Critical Failure:

Class, Taste and the Value of Film Criticism

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Dissertation submitted to the Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science, August 2011, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MSc in Media, Communication and Development. Supervised by Dr. Shakuntala Banaji.

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ABSTRACT

Many film goers look to film reviews by professional film critics to tell them about films that they consider watching and help them make their decisions. However, if we do not wish to take the role of film reviews for granted, there are pertinent questions that we can ask about this social phenomenon: What kind of information do readers find in film reviews and how does it help them make decisions?

While market research on the role of professional film criticism is mainly concerned with the relationship between film reviews and box office success, this dissertation studies how film reviews seek to influence consumption decisions and what implications this has on consumer choice. Grounded in a theoretical framework that is based primarily on Bourdieu's theory of distinction and Wittgenstein's social-practical conception of language, it examines judgements of taste expressed in film reviews in terms of the class identities that constitute the social context of their discourses, arguing that film reviews seek to perpetuate particular tastes as extensions of class identities.

Accordingly, through the application of Fairclough's critical discourse analysis to the examination of two film reviews that serve as case studies, this dissertation shows that the critics involved do identify with and distance themselves from certain kinds of preferences and socio-cultural practices on the basis of their personal biases towards these preferences and practices. However, while these findings demonstrate that taste does serve a means of distinction, the analysis is unable to establish the connection between the judgements of taste expressed in the reviews and particular class identities. Nevertheless, the lack of information on the particular tastes of the critics is also informative as it indicates that the two reviews provide readers with few or no means to contextualise the information presented, raising serious questions about its reliability and showing how film reviews may not necessarily be useful as decision-making aids.

INTRODUCTION

"Films about taste are not often made by Hollywood, perhaps because it would so severely limit the box office to require the audience to have any."

(Roger Ebert, 2001)

Film reviews written by professional film critics find an audience in film goers who wish to find out what the critics think of the films that they consider watching, regardless of whether critical opinions actually agree with the preferences of the general public. Perhaps readers of film reviews are motivated precisely by the desire to find alternative perspectives that can inform their decisions (Morgenstern, 2006), rather than simply watching films because they are box office hits. However, this raises a few questions: Why do the opinions of professional film critics (henceforth referred to as film critics or just critics) matter? What kind of information do readers find in film reviews and how does it help them make decisions?

While market research on the role of professional film criticism tends to focus on the relationship between film reviews and box office success, some studies devote part of their attention to the question of how film criticism influences consumption decisions (Boatwright, Basuroy & Kamakura, 2007; Basuroy, Chatterjee & Ravid, 2003; Eliashberg & Shugan, 1997). One of the views they offer on this question is that film reviews act as sources of information that help consumers make rational decisions (Boatwright, Basuroy & Kamakura, 2007: 402; Cameron, 1995: 322-323). Some critics seem to take a similar position when speaking of their role, presenting it as that of giving "informed" guidance (Corliss, 2007; English, 1979) rather than that of being "authority figure[s]" (Morgenstern, 2006).

This view may be contrasted with that of ideological theories on culture, which emphasise the "social and historical effects" of cultural products on the audience (Staiger, 1985: 14). One such theory advanced by the Frankfurt School holds that the consumption of culture is schematised by the Culture Industry (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1998). Under such a perspective, the function of film reviews may be seen as that of providing repertoires of familiar films and thereby of "reducing the effort required in [their] consumption" (Cameron, 1995: 328). In other words, it might be asserted under this perspective that, rather than providing guidance to consumers, film reviews affirm and reproduce binding tastes that dictate consumers' preferences.

Hence, the ideological view of culture raises another important question about film reviews: How is consumer agency maintained when consumers use film reviews as decision-making

aids? The answer to this question would be of interest to film goers who value choice but who rely on film reviews for prior information in making decisions. It would also be of interest to scholars who study film criticism, since it looks at impact of film criticism from a social rather than the typically market-oriented perspective. This difference in perspective also means that answering this question, as well as those raised in the beginning, would require an approach that is distinct from the number-crunching methods used in market research. Instead, it calls for the close examination of film reviews as individual texts.

Yet, before such a study can be carried out, there is a need to develop a theoretical framework with which the texts can be interpreted. Hence, the first part of this dissertation will be committed to establishing a theoretical framework that is grounded primarily in Bourdieu's theory of distinction, arguing in the same vein as ideological theories of culture that film reviews seek to perpetuate particular tastes as extensions of class identities that "function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny" (Bourdieu, 1984). An implication is that, rather than providing objective information on the particular films they are concerned with, discourses in film criticism seek to "confirm and crystallize existing predispositions" (Shaw, 1977: 139).

This dissertation will also anchor its study of film criticism in a theory of meaning that explains how distinctions in class and taste exert an important influence on discourses by making the case that meanings are constructed in reference to practical social contexts. After this extensive theoretical discussion, which will occupy a large part of this dissertation, it will finally be possible carry out, using the theoretical framework that has been established, a critical analysis of discourses within a sample of film reviews, which can be expected to yield some insights on the role of film reviews as decision-making aids.

THEORETICAL CHAPTER

Acquired taste: Aesthetic judgement in film criticism

Market-oriented literature on film criticism recognises that films are part of a special class of goods known as "esthetic products" (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982: 96), "experience goods" (Boatwright, Basuroy & Kamakura, 2007: 402) or "creative goods" (Basuroy, Chatterjee & Ravid, 2003: 104). Unlike utilitarian products that are consumed "for the maximization of an economic benefit" (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Eliashberg & Shugan, 1997: 69), aesthetic products are different by virtue of the fact that they have the capacity to "generate unusually strong emotional involvement" on the part of the consumer, as well as by the fact that the decision to consume them is "based primarily on [their] symbolic elements… rather than their tangible features" (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982: 96-97). Furthermore, consumers are "unable to assess the qualities of [such] products before consumption", hence the ostensible need for prior information that critics can provide (Basuroy, Chatterjee & Ravid, 2003: 116; Boatwright, Basuroy & Kamakura, 2007).

However, this raises questions about what kind of information is provided through film criticism and how it might influence consumption decisions. Films' status as aesthetic products implies that this information would differ at least in some respects to that provided by reviews of utilitarian products. In particular, both common wisdom and existing scholarship on film criticism tells us that the opinions conveyed in film reviews are subjective (Elizabeth & Shugan, 1997) and are associated with particular dispositions towards aesthetic values that we know as tastes (Austin, 1983). Thus, in studying how film criticism seeks to influence consumption decisions, it seems necessary to examine the nature of tastes and how they shape and are shaped by discourses in film reviews.

Theories of taste

Tastes imply a syntactic or comparative view of films and the establishment of personal aesthetic canons from which films are either included or excluded (Staiger, 1985). Tastes, therefore, constitute a context in which critical opinions on films may be understood. More importantly, this way of looking at tastes enables us to see them as a means of classification, a view espoused by Bourdieu in his theory of distinction (1989). But one might ask of how tastes come into being in the first place—do individuals develop tastes simply through their experiences as consumers, or are there external factors that shape or even determine individuals' tastes? As a central element of his theory, Bourdieu discusses concept of the

habitus, which he defines as practical "schemes of perception, thought, and action" (1989: 14). Does this concept provide an answer to the question of what is behind individuals' tastes?

These questions frame the following discussion on taste, in which I will argue, with particular focus on the theory of distinction, that there is a strong and dynamic link between class and taste. However, as a way of opening the discussion, I will first examine a few alternative theories on taste, which will be appraised in relation to Bourdieu's theory. Besides placing the discussion on taste within a larger body of existing scholarship, this will enable us to see the relative merits of the theory of distinction as a theoretical framework for the analysis of discourses in film criticism.

As my intention is to undertake in the rest of this section a brief survey and critique of theories of taste without entering into a discussion of philosophy of art and the sociology of consumption, I will limit it to an examination of two other major theoretical perspectives on taste: Kant's theory on aesthetic judgements and Veblen's theory of the leisure class.

In Kant's view, taste is defined as the capacity to appreciate the beauty (or lack thereof) of particular objects and their representations with reference to the pleasure (or displeasure) that is felt in their appreciation (Kant, 1987; Allison, 2001). However, Kant conceives of an antinomy that must be resolved in order for there to be a coherent account on the nature of taste (Scruton, 2001): On one hand, judgements of taste are expressions of subjective experience, which is to say that pleasure in the appreciation of an object is felt "directly in [the] presentation of the object" and cannot be induced "by means of any bases of proof" or through second hand accounts (Kant, 1987: 149); on the other, judgements of taste entail claims to universal validity, which is to say that they "lay claim to other people's necessary assent" (Kant, 1987: 53).

How can judgements of taste be based on subjective experience and, at the same time, lay claim to universal validity? Kant resolves this antinomy, firstly, by arguing that universal *agreement* is not necessary—it is sufficient to demonstrate that the notion of the universal validity of aesthetic judgements or judgements of taste can be entertained, that these judgements merely assume that everyone "*ought* to give his approval" (emphasis as in original) (Kant, 1987: 86). Secondly, Kant argues for the plausibility of the notion of universal validity by holding that judgements of taste are made using common human cognitive faculties (Allison, 2001) and are "devoid of all interest" of the observer himself (Kant, 1987: 53)—it does not, for example, involve the individual's desire to acquire or possess the object

depicted. Thus, while Kant holds that an aesthetic judgement is focused on a particular object and can therefore "lead to no universal rule" for judging all objects, he argues that a judgement does make a claim to the necessary agreement of others because it is made in a human rather than in a personal capacity (Scruton, 2001: 104; Kant, 1987).

Thus, Kant's argument implies that personal biases such class identity cannot influence taste, that there is in theory "a right and wrong in judgement" (Zangwill, 2010) that is determined by "a common sense" (Kant, 1987: 87). Where there are disagreements, people are not disputing the notion that the claim to universal validity is possible, but are "merely unable to agree, in particular cases, on the correct way to apply this [common sense]" (Kant, 1987: 58).

This ties the theory together neatly, reconciling the notion of universal validity with common differences in aesthetic judgements. Yet there is still much room for scepticism. It is difficult to defend the claim that there is a notion of correctness in matters of taste (even if this notion is widely held to exist) if there is no practical way of adjudicating between different opinions, especially in a context where disagreements between groups are common, such as between professional film critics and the general film audience (Austin, 1983; Basuroy, Chatterjee & Ravid, 2003). Therefore, in the absence of evidence for an aesthetic common sense under conditions of diversity, there is a need to account for what seem to be clear instances of divergent tastes. In other words, we need to be able to explain why people differ in their judgements of taste and why the notion of taste itself as a system of classification becomes an explicit "object of struggle" (Bourdieu, 1984).

On the face of it, a class-based theory of taste would be able to do so by chalking differences in taste up to class differences. However, in order for such a theory to be convincing, it would need to elaborate on the nature of class differences and how they are responsible for differences in taste. In his theory of the leisure class, Veblen offers one such account of the connection between class and taste. For Veblen, social classes are created through the ownership of property and the "struggle between men for the possession of goods" (Veblen, 1970: 34). Specifically, Veblen identifies two distinct classes in society: a leisure class and a working class (Veblen, 1970). Arguing that "The possession of wealth confers honor" and "invidious distinction", the two classes are differentiated primarily by the comparative wealth of the leisure class, which the less prosperous members of society aspire to (Veblen, 1970: 35).

This desire to be part of the leisure class translates, by force of habitual thinking, into the desire to emulate the latter aesthetically, generating a preference for goods belonging to

"accredited canons of consumption" that are dictated by "a standard of expensiveness and wastefulness" (Veblen, 1970: 88). While Veblen also posits a utilitarian view of beauty that values the "economic serviceability" of objects, in his view, the social prestige attached to the possession of wealth means that "marks of expensiveness come to be [commonly] accepted as beautiful features" without any consciousness of this association on the part of individuals (Veblen, 1970: 109, 97). Meanwhile, objects that fall short of this standard are deemed "offensive to our taste, supposedly as being departures from the aesthetic truth" (Veblen, 1970: 109, 97).

Therefore, in establishing expensiveness as the social measure of aesthetic value, Veblen also posits a conception of taste that is unitary rather than fragmented. While the utilitarian conception of beauty that he brings up presents a potential alternative to conspicuous consumption, it is not systematically linked to his larger aesthetic theory. Thus, despite being a class-based theory of taste, the theory of the leisure class similarly fails to explain the existence of divergent preferences. Moreover, Veblen's notion of emulation "ignores the extent to which consumption styles can emerge from... a subordinated social group" (Slater, 1997: 157). Tastes "may not only trickle down, but also trickle up and sideways" (Slater, 1997: 158). Veblen's one-directional conception of the link between class and taste does not capture such flexibility in the process of the diffusion of tastes (Gronow, 1997). Hence, we need a theory that is able to reflect both the fragmented and fluid nature of taste.

Nevertheless, in some ways these theories have led us to a better understanding of the notion of taste in the context of film criticism. Kant's idea that judgements of taste make a claim to the necessary assent of others explains why film critics may implicitly demand the agreement of their readers on the grounds of being correct in their judgements; while through our objection to the notion of universal validity, we are aware of the fact that such demands belie the relative nature of taste. Veblen's account, meanwhile, has introduced us to the link between class and taste through habit, which is mirrored and developed in Bourdieu's conception of habitus and its role in the formation of taste (Bourdieu, 1984). Hence, on this note, we are ready to begin the discussion of the theory of distinction with an examination of the concept of *habitus* and the link between class and taste.

Tastes as classifier and classified

As it has been defined earlier, habitus consists of practical "schemes of perception, thought, and action" (Bourdieu, 1989). Translated into everyday life as part of our habits, it functions "below the level of consciousness and language", engaging "the most fundamental principles

of construction and evaluation of the social world" (Bourdieu, 1984). It is therefore, very much about "the comfort and discomfort" or "the ease or self-consciousness we feel in the body" when we engage in even some of the most banal acts, including the consumption of goods (Slater, 1997: 162). Our habits, however, are not arbitrary—they are "constituted in the course of [our] collective history" of practices (Bourdieu, 1984) and are communicated to the individual through "a family and community steeped in class experiences" (Slater 1997: 163). Hence, there is a potential link between class and habitus—between a particular kind of group identity and our habits—which is worth exploring.

Assuming for the moment its socio-economic definition as an "objective" division of society according to economic status and its associated socio-cultural identity, class has a constraining influence on the habits and practical dispositions that individuals may have (Bourdieu, 1984). As part of the cultural sphere of human activity, for instance, preferences for aesthetic goods are constrained by the cultural capital that is available to individuals of particular classes or, in other words, by individuals' "accumulated knowledge and competence in using the codes of legitimate culture" (Slater, 1997: 160). By way of illustration, we may consider how it may be difficult to appreciate modernist art without having a certain kind of educational or social background, factors that are often related to an individual's economic background (Slater, 1997). Thus, the different classes have different consumption habits that are affected by the respective economic and cultural capitals associated with their classes (Gronow, 1997: 21).

However, these preferences become internalised by the different classes and come to themselves act as signifiers of class identity. This implies that, on one hand, class "[embeds] what some would mistakenly call values in the most automatic gestures", thereby in effect serving to prescribe correct behaviour according to an individual's social position (Bourdieu, 1984); on the other hand, what we consume, conversely, signifies our social positions (Slater, 1997). As such, individuals may 'apply' to become members of a class by adopting the habits (including the consumption habits) that are associated with that class. Thus, as much as we are classified by others according to our tastes, we are also capable of engaging in self-classification through the consumption of particular aesthetic products. As such, individuals "are producers not only of classifiable acts but also of acts of classification" (Bourdieu, 1984), through which they may establish or enhance their position within the social order (Slater, 1997; Bourdieu, 1984).

Therefore, it is not simply the case that there are pre-given and distinct classes that determine the tastes of the individuals within them. Rather, tastes are conversely involved in

the determination of individuals' classes (Slater, 1997). We have thus moved from a primarily socio-economic conception of class towards one that recognises the role of culture in the formation of class identity, class being, in this sense, "a given place in social space" that is tied to "practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position" (Bourdieu, 1984). Moreover, the theory of distinction goes further in recognising the complexity of the social relations against which the link between class and taste is fore grounded. Not only do culture and taste serve as instruments of competition and identification among individuals who want to be classified into particular classes, they also become objects of competition among the classes, especially between old established classes and emergent ones (Bourdieu, 1984). The preferences and dispositions of the latter, for example, may seek to "deny the relevance of the old order" and "establish a completely new hierarchy of tastes" that demand legitimacy (Gronow, 1997: 24-25). Competition also exists between groups within each class, who contest each other for the power to classify or to define what is considered to be legitimate class tastes (Bourdieu, 1984).

One of the crucial contributions of the theory of distinction is therefore the very notion of distinction—of tastes as a means of social classification through their being contrasted against each other in order to affirm or renegotiate class identities. Hence, echoing Gans' (1999) postulation of a fragmented terrain of taste publics formed by a diversity of aesthetic standards, this theory reconstructs tastes not as "[expressions] of universal and eternal standards of beauty originating outside social experience", but as a multiplicity of standards that are "part of symbolic systems of classification which both express and shape social interaction" (Ollivier & Fridman, 2001). It thereby denies professional film critics ultimate authority that is afforded by the intimate knowledge of a common standard; instead, it relegates them at best to positions of authority within their particular class-related taste publics. In other words, try as they may, critics cannot claim the validity of their judgements on the Kantian basis of a common aesthetic sense. Rather, they necessarily validate their opinions on the bases of preferences that they associate with their particular classes, and which are often conceived of in opposition to other preferences displayed in differing opinions.

In light of this, an analysis of film criticism should be sensitive to the act of "class-attributive judgement"—the act of classifying an aesthetic product according to sets of preferences that correspond to the critic's take on particular class tastes. In making class-attributive judgements about a product, critics are thereby identifying the product as part of either a legitimate or devalued repertoire and thus acknowledging or disavowing their consumption as valid preferences within the boundaries of the their class sensibilities (Bourdieu, 1984).

Reading taste and class in discourses

With this theoretical framework, we seem well-placed to carry out an analysis of discourses in film criticism with a view to discerning textual features that reveal the class-taste relationship. Yet, before we can proceed, a question warrants our attention: Why should we expect to find evidence of such a relationship in film reviews to begin with? So far it has been established that there is a mutually-constitutive link between class and taste, but it does not necessarily follow from this that this association would be reflected in discourses. We can cast the latter into doubt by questioning how we are able to establish what film critics intend to say in order to be able to conclude that they are making certain class-attributive judgements. If we are unable to do so with any certainty, then it might seem presumptuous to interpret film reviews in a way that makes the influence of the class-taste relation palpable. There is hence a need to expand the scope of our theoretical discussion to include a discussion of meaning explaining how and why the class-taste relation is important to the understanding of in discourses in film criticism.

The next section of this chapter will therefore cover various approaches to the general theory of meaning and specify, with reasons given, which theoretical framework would adopted to explain the pertinence of the class-taste relationship to the analysis discourses found in film reviews. This latter will then be discussed using the chosen framework, which will complete our theoretical discussion of meaning in the context of film criticism.

Theories of meaning

In the general theory of meaning, there are two kinds of theories that deal with different things: Semantic theories, which deal with the meanings of symbols as they are, and foundational theories of meaning, which deal with the question of why symbols have the meanings that they have (Speaks, 2010). Since taste and class are facts pertaining to the social context of discourses, in virtue of which expressions written in film reviews come to have their meanings (Speaks, 2010), they would be overlooked by a "narrowly semantic" analysis that de-emphasises "interpersonal dimensions which have to do with social relations and social identities" (Fairclough, 1992: 33). As such, we are interested foundational theories of meaning rather than semantic theories.

However, the term 'meaning' itself has different meanings, and it will be helpful to clarify what we take 'meaning' to mean in this discussion. There are two ways in which the term is ordinarily used: (1) "What someone means to say or do", and (2) "what that which is said,

written or done means" (Giddens, 1979: 44). Which definition we use determines the kind of approach to the foundational theories of meaning that we take. Using the first meaning, we would need to link the discourses in texts to the intentions of the authors, and this would warrant looking at mentalist approaches to the foundational theory of meaning, which seek to analyse linguistic representations or symbols and explain the nature of meaning in terms of the mental states of language users (Speaks, 2010). However, in studying the influence of class and taste on discourses, we are interested in the context in which discourses are generated rather than in the content of the authors' minds as they create the texts that contain those discourses. Hence, we would adopt a non-mentalist approach, which examines the influence that particular aspects of the usage of symbols have on their meanings without "making use of facts about [the] propositional attitudes" and mental states that accompany their usage (Speaks, 2010).

How meaning is conveyed is also a question that is pertinent to our choice of approaches. Foundational theories of meaning correspond to the subfield of linguistics known as pragmatics in that they are both concerned with the question of how context contributes to meaning (Speaks, 2010; Korta & Perry, 2011). We should therefore take a very brief look at pragmatics and consider how we may proceed further in light of the different kinds of approaches to it; namely, near-side pragmatics, which is concerned with the facts that determine what is actually said, and far-side pragmatics, which is concerned with facts about language that are "beyond saying" (Korta & Perry, 2011). Where class-attributive judgements are made explicit in a text through the *bona fide* declaration of the critic's class bias, it would not be necessary to reveal them through the analysis of the text. Thus, we are interested in the influence of class on judgements of taste where it is not clearly stated in the text. In other words, we are interested in class-attributive judgements that discourses in film reviews imply. As such, the far-side approach to pragmatics is more pertinent to our analysis.

At this juncture, we have determined that we need a non-mentalist foundational theory of meaning that accommodates the far-side approach to pragmatics; in other words, we need a theory of meaning that is able to account for implied meanings and is concerned with facts about the use of language which are external to individuals' minds. However, before proceeding to discuss a theory that meets these criteria, we should examine another school of thought that should not be ignored on account of its significant contributions to the theoretical debate on the conception of meaning: Structuralism.

Structuralism may be described as an anti-foundational theory of meaning in that it denies the existence of an inherent or natural foundation for the meanings of symbols. In his

seminal text on structuralist linguistics, Saussure argues that the link between the signifier—the symbol—and the signified—the object or idea indicated by the symbol—is "arbitrary" in that there is no inherent reason to be found in the nature or characteristic of a particular object that determines the symbol used to signify it (1959: 68). Rather, symbols come to have their meanings simply through common usage or, in other words, by "convention" (Saussure, 1959: 69). While this notion of the arbitrary nature of the sign seems to affirm a social and contextual conception of meaning-making, its anti-foundational bent may be taken further to cast doubt on the latter. Lévi-Strauss' structuralist theory, for example, holds that human language as a social institution is structured by an "unconscious teleology of mind", of which "man knows nothing" (Giddens, 1979: 20; Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 252). In other words, it makes the claim that although social structures may play a crucial role in governing communication or the use of language, there is an epistemological barrier that prevents us from understanding of how the latter is structured.

This line of thinking illustrates a problem in structuralist thought, which is the difficulty it has in reconciling human agency with a structural regime of signification, a problem that it has struggled with from its inception (Giddens, 1979). Also describing the arbitrary nature of the sign as "unmotivated", Saussure (1959: 69) emphasises in his theory the essential passivity of language users, who are simply making use of symbols with meanings that have been established without their conscious choosing (Giddens, 1979). Yet the rules of language use and interpretation change with time as they are repeatedly applied, and it is the need to reconcile transformations in the structures governing language with this passivity on the part of the human participants that leads to Lévi-Strauss' notion of the unconscious—the idea that people are collectively responsible for producing and transforming the structures that govern language, but in ways that they cannot be conscious of (Lévi-Strauss, 1966; Giddens, 1979).

However, we do have grounds to believe that the role of social structures in determining the meanings of symbols is knowable and not beyond the reach of human influence. We have seen, in our account of the relationship between class and taste, that individuals and groups are active agents who attempt to signify their class identities through symbolic consumption, generating a fluid environment that sees the perpetual re-appropriation and transformation of the symbols involved as new class boundaries are marked and old boundaries are transformed. For these activities and processes to be initiated and achieve their intended aims, not only must people be involved in processes of meaning-making, they must also be to some extent cognisant of the implications of their activity. How is this possible in light of the structuralist contention that people are merely passive language users? To answer this

question, we will turn to a theory of meaning that discusses the role of social convention in establishing meanings, and one that conforms to the approaches we have chosen earlier.

This theory is a theory of meaning that is centred on social norms, and it emphasises the role of social conventions in determining the rules of language use. Conventions are tacit rules that are set by social agreement. Abiding by conventions entails conforming to a certain set of standard practices, and thus conventions are closely associated with social norms. A constitutive link between social practices and the rules of language is asserted in Wittgenstein's (1953) social-practical conception of meaning, which makes the argument that formal rules do not constitute the fundamental governing principles of language use, since rules can only influence behaviour after they have undergone interpretation (Wittgenstein, 1953). Moreover, as "every action according to the rule is an interpretation", the interpretation of the rules of language consists of the use of language as well as the actions that actualise the meanings of words (Wittgenstein, 1953: 81). There is hence "a notion of primitive correctness of performance implicit in practice that precede and are presupposed by their explicit formulation in rules" (Brandom, 1994: 21).

Since the rules of language use are constantly being interpreted during language use, regular acts of interpretation become a collection of practices that make up "customs" or norms in a society (Wittgenstein, 1953: 81). Thus, this conception of meaning makes the crucial step of recognising that the rules of language are "constituted only in and through… practices" (Giddens, 1979: 41) and are hence governed by the "common behaviour of mankind" (Wittgenstein, 1953: 82), which can be observed and are hence knowable. The rules of language are governed, in other words, by social norms. As such, the social norms theory affirms, on the whole, the influence of language speakers on the rules of the languages they speak, since the latter are thoroughly rooted in social practices and are thereby of the speakers' own making (Brandom, 1994). Consequently, the ways in which language are used are dictated by the practical circumstances in which the speakers are immersed, which suggests that people "use language, like a tool, to get things done" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 18). In light of this, the social-practical context of a text has a necessary and significant influence on the meanings that it contains. Hence, in the analysis of discourses in film reviews, we can expect to see links, both explicit and implicit, between these discourses and the class-taste relations that are associated with the critics' preferences, especially in the form of class-attributive judgements made by them.

From theory to praxis: A summary and work plan

The identification of class-attributive judgements is hence our primary goal in positioning discourses in film reviews within particular class-taste relations, which would allow us to demonstrate the class-specific character of the judgements expressed, especially in contrast to claims of universal validity that may be made. By establishing a link between meanings and the socio-cultural practices that form the social context in which discourses are situated, the social-practical conception of language outlined in the previous section implies that we would not be amiss in expecting to find evidence of the influence of class and taste on discourses. Thus, the theoretical discussion in this chapter has given us a plausible framework with which we can carry out an analysis of film reviews as decision-making aids for consumers.

Hence, I will apply the theory of distinction to the analysis of two film reviews that will serve as case studies for the purpose of examining the influence of the class-taste relation on discourses in film criticism and the implications that this has on the role of film reviews as decision-making aids. The aim of the analysis, however, is not to arrive at conclusions that can be generalised to film criticism as a whole. Rather, it seeks to show how class-taste relations may influence discourses and how this influence may become obscured.

From a theoretical perspective, this analysis would constitute an operationalisation of the theory of distinction in the context of film criticism. It would, moreover, contribute to existing scholarship on the social function of film criticism, particularly from an aesthetic and cultural perspective.

On a practical basis, such an analysis would yield valuable insights on the information contained in the film reviews examined and its implications on consumer agency. Even in light of the relationship between class and taste, if consumers are able to infer the specific standards by which a critic judges a film in a review, they would nonetheless be able to arrive at conclusions that are more or less independent of the critic's, namely by being able to assess the latter's position and thus make their own decisions on whether to accept review's judgement and recommendations. The information provided in such a review may therefore still be considered to have the capacity to help consumers make meaningful choices. On the other hand, the inability of consumers to contextualise the judgement expressed in a review based on what they read in the text would be detrimental to the reliability and therefore the usefulness of the information provided. We would therefore be able to evaluate film reviews in their capacity as decision-making aids through a close analysis of their discourses.

Hence, critical discourse analysis (CDA) seems a natural choice for the purposes of our analysis as a method for extracting and examining meanings in discourses. Nevertheless, there is a need to go into a more in-depth discussion of CDA in order to show how it is useful for our analysis. This, as well as a discussion on the use of case studies, is covered in the following chapter on methodology.

METHODOLOGY

Discourse as social practice

As the earlier theoretical discussion on meaning has highlighted, the use of language constitutes a social practice (Wittgenstein, 1953) and people use language as a means to achieve practical ends (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Additionally, this entails an inherent connection between language and the social-practical context in which people use them. The consequent need to orientate textual analysis towards gaining an understanding of the social context and the practical aims of the social actors involved is the focus of Fairclough's (1992) approach to discourse analysis. This methodology is therefore very suitable for our analysis of film criticism as part of a social context that is dominated by acts of class identification.

Under this approach, discourse analysis aims to show the "systematic links between texts, discourse practices" and "socio-cultural practices" (Fairclough, 1995: 16-17), thereby making the analysis 'critical' (Fairclough, 1992). Hence, its system for the analysis of a text advocates the examination of the text on three levels: textual practice, discursive practice and socio-cultural practice (Fairclough, 1992). By conducting our analysis on the three levels of the texts in this order, we would be able to "focus on the detail of [a discourse] and then hypothesize about its functional effects as it becomes part of collective social interaction" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 160). Such an approach is anchored on the idea that a piece of text is both "product of society and a shaper of its discourse" (Hakam, 2009: 34), which affirms our notion that the judgements of taste expressed in film criticism are both determined by class identity and serving as determinants of class identity.

Sketching the analytical framework

The application of Fairclough's approach to CDA follows a comprehensive regime of textual interpretation that can nevertheless be tailored to the particulars of the analysis being done. As highlighted earlier, this approach deals with the text on three levels. On the textual level, we will examine the use of key words and phrases as well as the construction of key sentences in the texts in order to discern and interpret the signs that the authors have set down to convey certain meanings, focusing particularly on those which signal the critics' judgements. Additionally, we will examine "distinctive features of textual organisation" (Fairclough, 1992: 33)—the formal structures or syntactic content of the text—that also serve to convey particular meanings through the organisation of words and phrases into meaningful chunks. Coherent patterns of meaning emerge from such linguistic groupings they enable us to glean the prevailing discursive formations that, by helping to determine the meaning of words according to the positions of the speakers (Pêcheux, 1982; Thompson, 1984), link the text to the social context in which it was created. Using the meanings we interpret from the signs in tandem with observations regarding the formal structures and discursive formations within the text, we would be able to derive a preliminary reading of the class-attributive judgements made in each text.

Discursive practice is concerned with intertextuality, with how texts draw on other texts and accommodate different discourses (Fairclough, 1992). However, in the tradition of film theory, an analysis of film criticism calls for the understanding of films themselves as texts. Intertextuality in film criticism may primarily be understood in terms of comparisons between the films being reviewed and other films that are mentioned in the texts, as this is a means by which preferences are juxtaposed and judgements of taste derived. Thus, the reviewed films are included or excluded from particular canons by comparing or contrasting them with the films that are asserted to be part these canons. Recalling our earlier discussion of the theory of distinction, a reviewed film is hence either affirmed as part of a canon of good taste or not in reference to other films. Examining such intertextual conversations would therefore help us identify and ascertain the content of the class-attributive judgements made in the texts.

The construction of intertextual connections may also be done through comparing the consumption of the reviewed films with the consumption of other kinds of aesthetic products, which takes us to the socio-cultural level of analysis. The canons of good taste are thereby expanded to encompass more than films but also other socio-cultural practices. Class identification of the films in question is thus achieved through their inclusion to or exclusion

from more comprehensive canons consisting of socio-cultural practices that constitute the kinds of behaviour associated with particular classes. Looking at these complex links between films and socio-cultural practices, we would hence be able to observe the relationship between social class and the judgements of taste expressed in the texts, thereby completing our examination of the class-attributive judgements they make. Also of interest to our research is how each text positions the reader in order to sell its judgement: Is it claiming or implying that its judgement is based on an uncontroversial standard of good taste? Is it making the case for excluding the film in question by deriding its consumption as indicative of bad taste? These also constitute ways in which the text attempts to shape discourses on film tastes, itself becoming thereby an exercise in legitimising a particular hierarchy of tastes. Our reading of its class attributive judgement would therefore serve as a means of contextualising the claims of the text and positioning its judgement within a particular class-taste relation, and hence of emphasising the contingent nature of its conception of good and bad tastes.

The use and selection of case studies

We can see, therefore, that CDA entails the comprehensive analysis of texts. Given the scope of this dissertation, this seems to call for the examination of a few case studies rather than a large sample of texts. We must hence devote some attention to a discussion on the use of case studies—what does it entail and how would it contribute to achieving the aims of this dissertation?

"Case study research is not sampling research" (Tellis, 1997); it is therefore not designed to "enumerate frequencies" in order to produce statistical generalisations (Yin, 1994: 10). Rather, it aims at a holistic and in-depth investigation of cases (Orum, A., Feagin, J. & Sjoberg, G, 1991), which constitute instances of a class of phenomena that are explicated within a previously developed theoretical or analytical framework (Thomas, 2011; Tellis, 1997). Information gleaned from case studies is also useful for expanding upon an existing theory (Yin, 1994). Hence, while we are examining the case studies for the purpose of applying the theory of distinction, we would also be able to make observations on how well the theory is able to explicate the discourses under examination, where it falls short and what can be done to overcome its limitations.

There are two main concerns in selecting the case studies for our analysis: Firstly, the case studies must be provide sufficient material for the application of the theory of distinction to the analysis of discourses on films and film tastes; secondly, in order to better relate to

consumers' situation as they try to make decisions based on what they read in reviews, the case studies selected should be taken from among reviews that are widely read. These considerations have influenced both the selection of case studies and the way in which they were sought.

First, I looked at the reviews of the film critic Robert Ebert. As a well-known critic (Boatwright, Basuroy & Kamakura, 2007) who has the distinction of being the first film critic to win a Pulitzer Prize (Foley, 2011), Ebert enjoys a wide readership. Even if he is not, as an individual critic, influential on box office sales (Boatwright, Basuroy & Kamakura, 2007), his popularity indicates that he can be expected to have a considerable influence in shaping discourses on taste in film criticism. Thus, the first case study was found by browsing through Ebert's collection of reviews—a review of *The Taste of Others* (Ebert, 2001), a 2000 French film about taste by director Agnès Jaoui. In this review, Ebert devotes a large part of his attention to the concept of taste as part of his treatment of the subject matter of the film, thus providing an excellent opportunity for the examination of his views on taste and how they relate to his opinion of the film.

For the second case study, I wanted something sufficiently different from the first. At the same time, I wanted to continue with the approach of looking at reviews written by popular film critics. Hence, I turned to the reviews of the critic Michael Phillips, who has occasionally filled in for Ebert on the TV programme *At the Movies* and written for major newspapers such as *Chicago Tribune* and *Los Angeles Times* (Chicago Tribune, 2011). Phillips' review of the film *Captain America* (2011) was ultimately chosen for its marked difference in style from Ebert's review, which necessitates the greater use of inference as the subject of taste is not directly addressed in the text. However, this is mitigated by the fact that it is replete with intertextual connections that provide rich material for analysis. Additionally, it will help us avoid the repetitiveness of analysing a text that is too similar to the first.

With these chosen texts, we are ready to begin the analysis of discourses in film criticism. In the following chapter, the two case studies will be analysed and discussed individually. The theory of distinction will then be discussed in light of the conclusions drawn from both case studies, whereupon we will be able to come to our final conclusions regarding the influence of the class-taste relationship on the discourses found in the two reviews and its implications on consumer choice.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A tale of two standards: Ebert's review of The Taste of Others

"Everyone thinks they have the best taste... but we're all wrong"

(Agnès Jaoui – quoted in Collinson, 2009)

This review (Ebert, 2001) consists predominantly of a retelling of the film's main plot details, which is interspersed with comments about taste, particularly as it forms the subject matter of the film. These comments are highly informative for the purposes of our analysis as they reveal the conception of taste that Ebert conveys in the review. It does not mean, however, that this conception of taste is explicitly stated. Rather, there is an ostensible conflict between two distinct conceptions of taste that seem to be simultaneously endorsed by the author in the text: Taste is, on one hand, held to be relative and personal; on the other hand, the author also suggests that there is a particular standard of good taste that exists and requires a certain kind of cultural competence.

Both these notions appear multiple times in the text, the first conveyed in qualifiers that may superficially provide the review cover from charges of elitism. Readers would quickly come across one at the beginning of the text, as Ebert declares three sentences into his review that "your good taste might be my bad taste" (2001). However, he proceeds to send a perplexingly different message by stating in the next sentence that he is "patient" with "people who don't go to foreign films" like he would be "with a child" (Ebert, 2001). This patronising analogy suggests that those who do not watch foreign films are, like children, in some sense immature. When this is read together with another analogy that has been given in the first two sentences, in which Ebert compares having bad taste to needing "dental work" (2011), we may see an implied paternalistic relationship between Ebert as an established film critic and filmgoers whose tastes are problematic because they do not watch foreign films. Thus, the discursive formation found in the opening paragraph revolves around Ebert's position as an authority on films who possesses the knowledge of what constitutes good and bad tastes, a position that is predicated on the existence of a unitary or absolute standard of taste, judgements derived from which would lay claim to universal validity. And, as we will see, this opening sets the agenda for the rest of the review.

Next, Ebert affirms the idea that there is a correct conception of good taste by using the term "interesting" to describe people whose tastes entail a preference for foreign films (2001). Ebert does not qualify what he means by "interesting" (2001) and in the context of the position of authority that Ebert has asserted as a film critic, the term is liable to be

interpreted as one that is absolute rather than relative. The same implication may be read at the end of the review when Ebert states that having "interesting friends" who share one's taste means that one is "on the right track" (2001). Ebert seems to be saying, therefore, that good taste is associated with people who are indisputably interesting.

Notably, the second time Ebert uses the term "interesting" to describe fans of foreign film comes right after another qualifier in which he seems to admit that "It's not… that there's right and wrong about taste" (2001). Hence, we can see a pattern emerging in the discursive practice of the text whereby two conflicting discourses on taste are successively endorsed, in the form of Ebert professing to have a relative conception of taste before conveying what seems to be a radically different one. However, there does not seem to be an attempt to accommodate the two clashing discourses. Rather, in these instances, it seems as though Ebert is setting up a ruse in order to lull resistant readers into first agreeing with him so as to be able to say what he really intends to say.

Indeed, in giving his opinion on the merits of the film, Ebert privileges the second discourse and demonstrates what is more reminiscent of an absolute conception of taste. Praising the film for being "smart", Ebert warns that it is "all but impenetrable to anyone unable to appreciate what's going on under the dialogue, under the action… at the level where we instinctively make judgements based on taste" (2001). Therefore, he is implying that to be able to enjoy the film, one must have the right kind of taste. Simultaneously, having earlier opined that "taste involves… being able to see beneath [the superficial]", Ebert seems to be suggesting that the right kind of taste is identified with the enjoyment of the film. Therefore, Ebert conceives of particular kind of taste that he considers as good taste, and he associates it with the ability to appreciate a sophisticated film like *The Taste of Others*.

So far we have been able to make some observations about Ebert's conception of taste. However, at this point, we do not know enough to comment substantively on the class-attributive judgement made in the review. At the level of discursive practice, Ebert makes virtually no intertextual connections, comparing only a line delivered in the film with another in the film "As Good as it Gets", and he does not cite any other text to support his judgement of the film or the conception of taste he is expressing (2011). Hence, we must move on to the analysis of the socio-cultural practice of the review, where we will find a connection between the film—its consumption and the kind of taste it is held to represent—and a particular set of socio-cultural practices.

In making this connection, Ebert constructs a dichotomy between a low culture consisting of "crass tastes and materialist values" and a high culture consisting of "the life of the arts, of ideas, of questioning things" (2001). The contrast between the two cultures is illustrated by the difference Ebert highlights between Castella's habits in the beginning of the film and his habits in the later parts of the film. In the beginning, Castella is a "busy industrialist" who leads an "affluent but uninspiring" life, "surrounded by material comforts" that are "dictated by his wife" (Ebert, 2001). He also has to be dragged "kicking and screaming" to the theatre by his estranged wife (Ebert, 2001). However, as he falls in love with and pursues an actress he sees in the theatre, he begins to appreciate the high culture that the actress represents and learns to develop his own taste, even going as far as to challenge his wife's judgement of a painting he buys (Ebert, 2001). Thus, Castella's cultural sensibilities begin to change from those of low culture to those of high culture during the course of the film.

Here, it seems that, by highlighting the contrast between the high and low cultures as he sees them in the film, Ebert is suggesting that it is not enough to be able to consume what someone else tells you to. In order to have good taste, one must develop "one's own taste" (Ebert, 2001). However, Ebert also associates Castella's initial tastes with "the life of money", which he juxtaposes with "the life of the mind" (2001). Therefore, in Ebert's view, having good taste is not in fact simply about developing one's own taste, but about developing a particular kind of taste. The latter is associated not with the consumption of expensive products but, as we have seen, with the ability to appreciate nuanced works of art, including this film (Ebert, 2001).

Hence, as our analysis of textual practice indicates, contrary to the relative conception that he professes to have, Ebert's conception of good taste is in fact associated with the possession of a particular kind cultural capital that is indicated by one's appreciation of foreign films. Additionally, we can see in the socio-cultural practice of the text that Ebert explicitly links the film to an artistic-intellectual disposition that stands in contrast to simple undiscerning consumption. Thus, the consumption of the film is classified as part of the set of preferences belonging to a group of culturally-sophisticated consumers with which Ebert clearly identifies and which includes connoisseurs of foreign films and excludes most of the audience of Hollywood films (Ebert, 2001). The relative conception of taste expressed in the qualifiers is therefore contradicted and displaced by the exclusive claim to the possession of good taste that Ebert makes on behalf of this group.

Moreover, the review uses some choice phrases in warning its readers against having bad taste. Apart from comparing having bad taste with needing dental work, which we saw

earlier, Ebert also compares it to selling drugs in that it tells people "something about [a person] that [they] don't want to know more about"; except, he adds, that one can stop selling drugs but one "may never be able to tell a good painting from a bad one" (Ebert, 2001). While Ebert does not name specific preferences that exemplify bad taste in films, the fact that he thinks there is such a thing as bad taste and denies furthermore that we can simply choose not to have it leaves us with little doubt that he does not in fact subscribe to the view that taste is relative. There is, in Ebert's view, good taste and bad taste, and the former requires the possession of a particular kind of knowledge and cultural competence.

The good is the enemy of the best: Phillips' review of Captain America

> *"What is there for critics to say, except variations on the theme of Arrrrgh?"*
>
> (Joe Morgenstern, 2006)

As far as the class-taste relationship is concerned, there is very little to say about the textual practice in Phillips' review (2011). At this level, Phillips devotes his attention to the tone of the movie, which he praises for being serious enough and "confident" but at the same time witty and "relaxed", as well as to the capabilities the various actors (2011). These remarks tell us something about Phillips' opinion of the film, which is that he approves of it to some extent, but they tell us very little about how he classifies the film according to his conception of taste. It is at the level of discursive practice, through the numerous intertextual connections that he makes, that Phillips indicates his judgement of the movie in relation to what he considers to be good films.

The first thing that is notable in the discursive practice of the text is the comparison Phillips makes between *Captain America* and *Transformers 3*. In the opening sentence of the review, he states that the former is set "in direct opposition to the attention-span destroying likes of 'Transformers 3'", and goes on to add in the next sentence that it is "paced and designed for people who won't shrivel up and die" at "45 seconds" of plot-related dialogue between action sequences (Phillips, 2011). The tone here is clearly derisive, and we can see that Phillips is setting up a contrast between good sci-fi action films and bad ones—as they are epitomised by *Captain America* and *Transformers 3* respectively—on the basis of the difference in the amount gratuitous action scenes that indicate of lack of attentiveness to plot. The comparison between the two films continues in the third paragraph, where Phillips opines that *Captain America* is "informed by a... humility" that is not to be found in the works of *Transformers 3* director Michael Bay, culminating in his mocking description of a hypothetical scenario in which an unappreciative and horrified Bay "would explode like the Nazi at the end of 'Raiders of the Lost Ark'" when made to "sit still" and watch *Captain America* (2011).

This imagery is interesting because it suggests that Phillips is constructing Bay as a villain who represents and perpetuates a style of action films that Phillips dislikes, showing us in a vivid manner that there are, in his view, not only such things as relatively bad films but also a species of categorically bad films that may be compared to the work of an unambiguously evil antagonist in a Hollywood film. Moreover, towards the end of the review, Phillips states that the "storytelling and pacing" in *Captain America* "distinguish [the film] from the run of the mill" in the category of big-budget sci-fi action films, and proceeds to compare action sequences in the film to those in film classics such as *Night Train to Munich* and Hitchcock's *Foreign Correspondent* (2011). Hence, Phillips is implicitly establishing the existence of a canon of mediocre action films as well as a canon of more memorable films, and he classifies *Captain America* as one of the latter in order to show us how he rates the film.

However, the review's judgement of the film is layered with another discourse, in which Phillips reminds readers of his review that although *Captain America* is a good film, it is nonetheless not among the best, even for its kind. If we go back to the comparison he makes between its pacing and that of *Transformers 3* at the beginning of the review, we can see that even though Phillips indicates his approval for the former, he describes its plot-related dialogue as being about "world domination" or "a dame" (2011). Here, Phillips seems to be saying, on one hand, that *Transformers 3* is not even measured enough to have a dialogue that befits a sci-fi action film. Yet, on the other, he seems to be putting forward the notion that *Captain America* is ultimately still a sci-fi action film. In fact, he signals his relatively low opinion of the genre when, in the midst of praising the film, he states that he "hesitate[s]" to use the word "charm" in association with it, a sentiment he confirms in the following sentence when he describes the film's material as "ridiculousness" that must be treated in light-hearted manner (Phillips, 2001). The connotations of the word 'ridiculous' are such that it is difficult to conceive of it as being a positive or even a neutral descriptor, and its use here should hence be seen as a means by which Phillips tempers his praise for the film.

Towards the end of his review, Phillips offers a few comments that also put his positive review of the film into perspective. Although he praises the lead actor Chris Evans for being "a pretty good actor", he also compares Evans to Dominic Cooper from the *Iron Man* "sub-franchise" and notes that the former does not yet have the latter's wit (2011). Additionally, while he does go on to say that the film "has wit enough to compensate", in the following paragraph, he ends his review by telling us that his 10-year-old-son "pronounced [the film] one of his 'favourite movies, ever'" (2011). There are hence two things about the film that Phillips is suggesting here: The first, through the comparison between Evans and Cooper, is

that, in a way, the film does not represent the best effort in the sub-genre of comic superhero films. The second is that *Captain America* is a film that a 10-year-old child would call, in a characteristically child-like manner, one of his "favourite movies, ever" (Phillips, 2011). Phillips' reporting of his son's remark is significant in the context of what he has been implying about the film thus far, which is that *Captain America* is ultimately a film with a ridiculous premise. At the very least, we can surmise that it is not one of Phillips' own favourite films, since he could otherwise have said so himself instead of quoting his son.

Hence, we can see that Phillips classifies the film as a good film in either the sci-fi action genre or the comic superhero sub-genre, but he does not place it in a canon of good films in general and perhaps not even among the best works within the same genre. The former, however, is more interesting from the standpoint of the theory of distinction. We have seen, in his remarks on the nature of its dialogue and his referring to its material as "ridiculousness", that Phillips is implying in the review that there is a certain boundary that *Captain America* cannot cross as "comics-derived entertainment" (2011). The film is thus ostensibly excluded from a general canon of good films on the basis of its subject matter. Hence, Phillips seems to postulate a hierarchy of genres that is prejudiced against fantastic (as opposed to realistic) genres.

Yet, what does this tell us about Phillips' conception of taste or the class-attributive judgement that he makes in the review? Unlike Ebert in the first case study, Phillips does not make any overt claims about tastes or establish a clear connection between the film and wider socio-cultural practices. It is hence necessary to look at the text as a whole to determine the discursive formation that links it to a particular social formation and informs the interpretation its meanings.

From Phillips' attacks on *Transformers 3* and its director Michael Bay, we can deduce that he feels a sense of superiority over those who have a preference for that film. Moreover, the numerous references that Phillips makes to particular aspects of other films may be seen as a demonstration of his credentials as a critic who has extensive knowledge of his field of expertise. Thus, we can deduce that, much like Ebert did in the first case study, Phillips is setting himself up as a film expert with intimate knowledge of an absolute and universal standard of taste, which affords him the authority to pronounce valid judgements on films. The discursive formation of the text is thus centred on Phillips' status as a critic and his position of relative power over the reader. As such, the discourse in Phillips' review assumes this position of authority, from which he can freely express his distaste for films like *Transformers 3* and their directors without appearing to be unreasonably disagreeable.

Hence, at the level of socio-cultural practice, we can see that the review conforms to a not unexpected mode of discourse in film criticism, in which the critic plays the role of the enlightened guide who sits at the apex of the hierarchy of film tastes. We may therefore interpret Phillips' review as classifying *Transformers 3* as a film that falls outside the preferences of someone of his station, while at the same time accommodating *Captain America* in this regard without identifying his preferences too closely with it.

A class of their own: What the case studies have shown

The discourses in both reviews emphasise the role of the critics as experts and guides with the implied authority to adjudicate between different film preferences and tastes. In Ebert's review, this is done through the establishment of a paternalistic relationship between Ebert as a film critic and those who do not watch foreign films (Ebert, 2001), while Philips' credentials are established in his review by the demonstration of the knowledge of films that he commands (Phillips, 2011). But what can we say about what they do in this capacity that is common to both case studies? Have they shown us what constitutes good and bad tastes? Have they classified the films they review as part of repertoires associated the particular tastes of certain classes?

As we have seen, Ebert is more straightforward in expressing the difference that he sees between good and bad tastes in films, with "intelligence" being a crucial factor (Ebert, 2011). Meanwhile, in Phillips' case, we have had to infer it from the comments he makes about *Captain America* and, more patently, *Transformers 3*. Yet neither critic gives us much more than fleeting glimpses of their canons of good films and bad films, which are insufficient for determining what the criteria for membership in such canons might be.

Similarly, although Ebert again offers us a tantalising glimpse with his allusions to "the life of the mind" (Ebert, 2001), neither review makes extensive links between the films reviewed and specific sets of preferences in a wider sphere of socio-cultural practices. Hence, without being able to determine what each critic's definite canon of good films is and how the films being reviewed relate to the preferences of concrete groupings within a social formation that can be considered classes, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the influence of particular class affiliations on the critics' tastes or about the class-attributive judgements that they make.

CONCLUSION

Applying CDA to the examination of the case studies has given us an insight on how the two critics think about the films they are reviewing. Yet we have not been able to discern the tangible influence of particular class identities on the judgements of taste they make. This either implies that classes are indefinite or that class boundaries are not made explicit in the discourses that we have examined. At the same time, we have seen that the two critics do identify with and distance themselves from certain kinds of preferences and socio-cultural practices on the basis of their perception of the desirability (or undesirability) of these preferences and practices. Hence, through the analysis, we have been able to see a practical demonstration of taste as a means of distinction; what we have not seen is a demonstration of taste as a means of class distinction.

A potential implication of these findings is that class should be abandoned as the primary object of identification in favour of more amorphous and "polysemic" notions of social identity that are advanced in cultural studies (Slater, 1997: 166). Alternatively, the findings could be seen as unsurprising considering the extremely small sample size that could be worked with using CDA as the methodology for this study. The latter would suggest that further research using a different methodology, such as content analysis, could be done on the body of work of particular critics to determine if there are certain patterns in their discourses that might shed more light on these critics' class identification. The findings from such a study could in turn be used as the context with which further analysis using CDA might reveal the concrete ways in which class influences their discourses on films and film tastes.

Another pertinent issue that needs to be addressed by further research is that of bias in the analysis. CDA is "an interpretative rather than a straightforwardly descriptive discipline", and hence analysts have "interpretative tendencies" that are grounded in their own "social reasons" (Fairclough, 1992: 34, 35). By starting out to conduct the analysis using a theoretical framework centred on the theory of distinction, the analysis carried out in this dissertation has been predisposed to interpreting the discourses within the case studies in such a way as to be able to construct a narrative of distinction, thereby sidelining other interpretations. A more empirically-grounded basis for interpretation in future research on film reviews using CDA may be established through interview or focus group-based research that would yield information on how readers interpret the texts.

Despite these limitations, as mentioned earlier, the analysis conducted in this dissertation has given us an insight on the thought processes behind the two reviews examined. In fact, even what the analysis has not been able to find has nevertheless told us something important about these reviews, which is that the critics provide little information on the specific standards to which films have to conform in order to be considered good or bad films. Instead, readers are asked to trust in the critics' authority to pronounce aesthetic judgements on films, to trust that they are being guided in "the right direction" (Ebert, 2011). Hence, while the subjective character of the information given in these reviews is perhaps unsurprising, given the subjective nature of aesthetic judgements, the reviews provide readers with few or no means to contextualise the information. There are even indications that Ebert's review may be deliberately misleading readers where it expresses a relativist conception of taste. Consumers who are not familiar with the critics' writings as a whole would thus be unable to accurately determine the perspectives from which the critics appraise the films, which raises serious questions about the transparency and reliability of the information presented.

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