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# FROM IVORY TOWER TO CROSS-MEDIA PERSONAS

## The heterogeneous cultural critic in the media

**Nete Nørgaard Kristensen** and **Unni From**

*This article introduces a theoretical typology of four rival yet converging ideal types of cultural critics in contemporary media culture and in cultural journalism, more specifically, encapsulated by the term the heterogeneous cultural critic and characterized by different kinds of authority and expertise: (1) the intellectual cultural critic, who is closely connected to an aesthetic tradition, bohemia and/or academia, or institutionalized cultural capital; (2) the professional cultural journalist, who is first and foremost embedded in a media professional logic; (3) the media-made arbiter of taste, whose authority is closely linked to practical experience with cultural production and repeated charismatic media performances; and (4) the everyday amateur expert, who offers subjective opinions and represents experience-based cultural taste. The aim is to provide an analytical minimum model for future empirical studies by outlining the contours of the multiple, objective and subjective, professional and non-professional cultural "authorities" of contemporary media culture.*

**KEYWORDS** celebrity capital; charismatic authority; cultural criticism in the media; cultural journalism; heterogeneous cultural critics; media capital; media intellectuals

### Introduction

A recurring issue in academia as well as in the public debate is *who* qualifies as cultural critics or opinion makers in the public realm. The *Huffington Post* headline "The Death of Criticism or Everyone is a Critic" (November 14, 2011) encapsulates the current two-sided debate, often leaning towards the critical side as exemplified by doomsday headlines such as *The Observer's* "Is the Age of the Critic Over?" (January 30, 2011). In "A Critic's Manifesto", published in *The New Yorker* (August 28, 2012), writer and critic Daniel Mendelsohn presented the equation "KNOWLEDGE + TASTE = MEANINGFUL JUDGEMENT" as the essence of cultural criticism, arguing that not everyone is or can be a critic "because very few people have the rare combination of qualities that make a good critic". Good criticism, in his view, includes the capability "to mediate intelligently and stylishly between a work and its audience; to educate and edify in an engaging and, preferably, entertaining way". These examples concern the more overarching issue addressed in this article of *the authority and legitimacy of the cultural critic becoming increasingly heterogeneous in contemporary, Western media culture, and in cultural journalism more specifically.*

Today's institutionalized media—newspapers, magazines, radio, and television—allocate the role of cultural critic, pundit, or arbiter of taste to a variety of intellectuals, experts, media professionals, and celebrities from the cultural scene (e.g., Jacobs and Townsley 2011; Schlesinger 2009). At the same time, ordinary cultural consumers exchange experience-based cultural evaluations through "likes", tweets, and subjective

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amateur reviews by means of digital media technologies (e.g., Verboord 2014). Contemporary cultural criticism and debate, in its many institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms, thus challenge and complement the agenda-setting function of printed newspapers' cultural pages, which have long, at least in a Western context, provided an institutionalized framework for public critical discussion of art and culture and functioned as a potentially important influencer of public cultural taste and consumption (Blank 2007; Verboord 2014). This, as indicated by the examples above, puts the traditional authority and self-understanding of cultural critics in the news media to the test, confronting the cultural public sphere with democratic potentials and challenges.

In this article, we propose a typology of four rivalling yet converging types of cultural critics or cultural opinion makers, who are engaged in and influence the cultural debate in contemporary, Western media culture and in cultural journalism, more specifically. These four types are encapsulated by what we conceptualize as *the heterogeneous cultural critic*:

- *the intellectual cultural critic*, whose authority is closely connected to an aesthetic tradition, bohemia and/or academia—or institutionalized cultural capital;
- *the professional cultural journalist*, who may associate her- or himself with the intellectual, but whose authority is equally embedded in a media professional logic;
- *the media-made arbiter of taste*, whose authority is closely linked to practical experience with cultural production and repeated media performances; she or he thus draws on both professional customs or skills and personal charisma; and
- *the everyday amateur expert*, offering subjective opinions, and representing experience-based cultural taste and layman's authority.

The first two well-established and relatively clearly demarcated types are challenged and influenced by the last two newcomers, who have increasingly come to dominate mediated cultural opinion making. However, they are less easily delineable due to the blurring of their boundaries *vis-à-vis* each other. The typology does not provide a hierarchical perspective; the intellectual is not considered more significant, valuable, legitimate, or ideal than the media-made arbiter of taste. Rather, the four types are associated with or characterized by different *kinds* of authority, expertise, or capital. As a consequence, the typology implies that rivalling and converging paradigms of objective and subjective evaluations and media professional and non-professional cultural authorities coexist and potentially compete in contemporary media culture.

The aim of the article is, firstly, to provide an overview, from a non-normative perspective, of some of the media historical and structural changes that have occasioned the contemporary heterogeneity of cultural critics in the media. These include media technological and institutional changes, professional changes in journalism as well as in cultural journalism, more specifically, and changes in the relationship between media producers and media users, or audiences. Thus, even though cultural criticism is a very broad and cross-humanistic research field, we find that media and journalism studies, in particular, provide productive theoretical and analytical frameworks because contemporary cultural criticism is so extensively embedded in and formed by media-related circumstances. In addition to situating "the heterogeneous cultural critic" within the broad field of cultural criticism, we have therefore turned to media and journalism studies as well as celebrity studies. This is done with a view to explaining the more recent emergence and increasing presence or dominance of media-made arbiters of taste and everyday amateur experts in the cultural public sphere. One might argue that these newcomers exemplify the central role of media when it comes to producing and

reproducing cultural critics. The article also aims to provide an analytical *minimum* model of four ideal types for future empirical studies by outlining the contours and the heterogeneity of the competing, intersecting, overlapping, and mutually influential critical voices in contemporary cultural debate in Western media.

As is the case with all typologies, our conceptual model is a theoretical construct (Doty and Glick 1994), and empirical analysis may reveal that hierarchies among the stipulated four types do in fact exist. Empirical analysis may also reveal that the same agent performs varying critical roles in different contexts and thus possesses traits from more than one ideal type. Accordingly, the typology is not limited to one specific cultural field (film, literature, fashion, food, etc.), although the performance and authority of the specific type of critic will most likely be influenced by the cultural field in question. These empirical issues will not be addressed in this article, since it is first and foremost a theoretical contribution based on existing research literature, but, hopefully, the typology will be tested and operationalized in future empirical research.

In the following, first we locate our proposed typology within the very large research field of “cultural criticism”; second, we briefly introduce “authority” as a theoretical key concept for our typology; and third, we develop our four-sided typology of the “heterogeneous cultural critic” and the characteristics of each ideal type. These steps allow us to argue that the current, Western media landscape provides new voices of and platforms for cultural deliberation, which dissolve and transform conceptions of authority and expertise in cultural criticism, and blur the boundaries between professionals and non-professionals.

### Demarcation of Cultural Criticism

Cultural criticism is a broad concept that intersects with a range of humanistic disciplines and spaces for deliberation. The rich research literature on the topic provides different definitions, distinctions, and typologies, often associated with various institutional settings (e.g., Bordwell 1991; Elkins 2003; Said 1984; Titchener 1998). Said (1984), for example, argues that (literary) criticism is performed in reviews and journalism, in the historical and theoretical work of scholars/academia, and in classroom appreciation and interpretation. Similarly, Bordwell (1991) makes a distinction between three kinds of (film) critical publications associated with different macro institutions: journalism (in the press/news media), essayistic publications (in monthly magazines, for example), and academic research (in scholarly journals). The kinds of cultural criticism performed within these different institutional settings are distinctive and characterized by specific forms of authority and expertise, or, in the terms of Said (1984, 2), “a very precise division of intellectual labor”. This division includes, for example, the norms and practices of professional journalism, or the norms and practices of scholarly work. But these forms of cultural criticism also influence each other; academic as well as essayistic approaches stimulate the critical approach in the news media (Gjelsvik 2002) and vice versa (Baumann 2001). A common feature, however, is that they all provide cultural criticism top-down (Verboord 2014), precisely by being performed by agents (typically) associated with (some kind of) cultural expertise, knowledge, and authority. In consequence, none of the existing distinctions include the non-professionals or “amateurs”, providing cultural criticism from a bottom-up or experienced-based perspective as part of the cultural critical equation.

A recurring position in the literature on cultural criticism, regardless of its institutional setting, is a critical stance on the current favouring of generalists at the expense of specialists (Dahlgren 2012; Walsh 2003) and the, allegedly, increasing marginalization of traditional cultural criticism and art reviewing, i.e., the decline of intellectually or academically grounded deliberation and evaluation of art and culture (e.g., Bech-Karlsen 1991; Elkins 2003; Lund 2005; McDonald 2007). This echoes critical arguments on changes in (cultural) journalism more generally, declaring that cultural journalism is increasingly news-driven and de-prioritizes critical contemplation (e.g., Lund 2005; Larsen 2008). These various arguments stress the necessity of more thoroughly considering the layman's contributions to the current reconfiguration of cultural critical authority and expertise in light of the changing relations between producers and users in the media. Accordingly, Gillespie (2012) argues for a more heuristic definition of criticism as a concept and distinguishes between feedback (e.g., audiences giving feedback on YouTube), reviews (by users, advertisers, or journalists involving a more commercial perspective), and criticism (by professionals and/or intellectuals providing more than merely judgements of taste) (Gillespie 2012, 62).

Just as it is difficult to narrow down the concept of cultural criticism, it is also challenging to provide an unequivocal definition of what cultural critics do. As implied by our typology, the practice of cultural criticism is presently performed in multifarious ways by a variety of agents, labelled by a range of overlapping terms: intellectuals, experts, cultural critics, reviewers, cultural journalists, commentators, pundits, opinion makers, arbiters of taste, etc. In the present context, we use "cultural critic" as an overall term to emphasize the focus on *culture* (rather than society at large, politics, or economics), but we also turn to Titchener's (1998) distinction between "the critic" and "the reviewer". Based on specialized knowledge, the former analyses cultural objects and trends, while the latter, among other professional obligations as a journalist, reviews cultural objects, often within a range of cultural fields. One might argue that the "critic" applies a broad, or anthropological, approach to culture as "a whole way of life" (Williams [1958] 2011), while the "reviewer" addresses a more confined aesthetic conception of culture (Gans 1999). Our typology comprises both the "critic" and the "reviewer", but we emphasize Titchener's (1998) distinction because it concretizes the overall practices of cultural critics as "cultural intermediaries" in the original terms of Bourdieu (1984).

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984, 325), among other things, addressed the professionalization of occupations mediating between fields of (cultural) production and consumption, and he argued that the typical (at that time) "new" cultural intermediaries included "the producers of cultural programmes on TV and radio or the critics of 'quality' newspapers and magazines and all the writer-journalists and journalist-writers". These agents represented "professional tastemakers and authorities of legitimation" (Maguire 2014, 21). More recently, Maguire and Matthews (2012) have made a distinction between three dimensions characterizing what the cultural intermediary does in *contemporary* society: frame goods by ascribing value to cultural products; claim expertise based on their cultural, social, and, in the terms of Couldry (2003, 2012), media meta-capital; and have impact by attributing legitimacy to cultural artefacts and influencing the negotiation of "quality". Of particular importance in this context is their argument that "all cultural intermediaries rely more or less on personal dispositions and cultural capital as the basis of their professional credibility" (Maguire and Matthews 2012, 556). This namely alludes to the blurring boundaries of the personal and the professional, the private and the public.

It also indicates that the concept of the cultural intermediary ties in with our proposed typology but must be further developed, because it originated in a media context quite different from the current one. The heterogeneity of cultural criticism in today's cross-media landscape implies that the "old" and "new" cultural intermediaries in Bourdieu's original conceptualization (that is, the cultural intellectuals and professional cultural journalists in our typology) are supplemented and potentially challenged by the "new-new" cultural intermediaries, suggested by our typology (that is, the media-made arbiters of taste and the everyday amateur experts). These new voices potentially (also) come to influence "notions of *what*, and thereby *who*, is legitimate, desirable and worthy, and thus by definition what and who is not" (Maguire and Matthews 2012, 552).

### Authority

Before addressing the heterogeneous authority of the cultural critic in contemporary media culture in more detail, we briefly address the concept of "authority" itself. When trying to define "what is authority", Furedi (2013, 9) in his recent book on the sociological history of authority argues that "Those in authority are presumed to have 'power over the opinions of others', they have power to 'inspire belief' and a 'title to be believed'". This is only one of many definitions in the extensive literature on the multifaceted concept of authority. It does, however, comply well with our conception of how the cultural critic (in his or her many forms) claims cultural authority by performing as "cultural intermediaries" as defined above, originally by Bourdieu (1984) and more recently by Maguire and Matthews (2012, 2014).

Of particular interest to this article is the recurring observation that authority is increasingly being questioned or challenged in contemporary society, rather than being affirmed or appraised (Furedi 2013). The traditional institutions of authority, such as religion or, later, science, have lost their authority, which already in the mid-twentieth century led Arendt to argue that "authority has vanished from the modern world" (quoted in Furedi 2013, 11). Forty years later, Giddens (1991) contended that in the age of high modernity there are no "determinant authorities" (194), but rather multiple or a "diversity of 'authorities'" (5), which the public can invest their trust in or choose to ignore, the point being that the command of these multiple authorities "[is] no longer 'taken as binding'" in contrast to earlier times (Furedi 2013, 3). This leads Furedi to proclaim that "society faces a crisis of authority" (11). Couldry links this crisis of authority to the societal transformations promoted by the changing and digitalized media landscape: "One emerging aspect of media's influence on social organization is the transformation of authority in a digital media age" (Couldry 2012, 153) because "new information flows make institutions more porous" (154). As indicated, some argue that this situation also characterizes the authority of the cultural critic, at least the cultural critic traditionally associated with academia and aesthetic knowledge, as explained below.

The ambition of this article is not to clarify whether the current heterogeneity of cultural critics is a sign of crisis or prosperity but rather, as indicated, to *display* this current diversity and explicate on what kind(s) of authority the legitimacy of the four ideal types rests. Sociologists have discussed what constitutes legitimate authority for many years. Among the most quoted and contested suggestions are Weber's (1978) distinction between three ideal types of legitimate, political rule or authority: traditional, rational, and charismatic authority. Even though Weber's typology links to contexts quite dissimilar

from the socio-cultural sphere of mediated, cultural criticism, we find it useful, not least because it provides a starting point for discussing the historical positions of (cultural) authority and suggests one way of characterizing the competing forms of authority of contemporary cultural critics in a changed media landscape. Rational authority and charismatic authority are of particular importance in the context of this article in light of “the gradual dissolution of the authority of tradition” (Furedi 2013, 3) explained above. Rational authority is based on rules and regulations that determine who are in a position to rule. In the context of cultural critics, this can be linked to which societal groups are officially or formally perceived as cultural critics, based on their credentials, or their institutionalized cultural capital, to use Bourdieu’s (1986) term. Rational authority is thus not associated with a specific empirical person but rather with those who, based on existing regulations, are appointed to rule. Charismatic authority is contradictory to rational authority since it is first and foremost associated with a specific individual and the exceptional attributes of this persona, as long as she or he is viewed as exceptional. A range of cultural personas—e.g., celebrities, pundits, or media-made arbiters of taste—are characterized by precisely this kind of charismatic authority, and are, as a result, granted media access and attention. Celebrity status is thus by some associated with charismatic authority (see Couldry 2012; Driessens 2013; Ferris 2007; Kurzman et al. 2007). It can be argued that (some) cultural critics are also associated with traditional authority because, historically, they (and their peers) have been *acknowledged* for their intellectual performance. In these cases, their authority is not least based on the legacy associated with enlightenment, intellectualism, and the aura of art and aesthetic creation.

As also emphasized by Weber (1978), these three types of authority are theoretically viewed as pure but will often be mixed in empirical practice. Accordingly, the cultural critics outlined by our typology must in theory be viewed as ideal types although they will often be associated with more than one kind of authority in practice. This is not least due to the fact, as argued by Couldry (2012, 155), that “questions of authority are best understood by reference to the detailed dynamics of specific subfields” and thus the specific cultural areas and mediated contexts in which the various types of cultural critics perform.

## Typology

In the following, we develop our typology more thoroughly in order to provide a descriptive but theory-based framework to further elaborate the contours of contemporary cultural critics in the media.

### *The Intellectual Cultural Critic*

One noteworthy voice in cultural criticism and in cultural journalism, more specifically, is provided by the public intellectual, who historically has been a front figure and still seems to possess a role in the framing of cultural debate, reviewing, and opinion making. Examples of such twentieth-century thinkers include Palestinian American cultural critic and intellectual Edward Said, and Italian semiotician, philosopher, author, and literary critic Umberto Eco. However, as indicated, the intellectual has also been challenged or even marginalized, particularly by the media-made arbiters of taste and everyday amateur experts but, following Dahlgren (2012, 95), the role of the intellectual critic has always

“evolved and changed under changing historical circumstances”. Thus, whereas the public intellectual formerly represented a strong pillar within society, the intellectual today has become one voice among other strong voices (Madsen 2009, 47–48).

Scholars have analysed and discussed the role and nature of the intellectual intensively. Posner (2001, 35) defines the public intellectual as someone “expressing himself in a way that is accessible to the public, and the focus of his expression is on matters of general public concern of (or inflected by) a political or ideological cast”. Thus, the public intellectual may, as already indicated, address a range of issues relating to a broad or anthropological conception of culture (Gans 1999; Williams ([1958] 2011) and “offer general reflections on the direction or health of society” (Posner 2001, 35). Another common definition, in line with Posner’s, asserts that public intellectuals are sometimes affiliated with universities, they are typically driven by ideas and characterized by their often extreme viewpoints and involvement in controversial discussions or debates, and they have a communicative capacity to reach and engage large audiences (Dahlgren 2012). Accordingly, they have traditionally been associated with projects of enlightenment (Arnoldi 2005) and intellectual autonomy (Gramsci 2003), and they have often situated themselves in opposition to the ruling class (e.g., Said 1994).

However, this idealistic approach to the public intellectual is complemented by two other definitions (Arnoldi 2005). Firstly, public intellectuals are also perceived as an elitist group belonging, paradoxically, to the ruling class by virtue of their often professional identity as academics. They are thus associated with the power elite of society, who they were also implicitly destined to challenge. Secondly, public intellectuals are viewed in light of their role as mediators, communicating and translating scientific knowledge, results, and approaches to a broader public. This latter depiction transcends traditional conceptions of the public intellectual and overlaps with the “professional cultural journalist” in our typology, whom we return to below. Cultural journalism was, for example, attended to or performed by academic specialists for many years (Hovden and Knapskog 2008, 2015), whose authority was defined by a strong knowledge of art and aesthetics and legitimized by their cultural capital as academics or performing artists (Arnoldi 2005, 40).

These definitions of public intellectuals as an elitist group and as mediators of knowledge are closely interrelated, also in cultural criticism. Both are associated with tradition, the legacy of enlightenment, and the aura of art and aesthetic creation. But at the same time, their authority is anchored in institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) in terms of their academic or artistic credentials—certificates, titles, awards, etc.—which provide the elitist public intellectual with the rational authority or legitimacy to perform as *experts* on general public affairs, for example, in the media, or as consultants in public committees, etc. (Albæk, Christiansen, and Togeby 2003, 939). Thus, they occupy powerful positions within society, including the political and cultural public sphere, because they are given the opportunity to comment on and evaluate cultural policies in general, and cultural trends and products, more specifically. In consequence, this conception of the public intellectual explicitly contrasts with Posner’s definition, emphasizing independence and autonomy as well as the potential engagement of broader publics.

These definitions suggest how the various voices of public intellectuals have contributed and continue to contribute to the cultural debate. In line with Dahlgren (2012, 98), we argue that the definition of the genuine public intellectual is “a grey zone”, because “there is no census of the population” (Posner 2001, 170), and because the



different and yet converging types of public intellectuals all seem to play a role in cultural criticism in a mediated context.

Another way to conceptualize the cultural critical voice of the public intellectual in the media is to outline the genres they use when engaging in the public debate, and when they are used as sources within journalistic texts. According to Posner (2001, 36), the public intellectual applies a range of genres, but of particular importance are commentary, criticism, political satire, and the expert testimony. Posner mainly addresses the *content* of the output of public intellectuals, while others have worked with formalistic and stylistic genres such as the essay (Madsen 2009) as the hallmark of public intellectuals. Such opinionated genres epitomize cultural criticism within cultural journalism, they have framed the field for a long time (Kristensen and From 2011), and they have been used by the various intellectual voices in different ways. First of all, some intellectuals have engaged as authors of their own texts, either in opinion pieces or analyses, published in the press or other publications in order to comment on the state of the cultural public sphere. Secondly, especially the elitist intellectuals are given voices as news sources of specialized scientific knowledge, e.g., when communicating specific scholarly results. Furthermore, intellectuals are framed as legitimate sources of opinion within journalistic texts, and under these circumstances, provide more generalized knowledge anchored in a general conception of intellectuals as authorities to be consulted in light of their autonomous viewpoints. Thus, writers of intellectual capacity *and* scholars within the humanities compose a continuum of intellectual cultural critics associated with various forms of authority, institutional ties, and public engagement.

The media's framing of the intellectual as a legitimate source of information and opinion is also a discursive construction of authority. As a consequence, the intellectual or "expert" is *assigned* authority because journalists "qualify and mix statements and roles and functions of sources and often it seems to be the way the source is introduced or described that has influence on whether they are perceived as experts, advocates or in other roles" (Allagaier 2011, 481). This indicates that even though an overall characteristic of the intellectual is his or her independent voice in the public cultural sphere, this voice may, in fact, take various forms and be used in quite dissimilar manners by professional journalists, who themselves, as discussed further below, increasingly frame cultural critique from a media-professional perspective.

### *The Professional Cultural Journalist*

The professional cultural journalist often identifies with the intellectual critic which is justifiable, since many cultural journalists, as indicated, have one leg in academia and/or the arts world and another in journalism. Cultural journalists are also often better educated than the average journalist (Hovden and Knapskog 2008), so cultural journalists such as American film critic Roger Ebert, awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his film criticism, British commentator on music, culture, and cultural politics Norman Lebrecht, or Danish cultural editor Rune Lykkeberg, are in many ways characterized by considerable, institutionalized cultural capital. However, media institutional and technological changes have altered the professional practice of cultural journalism and cultural criticism in the news media during the past decades. In the following, we outline how these changes have influenced the ways in which the professional cultural journalist gains authority by way of competing types of professionalism—organizational professionalism, occupational professionalism,

and aesthetic specialization—which today all seem to define the professional cultural journalist as a cultural critic.

Örnebring (2009) argues that two kinds of professionalism characterize and strive in contemporary journalism more generally: *organizational professionalism*, giving priority to organizational goals and division or rationalization of labor, etc.; and *occupational professionalism*, focusing on the ideals, norms, and values of the profession. The former emphasizes an efficient and commercially sound production of cultural journalism that includes multi-skilled journalists or generalists who cover several cultural beats and produce “news you can use” on cultural offerings. The stories are distributed to several platforms and by means of various genres—news, critique, opinion pieces—that may brand the news medium; that is, cultural journalism dominated by media logics (Hjarvard 2013). In contrast, occupational professionalism emphasizes critical, independent, original, and investigative/analytical cultural journalism, adhering to the publicist and sovereign norms of journalism; that is, cultural journalism dominated by the ideals and logics of the profession (Kammer 2013).

However, the occupational professionalism of cultural journalists also differs from the occupational professionalism of news journalists more generally, since cultural journalists feel “qualitatively different from mainstream reporters” (Harries and Wahl-Jørgensen 2007, 626; see also Hellman and Jaakkola 2012; Kristensen and From 2011). First and foremost, cultural journalism is dominated by an evaluating or opinionated rather than a neutral approach. This is particularly due to the above-mentioned centrality of opinionated genres, such as the review, and in-depth and/or narrative genres, such as the portrait and the feature, but it is also due to the implicit association with literary journalism. Both the opinionated and the “featuristic” generic approach aims to convey not only aesthetically grounded evaluations or information about cultural persons, products, and trends, but also to provide entertainment, cultural experiences, and engagement (From 2010). Furthermore, cultural journalists have traditionally been closely intertwined with the cultural sphere and its creative agents who perform as news sources (Marshall 2005). These source networks, and sometimes even friendships, with artists and cultural producers (Kristensen 2003) provide the journalists with considerable social capital (Bourdieu 1986). However, they also challenge their professional autonomy or occupational professionalism in the traditional sense, and thus their professional authority. Not only are cultural journalists typically passionate about their topic(s); they also perceive themselves as conveyors or communicators of culture rather than watchdogs (Kristensen 2003), performing as “cultural intermediaries” between producers and users or consumers of culture (Bourdieu 1984) rather than adhering to the adversary model of traditional journalism (Blumler and Gurevitch 1981).

Research indicates that the cultural and aesthetic paradigm of specialization in cultural journalism and criticism is increasingly being subordinated to the media professional or organizational paradigm, focusing on news values, news genres, adaption to reader interests, and new patterns of use—or media logics (Hellman and Jaakkola 2012; Jaakkola et al. 2015; Larsen 2008; Kristensen and From 2011). Generalists are thus challenging the specialists among the professional cultural journalists. The decreasing number of freelancers, associated with the universities, performing the role as reviewers in the news media is empirical evidence of the increasing dominance of the media organizational logic (Hovden and Knapskog 2008), as is the replacement of aesthetic (and intellectual) experts by professionally educated cultural journalists, carrying out

cultural reporting as well as cultural reviewing. Hjarvard (2009), more generally, speaks of a new cultural class of professional media representatives, giving priority to the interests of the audience and the media institution rather than canons and art, and thus displacing the power balance of the cultural elite. This can be seen as one example of how the authority of traditional institutions has been challenged. Furthermore, Kristensen and From (2011) demonstrate the importance of cultural journalists/critics as branding tools and trademarks for institutionalized media in the increasingly competitive media environment. At the same time, the media logics—or organizational professionalism—reinforce the authority and status of the professional cultural journalist in the increasingly heterogeneous landscape of cultural pundits and opinion makers. Media institutions even (re)produce their own media intellectuals (Jacobs and Townsley 2011) by providing specific cultural journalists with public visibility, cultural legitimacy, and voice. In return, these media representatives supply brand value and reinforce the media institutions' cultural profile, thus supporting the organizational professionalism.

This implies that professional cultural journalists presently gain authority, first and foremost, from their affiliation with the institutionalized media and the media logic but also from what Couldry (2012) has termed media meta-capital, a concept that will be developed in the following section.

### *The Media-made Arbiter of Taste*

During the past 10 years, a new type of cultural critic has appeared more and more frequently in the public realm; we have termed this critical agent *the media-made arbiter of taste*. The authority of this new type is closely linked to practical experience with cultural production as well as to repeated media performances. In other words, it is linked to a mix of professional skill *and* personal charisma; examples include British media producer Simon Cowell, British comedian Russell Brand, and British chef Jamie Oliver. The digital cross-media environment has promoted these critical voices, who gain authority particularly by means of their “media meta-capital” (Couldry 2003, 2012) or their “celebrity capital” (Driessens 2013).

In Couldry's (2012, 140–142) conceptualization, drawing on Bourdieu and Champagne, the media increasingly determines what counts as important forms of capital within specific fields. Making reference to the political field and the increasingly porous authority of societal (including political) institutions, he argues, for example, that “individual political authority has ... become increasingly reliant on media-related capital and the ability to perform personality in the media” (Couldry 2012, 155). Similarly, media exposure and successful media performances have progressively become a determining factor for agents of artistic or cultural sub-fields, for commercial, political, and prestigious or symbolic reasons (Kristensen 2003; Kristensen and From 2015). The media's coverage of and attention to these fields may “alter the internal workings of that sub-field”, according to Couldry (2012, 141), because intensive media attention or accumulated media visibility may grant authority and power to agents performing within cultural areas such as food, music, or fashion—authority and power that may be used in other fields (Couldry 2003, 29).

The media-made arbiter of taste embodies these structural transformations because this type of cultural critic is characterized by the combination of *professional performances* and *media performances*: the primary experience of the media-made arbiter of taste is

within cultural production, such as designers designing fashion, architects shaping architecture, chefs creating gastronomy, and music producers composing lyrics. Such cultural production is based on professional skills, knowledge, and expertise, providing the media-made arbiter of taste with the (traditional) authority typically bestowed on practitioners of specific professions or crafts (e.g., Parsons 1939). At the same time, the media-made arbiter of taste is characterized by repeated performances in the media associated with his or her professional work. These performances could be blogging, featuring in articles, or participating in reality-formats, lifestyle programmes, television contest-programmes or game shows, such as *Project Catwalk*, *Hell's Kitchen*, or *The X Factor*. In these media (con)texts, the media-made arbiters of taste are acknowledged for their ("objective") talent for, for example, cooking, fashion design, or music production, at the same time as they are expected to convey or perform their subjective views and personalities. Thus, their authority as cultural critics is also attached to their status as publicly well-known figures. This public status allows them to perform the role of cultural experts on gastronomy, fashion, music, and lifestyle, and to provide (subjective) judgements of taste on, for example, "the good life" (healthy food, sustainable fashion textiles, etc.). These cross-media performances reproduce their status as publicly known and legitimate authorities within but sometimes also across cultural fields, because, as indicated, media-related capital can be used in various contexts. British cook Jamie Oliver, for example, not only performs the role of chef in the media but also becomes a critical voice on food, gastronomy, and ways of life (e.g., parenting) (Lewis 2008), and thus participates in public debate on lifestyle issues and the "good life".

Hence, media-made arbiters of taste are granted access to these media arenas also because of their charismatic authority, or their combination of cultural *and* media-related capital—or, in the terms of Maguire and Matthews (2012), their combination of the professional and the personal. As a consequence, they will often be bestowed with some kind of celebrity status (Kurzman et al. 2007). Couldry (2012, 143), for example, argues that "celebrities are people who have acquired large amounts of media-related capital through their appearance in media, which, under specific conditions, is available for use in a number of specific fields", while Driessens (2013, 552) proposes "celebrity capital" or "recognisability" as "accumulated media visibility that results from recurrent media representations". However, the media-made arbiters of taste are not only known for their charismatic personas performed in the media, i.e., their "well-knownness" (Boorstin 1961) or "attributed celebrity" (Rojek 2001). They are also known for their cultural production or "achieved celebrity" (Rojek 2001), because they must have some expertise, knowledge, or skill in order to become a media-made arbiter of taste, a cultural authority, and thus a cultural critic or expert in our conceptualization. This implies that the media-made arbiters of taste are personas, performing both their professional and (semi)-private selves.

Accordingly, the media-made arbiter of taste may follow different paths into the role as cultural critic by being invited to demonstrate specific talents (e.g., cooking or fashion design) or by commenting on specific issues in institutionalized (news) media (e.g., food in public schools or sustainable fashion production). She or he may also blog or tweet on various cultural issues and launch new ideas of cultural importance on social media. However, in contrast to the intellectual and the professional journalist, whose authorities are closely connected to tradition, knowledge, and professionalism, the primary charismatic authority of the media-made arbiter of taste is fragile. This, as argued by Weber (1978), is because charismatic authority is primarily bestowed upon individuals perceived

to have exceptional attributes. Thus, the media-made arbiter of taste only has authority as long as she or he is viewed as exceptional by the media and by the public. Weakened media capital, celebrity status, or celebrity capital, on the other hand, entails weakened authority (Couldry 2012) as cultural critic or arbiter of taste. Just as Kurzman et al. (2007, 363) claim that “Celebrity is status on speed”, the media-made arbiter of taste could similarly be viewed as a cultural critical agent on speed, quickly accumulating celebrity capital but potentially fading just as quickly.

Summing up, the media-made arbiter of taste thus combines objective and subjective evaluations, based on a combination of professional expertise as cultural producers and personal charisma.

### *The Everyday Amateur Expert*

During the past decade, scholars have discussed whether new digital media technologies strengthen or challenge democracy (Dahlberg 2011; Dahlgren 2012). It has been suggested that a more inclusive public sphere has emerged through media technologies, potentially giving individuals outside established media organizations voice (Castells 2001; Russell 2011). However, politically focused studies examining the actualization of this democratic potential apply a sceptical view because old structures seem to remain relatively unchanged (Hindman 2009; Morozov 2011), nor does digital democratization necessarily entail more people participating in political democracy (see also Dahlgren 2012). However, some argue that the cultural public sphere constitutes itself vibrantly across media platforms (Jenkins 2012; Kammer 2015; Verboord 2014) because digital technologies have paved the way for a new circuit of cultural critique, involving professionals, semi-professionals, and amateurs.

Following this line of reasoning, we argue that the amateur is an inevitable figure in contemporary cultural criticism in the media, not only because she or he provides new perspectives on cultural debate, but also because the amateur symbolizes a deconstruction of the division of labour between professionals and laypersons. The emergence of non-institutionalized media platforms as forums for cultural debate have contested the hierarchical and elitist logic of especially the printed cultural pages, which for years has set the agenda for cultural communication, review, and debate in a Northern European context. Especially since the introduction of WordPress, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc., in the mid-2000s, the amateur has become a noticeable voice in public debate. Some even argue that amateurs are “bypassing institutional gatekeepers and experts (like retailers, journalists, media critics and scholars) for the content generated by their counterparts” (Verboord 2014, 922).

However, what—or who—constitutes an amateur? Precise definitions of the amateur are sparse. One recurring but simple definition describes an amateur as someone who does not make a “livelihood from the activity” (Cox and Blake 2011, 206) but benefits from the activity by acquiring knowledge and skills, self-actualisation, and gratification, thus building up a strong identity through activities such as reviewing movies, collecting posters, discussing specific kinds of literature or popular music, etc. Thus, often amateurs have other careers but a strong passion for specific additional activities (Cox and Blake 2011, 206). Accordingly, the amateur has historically been defined as “taking the professional as a counterpoint” (Hamilton 2013, 180). Stebbins (1977, 594), for example, argues that the amateur is someone who strives to reach a professional level through

dedication, thus embodying the etymological meaning of “amateur”, i.e., “a lover of” (see also Hamilton 2013, 179). At the same time, the amateur is a person who either “intends to join the professional ranks” or a post-professional who “decided to abandon his profession” on a part-time basis (Stebbins 1977, 594).

However, recent research on “civic journalism”, “citizen journalism”, or “alternative journalism”—the diverse field has many terms—has more or less explicitly argued that amateurs and professionals are, at one and the same time, quite different but also quite similar, and they interact (e.g., Atton 2009). This indicates that we need to reconsider the professional as a “natural” counterpart of the amateur and vice versa. While the ethos and authority of the professional is anchored in an institutional, organizational, and, as implied, professional framing, the ethos of both the amateur and the professional is closely associated with their passion and capability to structure an argument targeted at a specific audience. Moreover, amateurs nowadays “sometimes get paid for their efforts” while “professionals often volunteer their services” (Hamilton 2013, 179). Due to these blurring boundaries between their worlds, a strict separation of the amateur and the professional seems neither productive nor reasonable anymore. Or as Atton (2009, 271) puts it, there “is a significant similarity between the fan as amateur writer and the professional writer as fan” because the dedicated amateur recognizes and adapts “the standards of excellence set and communicated” by the professionals (Stebbins 1992, 38).

This designates a complex and dynamic relation between professionals and amateurs displayed through newer concepts such as “the pro-am” (Leadbeater and Miller 2004), “the produser” (Bruns 2008), and “the prosumer” (Toffler 1980). When writing about television fans, Jenkins (2012, 86) even proposes the “fan critic” as an emerging critical institution despite its lack of official recognition. These “new” types of amateurs use a variety of genres and communities to engage in the public debate, for example, as critics on culture, providing evaluations and ideas legitimated by their subjective opinions and experience-based cultural taste. The amateurs participate in many different ways, the most important ones being as reviewers or commentators on professional cultural products on news websites (e.g., on movies; Verboord 2014), as reviewers or commentators on other amateurs’ productions on websites (e.g., reviews of blogs or YouTube productions), and as producers of fanzines, articles, blogs, and columns on the Web and in the printed press (e.g., on popular music or television series; Atton 2009; Jenkins 2012). Recent examples of digital media used as a platform for cultural critique by amateurs—or rather, pro-ams—are gamers, such as ProJared or PewDiePie, who discuss, test, and rate computer games online.<sup>1</sup> Both have engaged very large communities and represent new ways of reviewing (and testing) by combining visual insight, gaming skills, and (amateur) experience with and knowledge on the games, communicated by means of humour, identification, and personality. Hamilton (2013, 180) argues that these types of amateurs, gamers, and their peers, e.g., “the reality-celebrity, the social media user, the blogger, the citizen journalist, the hacker, and the media intern are all roles performed somewhere between the lines of paid/unpaid, professional/amateur, authorised/unofficial”.

Thus, newer digital media technologies have given ordinary citizens—or the everyday amateur experts—the opportunity to express subjective opinions and experience-based cultural taste to an unprecedented extent. They do so primarily by means of a layman’s authority, authenticity, and credibility, and by facilitating playful identification among peers. This explains the (potential) shift in division of labour between professional and non-professional critics. However, due to the multitude of “critical” voices, some of them,

e.g., ProJared or PewDiePie, paradoxically turn to mobilizing charismatic authority in order to gain popularity, voice, and thus the power to be critical agenda setters and tastemakers. Consequently, they come to mimic some of the characteristics of the media-made arbiters of taste and their mediatized cultural critique.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have proposed the concept *the heterogeneous cultural critic* and diagnosed four co-existing, potentially converging and competing ideal types of cultural critics, populating the digital cross-media landscape of the 2010s. By means of this typology, we have displayed the increasing heterogeneity of cultural critical agents in today's mediated cultural public sphere and, in particular, the various grounds on which their authority and legitimacy as cultural critics rest.

Our typology suggests that the rational and professional authority of *the intellectual cultural critic* and *the professional cultural journalist*—two well-established types of critics—is challenged and influenced by the charismatic and layman's authority of *the media-made-arbiter of taste* and *the everyday amateur expert*—two newcomers currently transforming and expanding mediated cultural criticism. The typology denotes that these multifarious cultural intermediaries' framing of cultural goods and claims to authority and expertise are anchored in different kinds of capital since personal or subjective preferences as well as media capital, or celebrity capital, appear to be as important as cultural capital and thus seem to constitute new types of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984; Couldry 2003, 2012; Dahlgren 2012; Driessens 2013; Maguire and Matthews 2012, 2014).

Our outlining of the four ideal types has revealed that within each type, a variety of sub-types or sub-agents co-exist, for example, the autonomous, bohemian intellectual, *and* the expert associated with academia; the professional cultural journalist grounded in the norms of the profession of journalism, *and* the freelance aesthetic occasionally reviewing or commenting on culture in institutionalized news media; the cultural producer becoming known in the media and bestowed with media or celebrity capital *and* the celebrity connoting cultural capital *and/or* becoming a cultural producer; the ordinary amateur or fan writing for pleasure *and* the pro-am developing a semi-professional brand and a crowd of peer followers. This suggests that the four ideal types and their many sub-variants have different media institutional ties and different relations to their audiences, conditioning their particular authority and making them contribute to the cultural public sphere in quite dissimilar ways. *Intellectual cultural critics*, for example, are characterized by independence from media institutional agendas and bonds. They are not hired opinion makers but offer viewpoints and expertise for free, or for "the public good", through a variety of media (books, opinion pieces, etc.). Furthermore, they are driven by their ideas and convictions and thus address broad audiences or an inclusive public sphere across cultural tastes, hierarchies, and media segments. Despite the norms of autonomy guiding journalism, *the professional cultural journalist* is indeed embedded in media institutional, organizational, and occupational structures since today's institutionalized news media reinforce the personal brand of professional cultural journalists, who, in return, become trademarks for specific media institutions. *The media-made arbiter of taste*, like the intellectual but contrary to the professional cultural journalist, is not part of *particular* media institutions. However, contrary to the intellectual and similar to the professional

cultural journalist, she or he is certainly dependent on institutionalized as well as non-institutionalized media for gaining visibility and recognition of her or his aura as persona and exceptional within cultural production. Finally, *the everyday amateur expert* is, in theory, dissociated from institutionalized media outlets even though these may merge into institution-like (media) groups or communities (see, e.g., Kammer 2015). They typically reach quite fractioned or specialized audiences or sub-publics, separated from a broader public discourse, but are still potentially capable of gathering larger groups of particular peers.

However, a common feature of the four ideal types is that they all need to possess some kind of cultural knowledge, skill, or expertise in order to gain authority and legitimacy as cultural critics despite this knowledge taking many different forms: intellectual expertise; professional journalistic norms and routines; skills as cultural producers; or layman's fascination and authentic devotion. Another common feature is the importance of the media displaying their knowledge and expertise, and supporting, reproducing, or reaffirming their authority as cultural critics, even though their ways of performing in and thus communicating by means of media differ. In other words, in mediatised culture and society (Hjarvard 2013), all four types have to convey some sort of personal charisma through various types of media to establish their authority and earn public recognition for their expertise.

The four ideal types can thus be said to reflect various historical periods of transition that have contributed to "heterogenizing" the critical voices participating in the cultural public sphere in a Western context. The intellectual cultural critic, who has been part of public, cultural debate for centuries (e.g., Posner 2001, 26), is still an important figure, but she or he has been transformed, especially during the past decades, due to reciprocal societal and media-related changes. The professional cultural journalist as we know him or her today is very much the result of professional changes in journalism during the twentieth century (e.g., Donsbach 2010), as well as media institutional transformations, especially during the past two decades. The media-made arbiter of taste, in the most extreme sense, exemplifies the mediatization of culture and society alluded to above (Hjarvard 2013) since the media-made arbiters of taste are a product of the media while at the same time providing content to the media. Finally, the everyday amateur expert is facilitated by digital media technologies, which have reconfigured the relations of media producers and media users, especially since the mid-2000s.

They thus jointly embody the complex and heterogeneous field of cultural criticism in contemporary media culture. How they more specifically interact and develop new types of criticism (and authority) within and across cultural fields, and within and across media, are empirical questions for future research to scrutinize.

## NOTE

1. American ProJared has more than 570,000 followers on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/user/DMJared/about>, accessed April 15, 2015), while Swedish PewDiePie has more than 36 million followers on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/user/PewDiePie/about>, accessed April 15, 2015).



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