, because if you only put that it's watched, then like it won't mean anything to you in three years.

A: So how do you usually engage? What do you do on Letterbox?

O: Waste hours of my life.

A: So do you like open it when you're bored?

O: Yeah, I open it when I'm...

A: Could you show me what you do in your life?

O: Just like, oh, I'm gonna open the Letterboxd now. Yeah, so I'm going to my Letterbox and then I'm on front page. And then I usually check first what other people watched. I always actually like, it never happens that somebody whom I follow watches something and I didn't see it, which means that I go into Letterbox quite frequently to be honest, especially because like I follow 97 people. So I'm always like informed about what's going on. If somebody, like I don't really care about ratings that much, but I always like go into a review and read a review if somebody leaves it, because, you know, not many people do that. And then before I would go into activity quite frequently to see what my friends are doing. But that was while I was following like less than 30 people now that I follow almost 100 people. Like sometimes people just spam. So I don't go into activity that much anymore. And then I usually go into search and start finding things or if somebody, for example, I don't know, it's like a vicious

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A Aleksandra Brania
11:55 AM Apr 1

film appreciation

A Aleksandra Brania
11:56 AM Apr 1

knowledge

A Aleksandra Brania
11:56 AM Apr 1

personal cinephilia narratives

A Aleksandra Brania
11:57 AM Apr 1

engagement and interactions

A Aleksandra Brania
12:00 PM Apr 1

film appreciation

A Aleksandra Brania
11:58 AM Apr 1

performance and taste

A Aleksandra Brania
11:59 AM Apr 1

engagement and interactions

Appendix 8: Codebook

Theme	Definition	Categories	Subcategories	Definition	Example
Identity & Taste	This theme captures how users on Letterboxd construct, express, and perform their identities through cinematic taste and platform engagement. Taste becomes a visible expression of belonging, self-understanding, and cultural positioning.	Identity construction		The process through which individuals create and define their sense of self, particularly in relation to their filmic interests and activities on Letterboxd.	I didn't really have like an identity as a movie watcher when I started using Letterboxd.
		Taste performance		How users express and perform their film taste on Letterboxd through practices such as ratings, reviews, and lists.	I want to see some diversity and if you can appreciate like a 60s pornographic movie the same way you appreciate like silent film then I then I am interested to what you say about almost anything.
		Personal film journey		This code highlights users' personal film history, significant film experiences.	I had my own personal letterboxd from the age when I started until when I was approximately 12. So I had like a notebook where I was writing down everything that I watched.
		Authenticity		Refers to the users' desire to express genuine opinions and personal experiences, often in tension with the performative nature of the platform	People come out of the theater looking like, yeah, we just wasted our 2.5 hours kind of thing. But then they go on Letterboxd and they write a very cinephile review of why they did not like it. By giving it not one star, at least 2.5 stars. So they don't seem like they are the ones who did not like a critically acclaimed film kind of things
		Cinephilia	Traditional	Cinephilia rooted in physical media, film clubs, or in-person film discussions.	A cinephile is someone, according to me, who can connect to a film on a deeper level.
			Digital	Cinephilia mediated through online platforms, where film engagement is shaped by digital tools, ratings, and reviews.	Letterboxd does a great job at what it aims to do, which is bringing people who love film together and sharing their opinions on films.
Community (Construction & Belonging)	This theme explores how community is formed, maintained, and experienced on Letterboxd.	Community	Belonging	Refers to how participants form connections with others on the platform, experience a sense of belonging	If you want to if you want to find if you want to find somebody who loves or hates a movie, you can on Letterboxd.
			Dynamics	How they engage in community, the formation of social ties, and interactions.	It never happens that somebody whom I follow watches something and I didn't see it, which means that I go into Letterboxd quite frequently to be honest.
		Online-offline		Refers to the connection between online behaviors on Letterboxd and offline cinephilic activities. This code covers how users integrate their online experiences with their offline lives, such as viewing habits, social interactions, or the impact of online platforms on offline film practices.	Wherever I go people are just like did you watch this, watch this. So I just hand them my letterboxd and they add films to my watch list which I never really get to watching because now there are like 500-600 films in there.
Cultural Capital & New Hierarchies	This theme examines how users on Letterboxd accumulate, perform, and negotiate cultural capital within the platform's social and technical infrastructure. It also examines how new informal hierarchies emerge, shaping who is perceived as credible, influential, or "authentically" cinephile.	Cultural Capital	Gaining	Accumulating cultural capital through active participation and recognition from others.	I tend to see like to discover films that I would probably not have discovered like by myself because of people that I follow letterbox and like have seen it.
			Performing	The act of showcasing one's film knowledge and taste as a form of cultural currency.	And more rarely it's like oh I feel like I should have watched this movie. So I'll watch this movie. Like I'll watch a Pasolini movie because I feel like I should have watched.
		Validation		The affirmation or recognition users receive from other community members or the platform itself, such as likes, followers, or comments, reinforces their participation, opinions, and behavior on Letterboxd.	Reading other people's reviews can be like positive affirmations. Like I was not wrong about something in this film.
		Hierarchy		Refers to the social stratification within the Letterboxd community both within users and films.	I also like you know when you have these I don't know like I'm in these top 1000 or like the box top 250 movies like you can take one of those off then that's also pretty satisfying I guess. Yeah. Because then like oh I'm a bit closer to this achievement milestone thing now
		Authority		The influence or credibility certain users or contributors hold within the community. This also includes how authority is granted or contested.	Whenever I see like they watch like a five star film for them and it's like a completely obscure film like an unknown film that like that guy gave it for like five stars. It like probably must be good

Platform (Architecture & Engagement)	This theme explores how Letterboxd's technical and social architecture shapes user behaviour, engagement, and the performance of cinephilia.	Platform Influence		The impact of Letterboxd as a platform on user behavior, practices, and perceptions of films.	I felt like oh I'm more much more intellectual academic now and being a part of this community.
		Media Rituals		Refers to the ritualistic behaviors users develop around their media consumption on the platform, including practices before, during, and after watching films, such as searching for recommendations, rating films, or reviewing them.	I think it's just kind of like also my habit that while watching the film kind of have a like oh this is going to be four or this is going to be three.
		Platform-specific practices	Reviewing	The practice of writing and sharing reviews as part of film engagement.	I'm cringing from my own text sometimes when I read my text about something. I think at the moment I was writing those I had some moment of confidence about my text and now I don't have them anymore
			Rating	The act of assigning numerical or qualitative scores to films as a form of personal expression and communication.	When something happens I like. I was like oh it just went 4. It got from 3.5 to 4 and yeah I think about that. And when I end the movie it's very, it's tricky thing because you just put the whole experience of the movie from 1 to 10 scale there
		Motivation		Explores the reasons behind users' participation on Letterboxd.	It's become like a competition thing now with my friends where I'm like I have logged more movies than you in this week. So I'm just like the faster I log movies the faster people get to know in my activity that I have watched it because sometimes I don't even complete the whole film like I watch this.
		Platform architecture		Refers to the structural design of Letterboxd and how its layout, features, and functionalities affect user behavior.	You can only like read somebody else's reviews, leave your own reviews and maybe write a comment, but it's not a private chat, so it's not as time consuming as some other social media.
		UGC		Refers to content produced by users, such as reviews, ratings, lists, and comments, that contribute to the platform's ecosystem.	I think there is kind of like diverse like a very range of but there are some people like express really like in the straight forward but there are some people who's like write the comment like very how can I say. Like scholars you know like very analyzing the movie and then connect with the like maybe human nature or like society system.
		Democratisation		Examines how platforms like Letterboxd democratize film culture by giving everyone a voice, while also revealing gatekeeping practices.	think it's great to have much of diversity of thinking on these platforms