

THE SHAPE OF CINEPHILE AT THE CRITERION CHANNEL: WHEN ALGORITHMS MEET CURATORS

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Video on Demand consumption at the time of COVID has dramatically increased. The development of algorithms is at the core of content platforms, and actually this feature splits the market in two main branches: the big ones, those with global reach and the smallest ones, that are mainly in local markets. Because the creation of an algorithm needs big data, codes, and eventually other tools like Artificial Intelligence, mostly only tech companies are into it. Even if the global market is mainly in the hands of one player, —the well-studied Netflix— there are other companies that are interesting for scholars. In this paper, we will discuss the value of the «editorialization» of the films and content versus the main technological functionalities and their possible future developments of The Criterion Channel, a service that provide the most exclusive and fine curated movies for home consumption. This project, currently operating in the USA and Canada was born in 2019 from The Criterion Collection, a prestigious manufacturer of Laser discs, DVD's, Blu-ray established in 1984, that itself is a subdivision of the art house movies distributor Janus Films. They commercialize other cinephiles objects such as books, posters and merchandise from the best world cinema d'auteur in film history. After their ancient streaming home Film Struck was shut down, their actual technology back-end is provided by Vimeo. Spectators can stream the movies from their cell phones, computers or devices like Apple Tv, Roku, and others. Subscriptions are paid monthly or by unique transaction. The new generations of cinephiles have access to a catalogue over 2344 titles that includes the filmography of the most important world cinema in terms of patrimony and cultural heritage. Films are restored and in its original format. Furthermore, the catalogue includes short movies, interviews and testimony from directors, actors, producers, panels, curators' capsules, commented films by the directors, scholars and other experts. These kinds of content are highly valued for the type of audiences attracted to this platform. The Criterion Channel allows the "movie lovers" to explore the catalogue not only from the search of the title, but through complex themes and concepts that are included in its collections. Now, these films are exclusively editorialized by the contribution of established curators that select and determine the collections according to themes, filmography production, and other criteria. This platform differs from Netflix strategy of binge-watching, because is focused to stimulate the notion of "collection", like in the era of physical supports, the user of the platform behaves like a "collector", so here the spectator in not looking for quantity, evasion or entertainment but rather for quality, intellectual stimulus and learning. Therefore, the technology is subordinated to the discourse of the films in the catalogue. Two facts are here important, on the one hand users can search movies by filtering: Genres, Decades, Counties, and by Director's name like a regular Vimeo search, on the other hand, the algorithm is conditioned to the cult of authorship and quality. For Criterion's audience, the "bonus material" is valued as gold, because it helps to understand deeply the films content and to make a deeper comprehension of the narrative, its auteur, and its context. By the task of editorialization, The Criterion Channel do promote the education of the spectator, but first of all, this task requires the contribution of curators, content coordinators, auteurs, scholars and other key actors that are the principal sources for the interpretation of historical and patrimonial films, and only after this work, a simple search motor match the search of the user.

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