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## **Cinephile Culture on Online Platforms in France: Rethinking the Process of Cultural Mediation**

**Christel Taillibert**

From cinema clubs and film festivals, via arthouse cinemas and cinematheques, cinephile culture conveys a peculiar relationship with cinematographic works that is characterised by a major interest in the artistic process. Cinephile culture, or simply ‘cinephilia’, has developed over time to engage with new opportunities and developments. There has always been a willingness to invest in meeting places with films, while adapting to socio-technical developments that characterise the possibilities of cinema, from the shared space of a theatrical cinema to the domestic space and the individualisation of viewing practices. This development has allowed for a renewal of the cinephile audience and the modernisation of a long-established culture with values and critical tools for younger generations.

The emergence of new practices of online consumption through video-on-demand (VOD) platforms has reshaped the concept of availability in the film industry. This has affected the cinephile system within Europe and elsewhere: it resulted in an explosion in amateur practices and online piracy, as well increased pressure on traditional players (Bullich 2021).<sup>1</sup> And it gave power to the new streaming giants in the film and audiovisual industries. In this new ecosystem, how can we preserve cinephile values and educate the younger generations who are able to choose from a large number of VOD platforms, at a time when global SVOD platforms with low-cost subscriptions have become hugely popular? How can we continue to educate the new generations of cinephiles in the streaming era?

This chapter focuses on online cinephile culture in France, which is one of the countries in Europe where cinephilia has an important - maybe the most important - role to play within the independent sector of the film industry. The chapter will make two complementary observations. The first is that cinephile history in France is characterized by process of cultural mediation. The second asserts that the development of a new socio-technical environment by VOD platforms assumes the exploration of new procedures for incorporating cinephile culture into a system that revolves around economic models, business models, and homogenous user paths. What reconfigurations, then, characterize the cinephile mediation model in the VOD universe? How do cinephile audiences engage with educational resources in the online environment?

To develop a baseline understanding, I will first draw on academic literature relating to the concept of cinephilia in film studies. As in many European countries, the film and audiovisual sectors in France are structured on the basis of a dichotomy between an industrial, commercial sector on the one hand, and a cultural sector based on cinephilia on the other hand. The French landscape is characterized by strong financial support for cinephile actors, for ideological, economic and cultural reasons. It is therefore important to examine the cinephile system in France in order to understand how it impacts online audiences. I will also draw on perspectives about the socio-economy of the digital industries and the sociology of cultural practices. Secondly, the analysis will provide examples from a large sample of 13 cinephile platforms in France with attention to their educational features and the ways in which their film catalogues are organised.

The cinephile platforms in this sample are understood as platforms with catalogues that primarily consist of cinephile films, also known as small-scale, art-house films. This includes both recent and older films, and feature films, documentaries and short films. Their editorial approach often intersects with the criteria of ‘independent cinema,’ even if educational, historical and cultural concerns are added that go beyond that concept.

<b>Cinephile platform</b>	<b>Creation date</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Available in countries</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Access</b>
ARTE	2006	ARTE	France, Germany (worldwide for certain contents)	French, English, German, Spanish, Polish, Italian	<a href="http://www.arte.tv">www.arte.tv</a>
Benshi	2017	Saint Maur Entreprise	France	French	<a href="https://benshi.fr/">https://benshi.fr/</a>
Bref Cinéma	2016	Agence du Court métrage	France, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg	French	<a href="http://www.brefcinema.com">www.brefcinema.com</a>
Bretagne & Diversité	2014	Rhizomes & Bretagne Culture et Diversité (Associations)	France	French, Breton	<a href="http://bretagne-et-diversite.net/fr/">http://bretagne-et-diversite.net/fr/</a>
Upopi	2014	CICLIC	France	French	<a href="https://upopi.ciclic.fr/">https://upopi.ciclic.fr/</a>
Mémoire	2010	CICLIC	France	French	<a href="https://memoire.ciclic.fr">https://memoire.ciclic.fr</a>
Le Cinéma Club	2015	Marie-Louise Khondji	worldwide	English	<a href="http://www.lecinemaclub.com">www.lecinemaclub.com</a>
La Cinetek	2015	La Cinémathèque des réalisateurs	France, Germany, Austria, Belgium	French, English, German	<a href="http://www.lacinetek.com/">www.lacinetek.com/</a>
Le Kinéscope	2014	Agence du court métrage	France	French	<a href="http://www.lekinetoscope.fr">www.lekinetoscope.fr</a>
KuB	2017	Breizh Créative	France	French	<a href="http://www.kubweb.media">www.kubweb.media</a>
My French Film Festival	2011	Unifrance	worldwide	French, English	<a href="http://www.myfrenchfilmfestival.com">www.myfrenchfilmfestival.com</a>
Tënk	2016	Société Coopérative d'Intérêt Collectif Tënk	France, Switzerland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Canada	French	<a href="http://www.on-tenk.com">www.on-tenk.com</a>
UniversCiné	2007	LMC/UniversCiné	France, Belgium	French	<a href="http://www.universcine.com">www.universcine.com</a>

Table 1 below provides an overview of cinephile platforms in our sample. Some of them are well-known players in France, such as the French-German television channel ARTE. UniversCiné is dedicated to independent, art-house cinema, and was born from the gathering of the rights catalogues of a significant number of French independent producers and distributors. La Cinetek is dedicated to film heritage, and managed by the association for film directors (La cinémathèque des Réalisateurs) in France. It was created by a collaboration between the Film Directors Society ('Société des Réalisateurs de Films') and LMC/UniversCiné. In addition, the 'Short Film Agency' ('Agence du court métrage'), whose aim is to promote and distribute short films, is at the origin of two platforms: Bref Cinéma, which is an offshoot of the short film magazine of the same name (Bref), and Le Kinéscope, a pedagogical portal conceived as a tool for the use of short films for educational purposes. Benshi is dedicated to art-house cinema for young audiences, and was created by the theatrical art-house cinema 'Studio des Ursulines,' in collaboration with other arthouse cinemas, to extend the work of raising children's awareness that is already proposed through the programming of the cinemas.

Two platforms in the sample group belong to the Centre-Val de Loire, a regional cultural agency in the centre of northern France: UPOPI is an image education platform that offers short films for consultation, and Mémoire provides access to a collection of films, both amateur and professional, filmed since the 1920s in the Centre-Val de Loire. Bretagne & Diversité is dedicated to films emblematic of cultural diversity throughout the world. Tënk, on the other hand, is dedicated to documentaries, as part of the 'General State of Documentary Film' in France ('États généraux du film documentaire'), one of the most important festivals in France dedicated to creative documentaries. KuB shows works dealing with the region of Brittany, and Le CiNéMa Club is devoted to independent and experimental works. The My French Film Festival is an online festival created by Unifrance, a national agency that promotes French cinema around the world. These platforms are generally designed for audiences in the French market, but the My French Film Festival and Le CiNéMa Club can be accessed by audiences worldwide. Some platforms are available in several countries, including ARTE, La Cinetek, Bref Cinéma, Tënk and UniversCiné.

This chapter proceeds in four sections. First, I will introduce how the concept cinephilia is employed in France. Then, a better understanding of cinephile VOD players in France will be developed, wherein I analyse their approaches to curation and catalogue availability. Next, I will analyse the way in which educational resources find their place within their platforms, in the form of informational added value. Finally, I will analyse the ways in which 'horizontal education' is managed by cinephile platforms. Education is traditionally based on the basis of a vertical relationship: the person who knows something transmits that knowledge to the person who does not know. But education can also be based on the contributions of horizontal relationships *between* learners, and that is the relationship I am interested in when it comes to cinephile platforms.

### **From Traditional Cinephilia to Online Cinephilia in France**

The foundations of cinephilia in France are complex because it was constructed at the meeting point of multiple movements. These include the recognition of cinema as an art form,

the preservation of cinematic heritage, the historiography of cinema, popular education, and the development of the French New Wave. Beyond France, cinephilia is also a largely globalised phenomenon, built on the basis of shared judgement tools, generating a feeling of recognition beyond national specificities (De Valck and Hagener 2005; Taillibert and Aubert 2015).

This is thus an environment for many players moving in different professional areas. However, they come together with similar strategies and common values. Firstly, they share values that are historically based on the concept of ‘quality’ (Vernet 2017), and on the construction of a critical system beyond the mainstream. This allows for the establishment of a qualitative hierarchy between cinema works. Secondly, there is a commitment to bringing cinephile works to life through a process of symbolic valorisation (through awards and festival prizes for instance), and support in writing, production and distribution. This provides opportunities for audiences to see films that circulate beyond the mainstream. Thirdly, there have been specific mechanisms set up to support cinephile culture, with these taking two forms. The first is embodied in policy instruments, developed since the post-War period, on the basis of an adapted legislative mechanism, and the organisation at national level of a subsidy system that favours distinguished film products. The second consists of carrying out concerted actions in the service of cinema education, from the youngest age, in partnership with the national education system, though the ‘National programmes for image education’ (‘Programmes nationaux d’éducation à l’image’<sup>2</sup>), but also in developing educational activities within the framework of cinephilia mediation devices, whatever their specific legal form may be.

Cinephilia occupies a particular place in France insofar as, since the 1950s, it has been a founding value of film policy. This policy was built on the basis of a referential framework historically proposed by what is called the ‘authors policy’ (‘Politique des Auteurs’). The authors’ policy was initially conceived as an affirmation of the important role of film directors in the film creation process. By contrast, the contribution of scriptwriters in the creative process is limited, and the role of producers is often reduced to more financial and administrative responsibilities. There is also a distinction between simply ‘directors,’ which describe technicians at the service of a project created by others, and ‘auteurs,’ who convey their own vision of the world through their films.

Cinephilia in France is traditionally based on a subsidy system that revolves around supporting the diversification of film culture. It is structured around labels such as the ‘Art et Essai,’ a French term for art-house. This label is awarded to films recognised as ‘works of research or novelty in the cinematographic field’ (CNC 2023, 3). The circulation of these films in France is usually facilitated by a circuit of arthouse cinemas which, in exchange for public funding from the State, programme works designated in this way on a large scale. This label in particular continues to structure the cinephile sector in France and the symbolic and financial valuations that accompany it.

Films supported by this subsidy system often develop a profile through the international festival circuit and circulation in the arthouse network of cinemas in France. However, for this subsidised system to survive, it is necessary that such works reach an audience, even if it is a niche audience. The major challenge for the cinephile cinema system therefore lies in its capacity to sustain audiences, and to form new audiences as new generations become familiar with film and film-going.

Creating awareness among new generations of audiences is particularly crucial as the upheavals inherent in the development of the online market and its associated uses since the 2000s have profoundly disrupted the film and audiovisual landscape. This development has impacted the roles of industry players that are traditionally part of the intermediation process, such as film critics, film club organisers, festival programmers, and others. Their role was supposedly undermined by forces that cut them out of the process, because the rapid emergence of VOD as a new distribution window resulted in experimentation with several new economic models, and forms of direct distribution for films (Smits 2019, 173). In addition to this process of dis-intermediation, however, the term reintermediation has also been employed. More specifically, the structuring of exchanges on the internet gave rise to a process of ‘technical reintermediation’ (Taillibert, 2020), with the actions of online audiences being guided and oriented by socio-technical devices in which algorithmic logics and recommendations have taken on an increasing role, orienting and shaping individual decisions. With regard to the most powerful SVOD platforms, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, algorithmic logics and recommendations are not always supportive for cinephile films. Cinephile platforms also compete against higher budget, mainstream films, which are often given more visibility, and appeal to mainstream audiences rather than more specifically to cinephile audiences (CSA Lab 2017; Drumond, Mota, Coutant and Millerand 2018; Delaporte 2019; Thuillas and Wiart 2019).

The first VOD platforms in France were launched in 2005. After various successful experiments, major French audiovisual players such as Canal+ and TF1 launched their own platforms to provide online access for films collections built up in previous years. They were followed by several internet service providers, including Free in 2005, Orange in 2006 (part of France Télécom), and Neuf Telecom in 2006 (part of Cegetel). They contributed to the development of the mainstream sector in the online market. Various experiments from cinephile platforms followed. The Franco-German channel ARTE opened ArteVOD in 2006 (now known as ‘Arte’), and the Institut National de l’Audiovisuel experimented with its own distribution platform, recently renamed ‘Madelen.’ The platform UniversCiné followed in 2007. It was created by the association of independent production and distribution players in France. These three pioneers are still central players in the online cinephile market today.

The online market developed further with the introduction of the HADOPI law in 2009. This is an intellectual property law designed to combat online piracy, while facilitating the development of legal online platforms (CNC 2016b, 16). Revenues from the online market began to stabilise between 2012- 2014, and grew by 19.8% in 2015 compared to 2014, reaching a total of €317.6 million (CNC 2016a, 175). Several policy measures in France encouraged the growth of the online market since the signing of the ‘European Charter for the Development and Adoption of Film Online’ (‘Charte européenne pour le développement et l’adoption du cinéma en ligne’) in Cannes in 2006. The National Centre for Cinematography and the Moving Image sought to frame and encourage this development through the expansion of its public funding system. Since 2008, it has incentivised the presence of French and European works in VOD catalogues through selective support for on-demand audiovisual platforms.

In the mid-2010s all kinds of audiovisual platforms were introduced in France. Netflix arrived in 2014, but there were also national initiatives. French distributors like Carlotta Films and associations like Films & Documentaries developed their own platforms to provide online

access for films for which they held distribution rights. But there were also other types of players, such as theatrical cinemas (e.g. Benshi), film magazines (e.g. Bref Cinéma) and the Société des Réalisateurs de Films (the origin of Cinetek). In addition, the ‘Agence du court métrage’ (which is developing Le Kinetoscope, an educational platform for short films), film festivals (e.g. Tënk,). Other players were developing yet more platforms such as E-cinema.com and Cinema Club. Given the huge variety of cinephilia organisations that have developed in the VOD market, the following sections of the chapter analyse their catalogue strategies and educational functions in more depth.

### **Cinephile Platform Catalogues and Interfaces**

Cinephile platforms have a particular manner in which their catalogues are presented to audiences. Two principles are important for catalogues and audiences in France. The first involves providing distinguished works based on qualitative criteria specific to the French *politique des auteurs*, which, as discussed, prioritises artistic merits above industrial merits. The second encourages the public to see as many cinematographic works as possible, in order to build, film after film, a cinephile culture of their own, while respecting the reference framework proposed by the platform.

Two distinct catalogue strategies in particular have been developed by cinephile players in Europe and internationally in the past 15 years or so. The first catalogue model is based on abundance of content, and the second is based on scarcity of content and rotation (Smits 2019; Frey 2021).

The abundance model involves a plethora of thousands of films, targeted to expectations of all sorts of audiences, whatever their preferences and tastes. The breadth of the catalogue is the central criterion by which the various cinephile platforms seek to demonstrate their added value. In the context of the access utopia in the online market, this kind of strategy meets the expectations and demands of audiences.

Many cinephile VOD platforms first adopted this model, while introducing in the criteria of compilation of the catalogues the criteria of selectivity necessary to fall in line with cinephilia as a symbolic institution. Criteria of selectivity are closely associated with how they present themselves through their brand image. For example, ARTE presents its platform interface as an extension of its work aimed at offering ‘innovative programs, open to the world, independents, and high-quality’ (ARTE 2021, 3). UniversCiné, in addition, particularly insists on the concept of ‘independence,’ with a high added value in the cinephile system. These are features shared by many French producers and distributors who launched cinephile platforms.

Cinephile platforms with catalogues based on abundance confront audiences with hyper-choice situations in terms of films they can choose from. But they have made editorial choices to guide audiences through their catalogues. More specifically, they seek to editorialise the platform with cinephile values, such as sorting and selection, to introduce what Akrich (2010, 206) calls a ‘script’ for cinephile use. The browsing paths, as induced by editorial choices, focus on criteria for evaluating works. Film genres are not excluded from those editorial choices. They are often organised according to categories, in order to introduce a carefully curated group of films. There are more editorial choices, such as the option to go

through the collections diachronically, which is a response to the need of building up a culture conscious of past contributions, and of influences exerted by works and trends on each other. La Cinetek, which is devoted to heritage cinema, is symptomatic of this strategy, but we can observe it also on other platforms. For instance, on Tënk and UniversCiné, there are browsing options that allow to keep track of the collection history. And on ARTE, Bref Cinéma and Benshi, there are differences between categories such as ‘cult movies’ and ‘classics.’ On La Cinetek, there is the option to select films that originate from particular decades, covering the period from 1900 to 2010 to emphasis the theme of film history. Similarly, there are platforms with options to select films from different countries. These various criteria are linked to the cultural diversity ideal, which is a political pillar of the development of contemporary cinephilia in France.

In addition, some cinephile platforms adopt approaches that promote atypical formats as markers of innovation and diversity. This historical differentiation strategy encourages users to watch short or medium length films, documentaries, and experimental films. Other platforms specialise in particular types of films for a niche audience, such as the short film for Bref Cinema, the creative documentary for Tënk, the anthropological film for Bretagne & Diversité, and the amateur film for Mémoire. Attention to younger audiences, which is important to develop cinephile audiences, is also a part of those platforms, in the form of functions that help parents to choose films with high-quality or age classifications for their children.

The second catalogue model is based on principles of scarcity and rotation. This is more specifically a strategy to ‘guide the steps’ of users, in accordance with the long tradition of film programming in cinemas. Such platforms bear much more resemblance to the longstanding tradition of programming in physical cinemas. Indeed, it is by drawing inspiration from traditional ways of access to films that this trend has developed in cinephilia circles. For example, for the cinephile platform 'La Toile' (The Screen) in France attempted to reflect the traditional role of physical cinemas in the online market. This project did not find its audience, and the platform had to close at the end of 2020, but the example demonstrates an intention to utilise the longstanding tradition of cinephile culture online.

To introduce pre-existing logics related to theatrical cinemas, but also to other traditional cinephile activities such as film clubs and film festivals, some cinephile platforms have reduced the quantity of films in their catalogues to limit audience choice. In accordance with the model introduced by a platform such as MUBI, those cinephile platforms adopt the ‘rotative selection’ principle (Taillibert 2017; Smits and Nikdel, 2019; Frey 2021). They make a relatively low number of titles available for a limited period of time. Some cinephile platforms in France, such as Le CiNéMa Club, have developed a substitution rotative selection model, whereby the catalogue changes completely. Other cinephile platforms, such as Tënk, Benshi and Bref Cinéma, have developed a sliding rotative selection model, with the catalogue gradually changing.

While such cinephile platforms limit audience choice, they reintroduce common approaches to programming. Such programming is particularly noticeable when the number of titles is reduced. CiNéMa Club pushed this strategy to the extreme, choosing for CiNéMa Club to programme only one film per week, and therefore making it very easy for audiences to decide what to watch. Also, for cinephile platforms with catalogues consisting of dozens of films, the



objective is to provide access to a carefully selection collection of films, and thereby gain the trust of audiences. As Joséphine Létang (Director General of La Toile) noted in 2017, some audiences may experience the influence of programming: ‘Even if at first sight they would not head for it, we recommend it to them’ (Létang 2017). The ‘they’ here, encapsulates how assumed subjectivity is reintroduced in the vision of cinephile platforms, on the basis of the goals of the cultural mediation effect. Audiences who identify themselves in the ‘horizon of expectations’, generated by the programmers or curators, can rely with confidence on their judgement. The purpose is to make that relationship conducive to achieve a long-term commitment from audience to the cinephile platform and the benefits that cinephile culture has to offer, such as educational and cultural values.

### **Reintroducing Educational Resources**

Beaudelot and Beaumont remind us that: ‘Access to art requires, if not the appropriation of complex codes and references, at least an apprenticeship that shows everyone the way to works and creation’ (1995, 31). For cinephile platforms, it is important to mould the taste of audiences, in the long tradition of cinephilia in France. The focus on education is therefore central to their strategies. That is reflected in publicly-funded programmes designed for image education for young audiences, but also in professional and teaching activities, and organisations such as the Art et Essai network, festivals, film clubs and film libraries in France. These actions have two objectives in particular: encouraging audiences to adhere to cinephile culture, and providing a framework that is capable of placing the reception cultural works in the context of a reflective, cultural approach.

The framework around which these activities has historically been structured was forged by film clubs, around activities organised in three stages: a presentation of the film by the facilitator, the screening of the film, and the organisation of a debate with audiences. This system places the film -- conceived as a work of art - at the heart of the system. It also mobilises advantages of vertical mediation and horizontal mediation. The former is likely to provide reflective and informational material from the top down; the latter is through an exchange which constitutes a founding act in the construction of a personal and collective culture. Both objectives ideally lead to ‘transforming consumption time into a space for establishing a relationship with meaning’ (Fleury 2008, 20). In addition, they are meant to create ‘a common space for the deployment of singular reasons [which] transforms the individuals who participate into political subjects’ (Montoya 2007, 124). This framework remains present in the vision of cinephile platforms and organisations.

We can find this top-down vision in the education of online film audiences. Through the implementation of ‘rituals of accompaniment’, we are able to anchor the experience in a cultural perspective. In the platforms of my sample, this accompaniment essentially takes the form of informational support, which invites audiences to extend the cinematographic experience by working on what Leveratto calls their ‘spectatorial competence’ (Leveratto 2003).

This informational backing – often orally borne in traditional mediation systems – here takes the form of written materials: long texts or short texts shed light on the three constitutive dimensions of cinema education in France: cinematographic culture education; education via cinematographic image; and cinematographic language education.

Cinema education is the most represented in France, and takes the form of documentary texts regarding the production contexts of works, their position in the film history, and their aesthetic and formal qualities. Special attention is paid to the director: the interest given to the labour of creation, to the genesis of the work, to its place in the oeuvre of the filmmaker. This confirms the function of the French *politique des auteurs* in the tradition of cinephile culture. It is therefore not uncommon to find the profiles of honoured directors on cinephile platforms. On the cinephile platform Bretagne & Diversité, for example, profiles of directors such as Gérard Alle, Emmanuel Audrain or René Vautier are available. Other cinephile platforms, such as UniversCiné and MFFF, include profiles of directors in combination with interviews, while cinephile platforms such as Bref Cinéma and MFFF include master classes in the form of short videos.

In keeping with the history of educational cinematography, and nowadays with the objectives of the French organisation Art in Education (AIE), special attention paid to education via cinema leads to the contribution of extra-cinematographic information relating to different topics raised by film works. As Lardoux reminds us, ‘Cinema, as an art, leads to looking into great subjects, whether metaphysical, existential, or historical’ (2017, 17). This concern sometimes results in specific supplementary materials, such as fact sheets devoted to minority groups around the world on Bretagne & Diversité, or production notes that accompany certain films on KuB. Or it is directly part of the editorial logics adopted by some cinephile platforms, such as ARTE, UniversCiné, Benshi, Tënk, Le Kinéscope, Bretagne & Diversité, KuB, Mémoire and MFFF. In the latter cases, the aim is to bring together films dedicated to similar topics, in order to bring them into dialogue with one another and thus to illuminate the topic from various points of view.

From an educational point of view, some cinephile platforms in France also teach in-depth about the meaning of film texts through cinematographic language education, with the purpose of strengthening audio-visual literacy. That is what Bergala theorized by the concept of a ‘fragment linked together’ (2002, 108). That means that the juxtaposition of film fragments is linked by an ‘idea of cinema’, such as an effect, a choice of direction, an aesthetic, or a theme, could produce meaning for educational purposes. Some cinephile platforms, like Le Kinetoscope and Benshi, for instance, propose specific themes structured around selected questions. They are able to let the audience compare, confront and intellectualise a specific concept on the basis of works assembled for this purpose. Le Kinetoscope invites exploring such questions based on a sample of short films. They assume that each film develops ‘a singular way to answer the asked question,’ and that its rapprochement allows for ‘putting in perspective different purposes driven by directors, their aesthetic choices and their bias in staging’ (Le Kinetoscope 2022). Education about cinematographic language is sometimes developed in a more traditional form through informational backing, like on the Upopi platform, which is particularly illustrative of this trend.

By way of conclusion to this section of the chapter, cinephile platforms in France also reinforce the educational dimension of their action by redirecting users to external sources of information, such as other cinephile sites that are not focused on online viewing. That is an impulse that is particularly symptomatic of the solidarity that constitutes the cinephile system.

## **Horizontal Education: the Missing Link of Cinephile Mediation?**

As was noted in the introduction to this chapter, the cinephile mediation model traditionally includes another constitutive side, resorting to horizontality's virtues in education. If discussions or exchanges more informally fulfil this role in mediation systems in the presence of the audience, what happens with this dimension in the framework of cinephile platforms? Two main hazards make the establishment of this experiment complex. The first is the non-simultaneity of the experience on one side, since according to the principles of delinearisation of content, nothing compels audiences to watch the same titles at the same time. The well-known expression 'anytime, anywhere, any device' reflects the flexibility that digital devices and online viewing offer. The second involves limits specific to online exchange modalities on the other side.

To answer the first of those challenges, the cinephile platforms increasingly consider implementing a catalogue strategy based on the principle of rotation. As already noted, that is a strategy employed to restrict choice around limited time offers, which makes it more likely that audiences watch the same content at approximately the same time. Reflecting the distribution model that has been proposed by Benghozi and Paris (2008, 697), these players experiment with the principle of 'ubiquitous limited continuous availability' to take advantage of the flexibility of online viewing, and the need for redirecting distribution through time and space.

To go further in this direction, other experiments seek to reintroduce the concept of 'appointment viewing' on VOD, in order to consider cultural consumption not as a solitary practice, but as a social collective construction. According to Éthis (2007, 12):

Technology changes which support evolution of attendance methods must be careful to this fundamental fact, otherwise appointment whether in cinema rooms, in front of television, or in front of a computer monitor, could lose its social quintessence and then the meaning of this cinematographic practice which is never defined itself by onanism it puts on, but by share(s) it implies.

To structure the meetings with films thought as appointments, cinephile platforms seek to organise their catalogues in such a way as to give it an autonomous temporality, that audiences are asked to follow. As Freissinier (ARTE) noted in 2017: 'We've got different levers to create urgency, to eventise our contents.'

These levers are essentially based on three strategies. The first is to editorialise in a privileged way 'novelties', a term which covers either the introduction of new titles for platform with large catalogues, or the renewal of programming for those based on the rotating selection principle. The second takes advantage of events set in the calendar to raise attention for films: such as seasons, important dates from civil or religious calendar, or events relative to political or cultural topicality. They are pretexts for specific 'programming,' made particularly attractive by this alignment with interests of the moment. For example, leading up to the Cesars' ceremony for the best French films in February 2022, the cinephile platform Bref Cinéma specifically programmed some films around previous winners of that ceremony, while

UniversCiné and ARTE programmed some films that were nominated for Césars that year. The third strategy extends the principle of thematic programming, this time according to issues that the curators of the platforms want to highlight, without any link to current events or the calendar.

If these editorial logics help to draw the attention of audience to specific films, horizontal education also implies that exchanges could occur between audiences who share the same experience. It is probably at this level that online traditional cinephile mediation modality encounters a stumbling block. Some cinephile platforms, such as ARTE, Mémoire, UniversCiné and Benshi, included comment areas for each film, but most of them neglected that option because audience engagement was too low. Moreover, when some audience members used it, it was more in the form of judgments and peremptory recommendations, without arguing, very distant from the critical exercise in thinking to which cinephilia aspires. Some platforms experimented with social networks to relocate the establishment of critical discussion, but without much more success.

It appears that the exchange, the shared reflexion – which is the base of cinephile mediation – cannot manage, for the time being, to find its counterpart on cinephile platforms. Two reasons can be invoked to understand this phenomenon. First, the individualization of the encounter pertaining to this system entails a form of communication that is less assertive than in the framework of collective watching. The expression of a written point of view turns out to be involving much more effort than expressing a point-of-view verbally. Second, the absence of a moderator to lead a discussion is detrimental. During face-to-face debates, the role of moderator is essential to nourish reflection and to encourage participation, but this process is difficult to replicate on online platforms.<sup>3</sup>

## **Conclusion**

These last remarks about education lead to point about the role that the ‘mediator’ occupies within cinephile platforms. Even if activities as observed in public, in-person systems are difficult to translate to online ‘spaces,’ we can nevertheless still observe the presence of one or several mediators on cinephile platforms, suggesting a process of re-intermediation. That process of re-intermediation is not only technical, but also human. That is most obvious in the sharing of tastes, judgments, choice from one or several personalities, often identified on the platform. As Adrien Desanges from the cinephile platform Benshi notes: ‘Films are chosen by human beings, incarnated. Not by computers, or algorithms. The recommendation, if any, is not an algorithmic product, but someone who think that this film is good’ (2018). Henceforth the choice, on that platform, to sign each presentation sheet of films, to personify the prescriber's work, constitute an affirmation of the subjectivity inherent to cinephilia. The recurring presence of ‘I’ and ‘we’ in articles on these platforms, on associated social networks, or on the newsletters sent to their audiences, evokes his presence in shaping the service’s platform for users, even if the digital environment does not allow for his embodiment to the extent found in the physical, analogue context in theatrical cinemas.

We can note that the extension in the online universe of pre-existing dichotomy in cinematographic and audio-visual industry (cultural industries on one side, and a cinephile niche market on the other side), also results in an attempt to rethink the mediation model in the

online market. Online cinephile users can rediscover the long-established symbolic environment that structures their special relationship with cinema.

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## **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> About ideas consisting of considering the passion for cinema according to systemic approach, see Taillibert 2020 (37-47).

<sup>2</sup> There are currently four such programmes: "Maternelle au cinéma" for nursery schools, "École au cinéma" for primary schools, "Collège au cinéma" for middle schools, and "Lycéens et apprentis au cinéma" for high schools.

<sup>3</sup> We though must note that there have been interesting experiences with debates organised through videoconferences by film festivals. They experimented, forced by lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic, with online debates.