

Positioning Arthouse in The Netherlands: Audience
Perspectives on the Dutch Arthouse Landscape in times
of Increasing Arthouse Commercialization and
Digitalization

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ABSTRACT

The boundaries between arthouse and mainstream cinema are blurring. With the increasing developments of arthouse commercialization and digitalization, the position of arthouse has shifted from a niche product towards a more mainstream stance. This trend has been covered by prior studies, but little is known about how audiences perceive this development. This is also the case for prior research on arthouse digitalization. The fast-growing technological-age that we live in now, has resulted in interesting developments in the digitalization of arthouse. There has been a rise of arthouse video-on-demand services, of which some try to bring the social experience of the physical theatre to one's home. These are new technical developments that might affect the sustainability of the arthouse theatre, but too little is known about this. Moreover, The Netherlands seems to be an interesting focus, since the number of arthouse theatre visits is growing more rapidly than its surrounding countries. Regarding The Netherlands, cross - over programming, Cineville and the notion of Dutch film festivals were the three central commercial aspects that were studied. Therefore, this research studies the perceptions of Dutch millennial arthouse fans on arthouse in The Netherlands, in times of increasing commercialization and digitalization of arthouse. By means of a qualitative approach, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 11 Dutch arthouse fans. The interviews took place in an online face-to-face setting through either Skype or Facetime and were recorded in audio and visuals. The transcriptions of the interview served as the generated data of which themes were established from. The findings suggest that arthouse fans acknowledge the developments of arthouse commercialization and digitalization and approve the results from these developments. They understand that these developments are needed for increasing the production and consolidation of arthouse. However, they seem to dislike the idea that arthouse commercialization results in lower artistic values in arthouse. The digitalization of arthouse is perceived as complementary to the arthouse theatre, which means that it is not seen as a threat. At last, even though arthouse slowly starts to become the new mainstream, the fans believe that the arts will always be preserved by the return of a new small-scaled type of arthouse.

Keywords: Arthouse cinema, Arthouse commercialization, Arthouse digitalization, audience perspectives, niche audience, mass audience, blurring boundaries, arthouse fans

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1. INTRODUCTION

In contrast to the large Dutch multiplex cinemas such as Pathé, small film theatres were formerly seen as dusty and boring. These film theatres were associated with places that only old people would visit. However, the growing popularity of Dutch film theatre visits and arthouse in general is now acknowledged (Filmfonds, 2019). This has caused for the changing position of arthouse to a more popular stand amongst the Dutch filmgoers, in which the developments of commercialization and digitalization of arthouse have a significant role. These developments of arthouse have led to a reevaluation of the literature about film, in which arthouse and mainstream cinema are placed as two different categories.

There is a widely recognized distinction that can be made within cinema (Kersten, 2013). This separation in the film world places arthouse films as a niche product, which refers to the small-scale and artistic form of cinema. Moreover, arthouse films are usually produced independently and only showcased in special film theaters that are intended for niche audiences. On the other hand, there are mainstream films (blockbusters), that are mainly produced by powerful film institutions such as Hollywood. Mainstream films focus on more large-scale and commercial film work, which are intended for the mass audience. While acknowledging the clear distinction of arthouse versus blockbusters from a traditional viewpoint (Bourdieu, 1993), times have most certainly changed. As a result of the more recent developments of arthouse commercialization and digitalization, the distinctive line between the two opposing groups in the film world has become more fluid. (Kersten, 2013; Warnier, 2017; Wilinsky, 2001). Regarding the film content, it means that characteristics of arthouse and mainstream content are fusing. Furthermore, film theatres and multiplexes are programming both types of films, instead of keeping it separate. On a digital perspective, there is an increasing amount of arthouse films available on demand. These developments have made arthouse more accessible for larger audiences, online and offline.

The changing position of arthouse can be explained by increasing commercialization in the Dutch film field. Commercialization in this case means, the growing accessibility of arthouse films in The Netherlands by means of the ambition to make arthouse more popular for everyone. This study focuses on three different commercializing aspects in the Dutch film field that has changed the position of arthouse (De Valck, 2014; Warnier, 2017). Firstly, cross-over programming is becoming more and more regular. This means that film theaters are screening mainstream films from multiplexes, while multiplexes are also adding more arthouse films into their programme. Furthermore, external organizations, such as *Cineville*,

try to make the arthouse experience more accessible and popular. These organizations work together with the arthouse theatres, by offering unlimited access to the theatre screenings for a profitable amount of money. Another commercial development is the notion of international film festivals. Film festivals such as International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR) are ideal for independent filmmakers to get recognition from the whole world. As a result, independent filmmakers are more encouraged to make films. This benefits the growth of the presence of arthouse in general but is in contrast to the traditional idea of arthouse as being small-scaled.

In addition to the commercializing aspects in the Dutch arthouse field, digitalization is an essential factor as well. Digitalization in this case, means the growing options of watching arthouse films digitally without time boundaries and from the comfort of someone's home. This has been made possible through Video-on-demand (VOD) services that provide arthouse films, but also simply by downloading films. According to Brent Lang (2017), Senior Film and Media editor for *Variety*, "there is mounting anxiety among theater owners, studio executives, filmmakers, and cinephiles that the lights may be starting to flicker. As consumer tastes and demands change..." (p. 1). With the growth of VOD services such as Netflix, audiences tend to enjoy the idea of watching media on demand. Following this idea of changing consumer behaviors, it would eventually have negative consequences for the existence of the cinema. However, multiplexes take counter actions by using the latest technologies for images and sound systems (Pardo, 2015). This way, visitors get a unique audiovisual experience that can solely be obtained in the cinema. This is a strong argument for audiences to choose cinemas over VOD. However, for arthouse theaters, the interactive cinema technologies do not apply. One would therefore argue that arthouse cinema is in crisis (Hilderbrand, 2010), but the contrary is happening in The Netherlands. However, that the number of Dutch film theatre visits is growing, does not mean that arthouse digitalization is not relevant. The digitalization of arthouse made arthouse more accessible and inclusive, especially when considering the available VOD services in The Netherlands that are specifically catered to arthouse cinema such as: *Picl*, *Cinetree*, *Cinemember* and *MUBI*. This has consequences on the changing position of arthouse, as it was traditionally seen as an exclusive experience for niche audiences in theatres only.

This study focuses particularly on The Netherlands and the Dutch arthouse audience, because of its distinctive arthouse development in contrast to the neighboring countries. In 2018, the total number of Dutch cinema visits, including mainstream and arthouse theatre visits, faced a downfall for the first time in ten years (Filmfonds, 2019). However, the share

of the Dutch arthouse theatre visits in the total number of cinema visits, increased with 8.4% in the same year (Filmfonds, 2019). Despite the loss of that year for multiplexes such as Pathé and Vue, arthouse films in theatres seemed to be getting more popular in the Netherlands nevertheless. Remarkably, this growth has been way stronger than the surrounding countries such as Germany, Belgium and France. The fact that arthouse popularity is growing in The Netherlands and not in the surrounding countries, also suggests that the overall Dutch arthouse landscape differs. Moreover, growing arthouse theatre visits is a result that derives from the actions of the audience. They are the ones that experience the change in popularity of arthouse. It is therefore important to centralize the audience perspective within this study.

The aim of this study is to explore the perceptions of the current arthouse scene in the Netherlands by Dutch millennial arthouse fans. By considering the blurred boundaries between arthouse and blockbusters, the growing popularity of arthouse in The Netherlands, the role of commercializing aspects and also the current development of digital VOD services within the arthouse scene, a coherent image on the perception of arthouse can be realized. In order to achieve this, Dutch millennial arthouse fans were interviewed to obtain meaningful perceptions on the arthouse scene in The Netherlands. This specific group was chosen because Dutch millennials tend to be the most frequent users of VOD services and they are the largest group within the Cineville-members (Mediamonitor, 2018; Stokkom, 2019). Thus, millennials are the most relevant to study for the purposes of this paper. Studying all these combined elements regarding arthouse in The Netherlands, will answer the following research question: *How do Dutch millennial arthouse fans perceive arthouse in The Netherlands in times of increasing commercialization and digitalization of arthouse?*

As mentioned before, studies have been discussing the blurring boundaries between arthouse and mainstream cinema by means of commercialization (Kersten, 2013; Warnier, 2017; Wilinsky, 2001) and the role of digitalization within arthouse consumption (Hilderbrand, 2010). These studies are based on literature reviews on the development of arthouse and content analyses of how arthouse gets depicted on social media and critic reviews. Therefore, the results of these studies give a clear theoretical perspective on the changes that are happening within arthouse as a genre. This study builds upon the discussed articles while presenting a new element that contributes to the current literature. Taking a different approach makes this study of academic relevance because it explores the *perceptions* of Dutch arthouse audiences on the changing position of arthouse by means of commercialization and digitalization of arthouse. By conducting interviews with Dutch

arthouse fans, meaningful outcomes create new insights on the development of arthouse from an audience perspective. This study also combines arthouse commercialization and digitalization as an intersectional development, whereas prior studies solely discuss the two in separate articles. Because of arthouse commercialization, there is more arthouse digitalization. But also, more arthouse digitalization results in arthouse being more commercialized because of higher accessibility and exposure. Prior studies take a more general approach on the position of arthouse, while this study has its focus on the Netherlands and the commercial and digital developments of arthouse that happens within the country. This is because of The Netherlands's distinctive growth in arthouse theatre visits, compared to the neighboring countries. Therefore, the study's audience perspective, intersectional approach and focus on the Netherlands, give new insights on the changing position of arthouse that contribute to the current academic literature. Accordingly, this study is socially relevant to independent film makers, producers and theatre owners (from overseas) to have more insight on the perceptions and needs of their regular arthouse consumers. The results can also contribute to the commercial arthouse organizations, such as *Cineville*, and digital arthouse streaming platforms to improve their strategies according to the opinions of the consumers. After all, the audience is equivalent to the consumers who get to experience the products that these organizations offer. Listening to their perceptions is therefore valuable for the arthouse film industry in order to grow.

The next chapters of this paper are structured according to the main goal of answering the research question. The following chapter includes the theoretical framework, which is an overview of different theories and literature regarding arthouse. The theoretical framework is followed by the methodology of this research, which explains how this research is conducted in order to answer the research question. This is followed by the results section that presents the outcome of the research process and makes a connection with the theory. The research paper ends with a conclusion of the study by answering the research question, followed by the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following four sub-sections give an overall framework on arthouse and the surrounding developments around arthouse as the theoretical base of this study. By taking Bourdieu's (1993) perspective on cultural production, the position of arthouse is explained from its beginning stage until the current era. Following from that, the framework continues by zooming in on the arthouse landscape in The Netherlands with its focus on the three commercializing aspects. In addition, the concept of arthouse digitalization is explained in the third sub-section, with the rise of VOD as the main focus point. The framework ends with a section on the motivations of watching arthouse in terms of arthouse theatre visits, but also arthouse content.

2.1. Experiencing Arthouse as a Form of Cultural Production

Based on Bourdieu's (1993) theory on cultural production, he uses the concept of *field* (Bourdieu, 1989) to explain structured and social contexts in which the ways of being and thinking are practiced. Each field holds its own specific logic, behavior and network of relations that are maintained by individuals and institutions. Within the *field*, there are forms of *capital* which are given a type of value. Bourdieu (1986), identifies four types of capital. There is the *economic capital*, which focuses on money, property and large market shares. There is the *cultural capital*, which involves knowledge, skills and aesthetic preferences. There is the *social capital*, which involves informal interpersonal networks. Lastly, there is the *symbolic capital*, focusing on prestige and recognition.

Within the cultural production fields, there is a struggle of power between two segments; the large-scale (mass) production and the small-scale (restricted) production. This distinction can be recognized by the degree to which each segment is autonomous from the 'field of power'. The field of power is another field that involves the dominant power relations in society (Kersten, 2013). The large-scale production is highly dominated by the field of power. This means that organizations within the large-scale sector interrelate with other fields and values. Within the film industry, large-scale productions are the mainstream films produced for the mass audience. This part is driven by the former mentioned *economic capital*, and concerns reaching the largest market share (Kersten, 2013; de Valck, 2014). On the other side of the spectrum, there is small-scale production. This part is considered to belong to the autonomous pole of cultural production and can be understood as operating according to the main ideas and values of the field itself. Banks (2010) explains autonomy as:

In broad terms, autonomy can be defined as the capacity of individuals (and also institutions and organisations) to exercise discretion or apply freedom of choice; autonomous subjects are ones that have the ability to determine the pattern and shape of their own lives. (Banks, 2010, p. 252)

In the film industry, arthouse is considered to be artistically autonomous and relates to the small-scale production of films that is addressed to the niche market. Instead of focusing on the economic capital (money), arthouse producers focus on the field itself by producing art for art's sake (Bourdieu, 1993) which involves more symbolic capital. In this case, economic capital is achieved by obtaining “high revenues and large market shares”, whereas symbolic capital is achieved by “nominations, prizes, honors and acclaim that add prestige” (Kersten, 2013, p. 31). Interestingly, what happens is that more desire for economic capital, usually results in lower levels of symbolic capital (Kersten, 2013).

An example in the film industries that visualizes the ongoing pull and push relation between autonomy and the strive for economic capital, are blockbusters with sequels. Blockbusters are commercial films made for the mass audience, intended to bring a high amount of revenue. Sequels, in this case, are the films that expand and continue the story from earlier works such as: *Starwars* and *Lord of The Rings*. According to Smit and Pangarker (2013), there is a significant linear relationship between sequels and revenue. As revenues belong to the importance of economic capital for mainstream production companies, it is understandable that sequels are being created. It also means that, by producing sequels, these large-scaled studios are restricted to the commercial demands of the industry. The commercial demands are tied with the restrictions of working with a formula that is based on the likings of the mass audience and therefore is expected to generate the highest revenue. Drawing back on Bourdieu's (1993) theory of cultural fields, large-scaled studios take a heteronomous stand in the film industry. This means that they operate based on their interrelation with other fields in order to facilitate the needs of the commercial industry (Bourdieu, 1993; De Valck, 2014). Encountering these commercial restrictions by reason of gaining high revenues, results in having less room for artistic freedom.

Barbara Wilinsky (2001), one of the most leading writers on the discourse of arthouse cinema, describes art cinema as an alternative to the dominant mainstream culture. Moreover, she explains that this alternative form allows for the arthouse community to distinguish themselves from the ‘ordinary’ filmgoers. Traditionally speaking, art film theatres emerged in the late 1940s in New York and used to be exclusive small theatres in small urban areas.

These theatres offered a special artistic experience that was distinctive from mainstream cinemas. Arthouse theatres were characterized by offering a sense of prestige and status, which included the promotion of these venues as sites of ‘intellectual, artistic and high culture leisure’ (Willinsky, 2001, p. 3). The films that were screened, were produced by independent film institutions and involved intellectual and artistic elements for intelligent audiences that perceive film as an art form. Art cinema was also characterized as an alternative culture, which tend to be more artistic, realistic and personal compared to mainstream cinema. Examples of arthouse films from those times that illustrated the potential of alternative films were: *The Bicycle Thief* (1948) and *Wild Strawberries* (1957). This development of arthouse shows a clear distinction from the mainstream cinema in terms of content, but also between niche and mainstream audiences. Willinsky (2001), also explains that “although film audiences might be interested in keeping art cinema alternative and exclusive, operators of the industry might constantly seek to expand their audiences” (p. 4). This is highly relevant to keep in mind for the purpose of this study, since Willinsky (2001) suggests that arthouse fans have aversion towards the developments of arthouse commercialization, by wanting to preserve the alternative and exclusive sense of arthouse.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Hollywood started to acknowledge the potential of arthouse cinema (Wilinsky, 2001). As a result, mainstream studios started to produce films with arthouse themes and techniques but aimed for the mass audience. Starting from these years, the distinction between the large-scale sector and the small-scale sector in the film industry became blurrier and not as clear as Bourdieu (1993) makes it seem like in the theory. This development of barriers declination in the film industry is still relevant up until today. Hesmondhalgh (2006) takes a critical standpoint towards Bourdieu, by arguing that the importance of the rise of cultural industries and the conflux of cultural and economic fields have not been discussed enough. Cultural industries often times operate in economic fields. Therefore, Bourdieu’s (1993) take on the cultural and economic fields as separates, makes no sense. An explanation by Bordwell and Thompson (2010) that supports this contradiction against Bourdieu’s theory, is their definition on arthouse as: “A critical term used to describe films that, while made within commercial circumstances, take an approach to form and style influenced by modernist trends within ‘high art’ and that offer an alternative to mainstream entertainment.” (p. 731). De Valck (2014) adds to this notion by explaining that some of the ‘independent’ companies that produce arthouse, are subsidiaries of Hollywood studios. Therefore, small-scale productions are sometimes involved in the field of mass production (Hesmondhalgh, 2006), which makes the organization of the cultural industries rather

complex. This complexity between the autonomous values of arts and its involvement in economic values of the industry is explained in the following section on the commercialization of arthouse.

In addition to the critiques on Bourdieu's (1986, 1993) theory of cultural capital that involves the cultural industry, Peterson (1992) argues Bourdieu's stance on the elite-to-mass distinctive hierarchy. He believes there is a certain part of the upper occupational group that enjoys both high and popular culture, which he entitles as 'Cultural Omnivores'. Therefore, he takes a critical approach towards the distinction between classes that is being made according to expressions of high-brow versus low-brow taste. To relate these terms to the context of this study, high-brow can be understood as the arthouse product whereas low-brow belongs to popular culture found in mainstream cinema. Instead of the dichotomy of classes made by means of high-brow and low-brow taste, Peterson (1992) opts for the dichotomy between cultural omnivore and cultural univore. This means that elites show a diverse affection for various kinds of high-brow and low-brow cultural products, whereas the taste preferences of the lower classes show a more univore affection towards one certain type of cultural form. Since many cultural elites show a preference for both high-brow and popular cultures, some authors have argued for a decline in the legitimacy of snobbism and holding an inclusive ethos (Brooks, 2001; Peterson, 1992; Van Eijck & Knulst, 2005). Brooks (2001) describes that the current elite is characterized as highly educated, whilst also being conscious of the circumstances of lower classes. These arguments for the cultural omnivore and the aversion of snobbism by the elite, has been explained within a general context of cultural production. Hence, for the purpose of this study, it is interesting to see if arthouse fans have the same observations within the film world. Based on the literature of the cultural omnivore (Peterson, 1992) and applying it to the arthouse scene, it is expected that arthouse fans refuse the idea of a niche audience and have interest in mainstream films as well.

2.2. Commercialization of Arthouse

Based on the Bourdieuan framework (Bourdieu, 1993), it can be argued that arthouse belongs to the autonomous pole of cultural production. This is "the believe in the value of art, culture and creativity in itself, for itself and as something essentially not correlated with money" (de Valck, 2012, p. 41). However, as arthouse belongs to an industry that values economic beliefs for the circulation and distribution of arthouse, the autonomous mentality of arthouse does not add up (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010; Hesmondhalgh, 2006; de Valck,

2012). There seems to be a rather complex relation between the artistic values of arthouse, and the commercial industry that arthouse is positioned in. The first part of this theoretical section discusses the general perspective of the relation between art and commerce. This is followed by a sub-section that zooms in on the commercial aspects that are relevant for the arthouse industry in The Netherlands. This is of high relevance because this study focuses on the perceptions of arthouse in The Netherlands.

2.2.1. Art – Commerce Relation

The debate between commercial restrictions and artistic freedom has been discussed by Banks (2010), by means of the “art-commerce relation” as introduced by Ryan (1992) and the role of autonomy in the cultural industries. As Banks (2010) explains, arts and commerce should not be perceived as two worlds that stand apart from each other. Contrary, arts and commerce have shown to share an intimate relationship (Banks, 2010). This relates to the ideas of Hesmondhalgh (2006) that criticize the shallow explanation of Bourdieu’s (1993) placement of the arts and the mainstream in cultural productions. The intimate relationship can be explained by two developments within the art-commerce relation. First of all, growing commercialization of the arts increases the production and commodification of the arts. Secondly, the emergence of arts markets serves as a means for liberating artists to expose their work to willing consumers, rather than constraining them. As the author explains:

In reality, then, commercial society may have monetised art and exploited artists, but artists needed the market to circulate their otherwise invisible works, to provide a means of subsistence, and to act as an instrument for cultivating rewards and prestige sufficient to denecessitate patronage. (Banks, 2010, p. 253)

Thus, the rise of consumption by the masses, results in further expansion of the demands for artistic and cultural goods. Subsequently, this also consolidates critical and avant-garde movements (niche audiences) and their high level of taste in the arts (Banks, 2010). Despite this relation between art and commerce, the belief in the possibility to be free from commercial constraints and to act from pure artistic self-creation, sustains (Slater & Tonkiss, 2013). Slater and Tonkiss (2013) argue that the necessity of the autonomy of arts is defended by academic critics in the past (James, 1983), but also by modern observers (Hughes, 2008). This is because they believe that modern societies “drain the beauty and uniqueness of arts by means of calculative rationality”, and therefore commercialization of the arts damages and

degrades the finest arts (Banks, 2010, p. 254). This idea suggests a strong disinterest and even refusal of the economic world by the true artist. Interestingly, as named as the ‘autonomy of pose’ by Banks (2010, p. 258), the disinterested stance against the commercial world is by itself a commercial strategy. Bourdieu and Nice (1980) add to this notion by explaining the autonomy as pose as an underlying paradox that takes place. For example, radical high-art artists and the disinterested stance in the economic world, will preserve the authenticity and the belief in the arts, as art for art’s sake. By doing so, the art in the creative/cultural field will be preserved and get recognized by others. In return, this will eventually convert into economic rewards.

2.2.2. Commercialization of Arthouse in the Netherlands

Regarding the Netherlands, there are three developments of commercialization of arthouse that have influenced its position. Firstly, Dutch cinemas and film theaters show a form of cross-over programming. Moreover, Cineville and Dutch film festivals are major players for setting arthouse on the map in The Netherlands.

Dutch mainstream cinemas are now also incorporating arthouse films in their programming. This makes the niche market of arthouse more easily accessible to the mass. On the other hand, arthouse theaters are doing the same by featuring commercial films from large-scale productions. This development is called cross-over programming (Peters, 2014). As a result, the positions of arthouse and mainstream films in the cinemas are not as distinctive as they used to be. Economic factors play a role in the blurring boundary between the two categories. More commercial programming of films in arthouse theaters will ensure the persistence of these smaller theaters by attracting a wider audience (Peters, 2014).

Secondly, Cineville is a Dutch film organization that offers unlimited access to 44 Dutch theaters across 20 cities in the whole country. According to the current director Thomas Hosman, Cineville strived to offer an alternative to Dutch mainstream cinema passes (Stokkom, 2019). This supports Willinsky’s (2001) ideas on creating an alternative form of cinema that “distinguishes itself from ordinary filmgoers” (p. 3). Moreover, Cineville wanted to get rid of the former image of arthouse as being boring and outdated (Stokkom, 2019). Currently, Cineville reached almost 45 thousand subscribers, of which more than half is aged between 20 and 39. Cineville has allowed for an easier bridge between consumers and art house theatres, making it less exclusive and more commercial. Also, now that more cinemas

are doing cross-over programming, arthouse theatres are offering it seems logical that joining Cineville becomes more attractive to less niche audiences as well.

Another aspect of the film industry that meets commercializing practices are film festivals. De Valck (2014) argues that, with the arrival of film festivals, there is a growing tension between an art for art's sake ideology and a commercializing subfield. In the article, the author explains that the people in the organizations of film festivals are combining the art for art's sake values with the new ideal of cultural entrepreneurship. Cultural entrepreneurship in the film festival world involves generating revenue from the festival's cultural activities, by negotiating between the core artistic interests and the commercial interests (Scott, 2012; de Valck, 2012). Traditionally, film festivals served as a place to celebrate the artistic achievements or sociopolitical relevance of arthouse movies. But soon after the first film festivals back in the 1940s, film festivals also doubled as meeting points for the international film industry (de Valck, 2014). The involvement of the film industry as a stakeholder, results in the industry's commercial interests of distributing the screened films in order to reach larger audiences. Unwin, Kerrigan, Waite and Grant (2007) even argue that film festivals act as a catalyst for distributing cinematic messages to society and serve as an inexpensive marketing tool for soon to be released movies. Therefore, it can be said that film festivals are affected by the trend of commercialization within the film industry.

Film festivals are also using commercial marketing strategies to promote their events. Unwin et al. (2007) explain the historical perspective of marketing within the cultural industry, in which the focus of cultural organizations should be on the creativity, the innovation and the dissemination of new art forms, instead of targeting consumer needs. The authors also give a more modern approach to cultural marketing, in which cultural organizations are more acceptive of commercial marketing whilst acknowledging the need to maintain artistic integrity (Unwin et al., 2007). The continuous negotiation between the artistic and the commercial demands in the film festival world, reflects the theory of the art-commerce relation (Ryan, 1992) as explained before. The acknowledgement of commercial marketing comes from the idea that it enhances the image and identity of film festivals and it creates more exposure and public awareness. This has beneficial consequences for the continuity of project aids that is secured by sponsors and public funding from the government (Unwin et al., 2007). The evolution of anti-marketing to the acceptance of marketing over the years, also shows the growing presence of commercialization in the cultural industry. As a consequence, it is expected that the film festivals in The Netherlands create more exposure of arthouse to larger audiences, thus encourage the commercialization of arthouse.

2.3. Arthouse in a digitalized environment

Just like in the music and television industry, the film industry is facing competition from new digital services that are considered disruptive. The “Disruptive Innovation Theory” by Christensen (1997), is one of the most well-known theories to explain failures or difficulties for established markets made by external technological changes. In terms of the film industry, this is happening with the increasing popularity of video-on-demand (VOD) such as Netflix. Instead of being restricted to a certain location and time slot by attending a film at the cinemas, audiences can now watch the latest films whenever and wherever they want. Not only do commercial cinemas provide a digital counterpart, *Picl* is a special Dutch VOD platform for arthouse films only. Interestingly, the movies that can be streamed online, are also being showcased in theaters at the same time. Other examples of successful streaming devices in The Netherlands that are catered to arthouse cinema are: Cinetree, CineMember, Vitamine Cineville and MUBI. The rise and the successfulness of VOD platforms for arthouse, suggests that it has become essential for the distribution strategies of independent cinema companies (Hilderbrand, 2010).

The film, home video and television markets are in flux and it has become unescapable (Hilderbrand, 2010). In an article by Silver and McDonnell (2007), the authors explain the new economics of the movie business. Prior to the concept of post-theatrical markets, the theatrical release accounted for the full revenue. But with today’s competitive entertainment environment and the new media delivery channels that play a large role in the value chain of a certain film, the theatrical release may only account for 30% of the of the total revenues. The post-theatrical markets can be understood as “home video, cable TV, satellite TV, pay-per-view, DVD players, and video-on-demand” (Silver & McDonnell, 2007, p. 492), that has enabled consumers to watch films on mediums other than the theatre screen since the 1970s. Apart from the new media channels, other ancillary revenue streams such as book tie-ins, music soundtracks and merchandise also enable making larger profits down the value chain (Silver & McDonnell, 2007). Hence, large film studios now use the theatrical release to establish its brand, especially the major ones. This notion of technological convergence of a movie release is more relevant for the major studios and blockbusters, than it is for arthouse releases. Arthouse films, especially the very small ones, rely less on the ancillary revenue streams to generate larger profits (Hilderbrand, 2010). With the economic disadvantage of arthouse cinema, it seems that arthouse is in crisis. However, now that

arthouse films also have been more and more accessible through VOD (Hilderbrand, 2010), it is interesting to look at how digitalization affects the perception of audiences surrounding the arthouse release in theatres and their motivations of visiting the theatres.

VOD platforms for films try to make the home viewing experience as pleasant as possible. Studies have shown the importance of collective spectatorship as a motivational factor to visit the film theatre (Baudry & Williams, 1974; Hanich, 2014; Metz & Gusetti, 1976). In short, it is the enjoyment of audiences to (unconsciously) watch a film collectively. The concept of collective spectatorship is further explained in the next section on the motivations of arthouse viewing. However, it is also relevant to introduce collective spectatorship within the digitalization context. VOD platform Netflix has come up with *Netflix Party*, a program that synchronizes the movie or series and plays it across the participating accounts. This innovative function allows for collectively watching media content with friends, without physically being together. Very recently, Vitamine Cineville (launched by Cineville in March 2020) has paved its way into the Dutch digital arthouse scene. Vitamine Cineville shares similarities with Netflix Party, in terms of synchronic online film watching from different places. However, the difference here, is that Vitamine Cineville controls the timing schedule of online film screenings and anyone can join. In addition, the program offers online Q&A sessions with directors and introductions prior to the online film screening by curators. Hence, it resembles the activities of a physical theatre. Also, the fact that one can synchronically watch an arthouse film without knowing the other spectators, positively aligns with the “unconscious” element of collective spectatorship as a motivation for theatre visits (Hanich, 2014). Referring back to the possible treats of digitalization (Hilderbrand, 2010) to the arthouse industry, it seems that the abilities of Vitamine Cineville strengthens the power of arthouse digitalization in The Netherlands. Therefore, the introduction of Vitamine Cineville in The Netherlands, can be considered as an interesting alternative for arthouse audiences that comes with negative outcomes for the sustainability of arthouse theatre visits.

Silver and McDonnel (2007) have acknowledged the recent trends that cinemas have been trying to cope with the technical disruptive innovations, by using new technologies to provide exclusive sound and image quality systems (IMAX and Dolby Cinema) (Pardo, 2015; Silver & McDonnel, 2007). These new cinema technologies contribute to the immersive experience of film watching. This makes the film experience more valuable for audiences, which can only be obtained in the multiplexes. The exclusive cinema experience that is obtained by means of these new technologies also serves as a motivational factor for

visiting the multiplex, instead of watching the film at home. In contrary, arthouse theatres do not include these new immersive technologies for their film screenings as a counteraction to arthouse digitalization. However, based on the growing number of Dutch arthouse theatre visits, there seem to be other intrinsic motivations of audiences for visiting the arthouse theatre.

2.4. Motivations of Arthouse Viewing

In this theoretical section, the motivations of arthouse viewing are discussed within two categories. The first section gives a theoretical framework on the motivations of visiting a theatre, whereas the second part dives deeper into the motivations regarding the content of arthouse films.

2.4.1. Arthouse Theatre Motives

Recent studies by Van der Vijver (2017, 2019), examines the endurance of the cinema and the understanding of the social experience of cinema going today. Especially in an age where watching films is consumed in a media convergence culture (Hilderbrand, 2010), it is important to delve into the motivations of theatre-goers to reconsider the relevance of the theatre. In her article, the author constructed three non-technologically centered motivations of the cinema experience regarding social engagement. These socialized experiential motivations are social activities (companionship and leisure), contacts (unique heterogeneity of the audience) and conformity (communal experience of consensual predictability). Swanson, Davis and Zhao (2008), add to this notion by mentioning the importance of social interaction as a motive, in which they stress that this motive is specifically related to audiences that visit artistic performances. Examples of social interactions are: sharing emotions and experiences and socializing with other filmgoers that share the same interest in art films (Cuadrado-Garcia, Filimon & Montoro-Pons, 2018; Swanson et al., 2008). In addition to the motive of social interaction in the context of artistic performances, Tulleken (2013) explains the importance of the included café or restaurant of a film theatre. From her research, arthouse fans stated that they enjoy the ambiance of the café/restaurant and perceive it as the place to socialize. This makes the motivator of social interaction at artistic performances more relevant for the film theatre. Interestingly, Van der Vijver (2017) found that these specific social aspects were not perceived as motivational factors with regard to the

multiplex. For the multiplexes, the immersion of the cinematic experience plays a significant role in motivations. This involves the appreciation of cinema-goers on a technical level, in which the immersive experience is amplified by means of excellent sound and image quality (Pardo, 2015; Van der Vijver, 2017). Furthermore, Cuadrado-Garcia et al. (2018) argue that “mainstream filmgoers films’ popularity (i.e., prizes, intensive advertising, favorite actors and successful box-office records) and mood (to relieve boredom and to relax) are the main drivers of cinema attendance.” (p. 55). Therefore, research has shown a clear difference in motivations, in which arthouse visitors value the social interactions and multiplex visitors are driven by the popularity of the film and the mood they are in.

A concept that aligns with the notion of socialized experiential motivations is collective spectatorship. The theory of collective spectatorship was first introduced by Hanich (2014) but derives from previous spectator theories from the 1970s regarding the perceiving of film entertainment by audiences (Baudry & Williams, 1974; Metz & Gusetti, 1976). These theorists confirm the idea of film viewing as a silent, motionless and expressionless experience for spectators. Moreover, it was considered as a solely and individual experience in which spectators are not entirely conscious of what is happening (Hanich, 2014). However, Hanich (2014) takes a critical look at this historical approach, by introducing the concept of collective spectatorship that states that audiences “can enjoy watching a film collectively without being fully aware of this fact” (p. 354). Essentially, this suggests that film audiences are aware of other spectators in the room, without actively thinking about them. While focusing on the film, collective spectatorship is highly prevalent during moments of high emotions in films, when shared happiness or sadness are easier to be sensed (Hanich, 2014). Recent scholars have used collective spectatorship as a communal motivational factor for film viewing (Flynn, 2018; Hanich, 2018). As the article by Hanich (2014) discusses collective spectatorship with the idea that it is solely a motivational factor for going to the cinema, it can be considered outdated. A critique point would therefore be that the article is limiting for today’s fast-growing digital age. With the current digital advances of video-on-demand, the concept of collective spectatorship has paved a way into the digital environment as well. Therefore, the concept of collective spectatorship, as discussed by Hanich (2014) should be reconsidered and put into digital context.

2.4.2. Arthouse Content Motives

Studies have examined the motivational factors of consuming films (Cuadrado-Garcia et al. 2018; Governo & Teixeira, 2014; Tullekens, 2013). From these studies and the findings from older research (Austin, 1989; O'Brien, 1977), the scholars suggested that film demands creative and self-fulfilling needs. Regarding film content, this is positively associated with an enjoyable and pleasant activity, relaxation and arousal/excitement (Governo & Teixeira, 2014). These factors are general motives of film consumption, which means that the scholars assume that all types of film audiences would experience these needs. A clear distinction on the motivations of film consumption between the specific arthouse audience and the mainstream audience, has not been discussed.

With regards to the relevance to the current study, the focus on the artistic audience and their motivations of consuming artistic content has been examined. Swanson et al. (2008), proposed six motivational factors of visiting art performances. This list includes motivational factors that apply to the consumption of artistic content, but also the motivations of visiting art performances. The motivational factors 'aesthetics' and 'education' are the two motives out of the six that are relevant to the context of arthouse content (Swanson et al., 2008). The aesthetics aspect is closely related to the general notion of pleasure seeking by means of film consumption as explained before by Governo and Teixeira (2008). According to Swanson et al. (2008), audiences perceive art performances as a form of art which they derive pleasure from. This means that the artistic expression from the performance, in the form of beauty and grace, can be perceived as a motivational factor of consuming artistic content. In addition to the aesthetics, education is also stated as a motivator for art performances. The study suggests that audiences of artistic content seek to educate themselves and that they "may be motivated by the desire to learn and know more about the arts." (p. 302). The above-mentioned motivators were suggested within the context of arts live performances and consumption of fine arts (paintings/sculptures). This is relevant to arthouse in the artistic sense, however the concepts cannot automatically be bridged to the motivations of watching arthouse. The results of this study aim to make a better and more specific connection between arthouse fans and their motivations of watching arthouse films.

The above-mentioned literature on the motivations of arthouse viewing regarding the arthouse theatre and the arthouse content, is just one part of the theory that is used as a base for designing the methodology of this research paper. Using all relevant aspects of this theoretical framework regarding the autonomy of arthouse, arthouse commercialization,

arthouse digitalization and arthouse motivation, the research design for the methodology of this study is constructed and presented in the following chapter. The research design allows for the relevant results that are needed for answering the research question.

3. METHODS

The perceptions of Dutch millennial arthouse fans were studied by using qualitative research methods of in-depth interviews. The next sub-chapters focus on explaining in-depth interviews and the legitimation of this research method for the purpose of this study. This is followed by the systematic steps of the research procedure and ends with considering the ethical considerations of research design.

3.1. Research Design

In order to answer the research question: *How do Dutch millennial arthouse fans perceive arthouse with the increasing commercialization and digitalization of arthouse?*, in-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 11 arthouse fans. Qualitative in-depth interviewing is a justified research method in order to answer the research question. Taking this qualitative approach is most suitable for this research, because it provides a way of generating empirical data about the perceptions of arthouse from the respondents (Leegard, Keegan & Ward, 2003). This requires the step of meaning-making from the answers of the respondents, which is essential to focus on and answer the ‘how’ that is stated in the research question. As this study is interested in audience perceptions, conducting in-depth interviews is the most effective way to obtain information on the meaningful interpretations of the experiences of the arthouse fans (Kvale, 2007).

The in-depth interviews were prepared in a semi-structured manner and designed in a topic list. This means that questions were prepared beforehand, which served as a guide when the actual interview took place. Most questions were open-ended, which allowed for more discussion with the respondent. The questions that were not open-ended, particularly served as introductory questions which were then followed by open questions. This way, interviewees also had the time and space to express their experiences and viewpoints in their own terms. Semi-structured in-depth interviews are considered flexible, which allows for obtaining more data beyond the restrictions of the topic list. Another benefit of semi-

structured in-depth interviews is that the questions can be prepared ahead of time. This allows for a smoother process of the interview, in which the interviewer appears competent.

3.2. Sample

Regarding the sample criteria for choosing the interviewees, this study only focuses on the millennial group born between the years 1981 and 1996 (Pewresearch, 2019). This age group was chosen because Dutch millennials tend to be the most frequent users of VOD services (Mediamonitor, 2018; Stichting Filmonderzoek, 2017). In addition, more than half of the Cineville-members are between 20 and 39 years old (Stokkom, 2019). Considering the different aspects of experiencing arthouse in times of commercialization and digitalization, selecting interviewees within this age criterion is the most relevant choice for answering the research question. Another criterion is that the interviewees should be frequent arthouse consumers. An annual Dutch report on cinema visitors, distinguishes three types of cinema visiting frequency groups (Bioscoopmonitor, 2018). The groups are named: incidental, regular and frequent. According to the report, frequent film theater visitors visit the theater monthly and make out 10% of the total number of cinema visits. Moreover, since this paper looks at the arthouse experience in general, and not only the film theater visits, it is also important to consider the data on arthouse home-viewing. Stichting Filmonderzoek (2017), examined the frequency of home-viewing with regards to arthouse. Within the research, 26% of the 300 participants said to watch arthouse films at home monthly or more. These percentages show the feasibility of finding arthouse fans with frequent consumption as criterion. Therefore, the frequency of arthouse consumption for the interviewees should be at a minimum of once per month.

By using the purposive sampling method, interviewees are selected based on predetermined criterion of importance. For this paper, the criteria are Dutch millennials and frequent arthouse consumers. Building on this particular sampling method allows for the identification of information-rich cases that relate to the phenomenon of interest. This contributes to the objective of answering the research question. By using gatekeepers who are arthouse fans themselves and who have insight in the arthouse community, participants for the interviews were recruited. These gatekeepers are individuals from the researcher's surroundings. These participants then recruited other possible participants, which makes this method partly a form of snowball sampling. Four participants were recruited by gatekeepers

from the researcher's surroundings. Consequently, these participants recruited other four participants. At last, by attending a film festival in Amsterdam between the 14th and 18th of March 2020, three new participants were recruited who were volunteering for the festival.

3.3. Operationalization

Semi-structured interviews and the topic list were used as a guidance to conduct the interviews. This gave the participant the freedom to allow for new meaningful ideas, whilst still keeping it relevant to the theory. The topic list consists of the main topics and subtopics that are related to the theory. The main topics are: *autonomy of arthouse*, *arthouse commercialization*, *arthouse digitalization* and *arthouse motivation*. Within the topic *autonomy of arthouse*, the separate fields of small-scale production (arthouse) and large-scale production (blockbusters) as explained by Bourdieu (1993) were discussed, as well as the notion of the blurring boundaries between the two fields. The topic *arthouse commercialization* consists of questions of the perceiving of arthouse commercialization in The Netherlands. The third topic *arthouse digitalization* is a modern approach on arthouse consumption which involves questions on how arthouse fans consume arthouse digitally. The last topic *arthouse motivation*, involves the two types of motivations of arthouse viewing. These are regarding the content, but also the motivations on visiting film theatres. This way, the study's theoretical core concepts are translated into the interview questions, which is essential for answering the research question.

3.4. Data-collection

By conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews with 11 respondents, the data for this research paper were retrieved. The interviews were planned to be conducted face-to-face in a physical space. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen difficulties, all interviews had to be conducted face-to-face through Skype or Facetime. The interviews took place at the start of the third week of April until the first week of May 2020. There was a fair distribution in terms of gender, in which five respondents were female and six respondents were male. The length of the interviews varied from 50 minutes to 75 minutes. Since all interviews were recorded for both audio and visuals, the body language that the respondents portrayed could be taken into account during the transcribing process. This contributes to a better

understanding of the connotation of certain meaningful perceptions by the respondents, which gives a more accurate set of data for answering the research question.

3.5. Data-analysis

In terms of the coding procedure, an inductive thematic analysis of the qualitative data was performed. A thematic analysis was chosen because it allows for systematic identification of the patterns of meaning in the dataset, which are relevant in relation to the topic and the research question (Braun & Clark, 2012). The reason for performing a thematic analysis is because it is a flexible and accessible method of doing qualitative research, while providing rich and detailed descriptions. This is because it can be conducted in a number of different ways. For this study, an inductive approach to data coding and analysis has been chosen, which is a bottom-up approach that is derived from what is *in* the data (Braun & Clark, 2012). This way, the codes and themes systematically generate theory that is grounded in the data. The themes are therefore strongly linked from the data, because they emerge from it.

With this analysis, patterned themes were generated from the interview data. The first step of familiarization happened during the process of transcribing the interview data. The first three interviews were transcribed manually. The remainder were transcribed with the use of an online transcribing program, of which the transcriptions needed a thorough check afterwards to make the data as accurate as possible. After familiarization, the initial codes were generated manually by means of data reduction. Thereafter, four overarching themes were generated manually by structuring and combining the codes.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The consent form for the respondents was transferred orally before every online face-to-face interview session. During this oral consent procedure, the respondents were informed about the anonymity and confidentiality of this research. This means that the respondents maintain their anonymity by taking part of this research and the given information is used for the purposes of this research only. The oral consent procedure also made sure that the respondents were allowed to not answer certain questions or opt out of the interview at any moment. As mentioned in the data-collection segment, the online interviews were recorded in audio and visuals. This was also communicated beforehand, while putting emphasis on the respondent's right of anonymity and confidentiality. All respondents agreed to the terms and

conditions before the start of the interview by answering “I do consent” (See appendix B). There was no situation of rejection from the respondents, possibly because the topic is not sensitive to ethical issues. Also, the respondents are arthouse enthusiasts themselves, who are motivated to talk about their perceptions on arthouse. This resulted in smooth and fluent procedures of the interviews, which were even considered enjoyable according to the respondents.

4. RESULTS

By examining the transcribed interviews, four established main themes have resulted with a total of seven sub-themes. The main themes are: *Audience Expansion*, *Importance of the Arthouse Theatre*, *Elimination of Film Dichotomy* and *Perseverance of the Arts*. These themes are derived in light of the central research question and the discussed theoretical framework. Each theme and its sub-themes will be discussed in the following sections whilst also explaining the interrelation between them.

4.1. Audience Expansion

The theme *Audience Expansion* is an established theme that stands for the demand of expansion of the arthouse audience by the parties that are involved in the arthouse industry. This means both the consumer and the producer side of arthouse. The expansion of the arthouse audience is made possible by means of the developments of arthouse commercialization and digitalization. This theme is divided in three sub-themes: *audience accessibility*, *audience diversity* and *positive attitude towards arthouse exposure*. *Audience accessibility* and *audience diversity* are closely related, since audience diversity is boosted when arthouse is more accessible to different audiences. Therefore, the relation between the two sub-themes can be considered structural, in which *arthouse accessibility* is the prior step to promote *audience diversity*.

4.1.1. Arthouse Accessibility

Encouraging a larger arthouse audience, is more realistic when arthouse is being made more accessible. Accessibility of arthouse can be understood as the amount of theatres or

digital options where arthouse films can be screened, but also the way arthouse gets promoted in order to make the genre more accessible for new audiences.

Arthouse digitalization is a development that has positively influenced the accessibility of arthouse. Nevertheless, with the available digital options in the Netherlands, the accessibility is perceived positively to a certain point. Every respondent happened to be subscribed to at least one streaming platform which offers arthouse movies. On the one hand, respondents have a positive perception on arthouse digitalization because they are able to watch an arthouse movie at home and at any time. The easiness of having access to arthouse films through digitalization, shows how non-arthouse fans can now more easily get exposed to arthouse. Especially when cross-over films pave their way into major platforms like Netflix. On the other hand, for the arthouse fanatics, the arthouse films that online platforms offer in The Netherlands, are considered too limited. Joris, a 29-year old filmmaker said:

You can use a VPN hack to get an account on the Criterion channel because it's US only right now. And like their offering is top notch. So, I think their selection is so good that they might be the one to convince me to stream. They have all the obscure gems that I still want to see... And so, they're the ones that'll get me over once they hit Europe. (Joris, 29)

Noah adds to this by comparing the US Criterion channel to the Dutch Cinetree platform:

I would definitely pay for the Criterion channel, but I wouldn't pay for anything else. I think it's about what they offer. A platform like Cinetree doesn't offer me anything. I hate the way they brand their films. I'm not really into the way their brands their films. It's like super childish as well. I don't have the feeling that they know what they're talking about. (Noah, 26)

The analysis shows that the accessibility of arthouse on digital platforms in The Netherlands can be looked at from different perspectives. In connection to Hilderbrand's (2010) ideas on the growing importance of VOD platforms in the arthouse industry, there are indeed more digital options of arthouse. The arthouse accessibility in the digital context, can encourage new audiences. However, for the true arthouse fans, the digital arthouse offerings in The Netherlands are still too limiting for now.

Next to the arthouse accessibility in amounts, accessibility also means the way arthouse gets promoted in order to reach larger audiences. Cineville's motive is to make arthouse more popular among larger audiences. The organization acts upon the outreaching element by sharing content that is easy to understand for audiences that are not familiar with arthouse. For example, in the podcasts that they make and share, the conversations and the subjects that they deliver are considered easy to understand. Therefore, respondents agree on the idea that Cineville tries to reach new audiences by making arthouse accessible to talk about. However, for a few respondents who see themselves as fanatic arthouse fans, this accessibility element is not challenging enough for them. For example, Joris, a 29-year old male filmmaker explained:

Cineville never is able to challenge me. They are a bit childish, especially their podcast, it's awful. I don't like the tone. It's amateurish. It's super accessible. But it's okay. I get it. It's just not for me. Personally, I'd love to see them being a platform that's able to like, deepen and like analyze. (Joris, 29)

This shows that, Cineville's strategy of being accessible to reach larger audiences, is appreciated. But on the other hand, respondents also see that this is a commercial move and therefore they feel indifferent about their relation with Cineville as a company.

Location differences have shown to be an important factor of blocking arthouse accessibility. From the analysis, it became clear that there is a difference in arthouse theatre accessibility between Amsterdam and the rest of The Netherlands. Amsterdam is a city where arthouse is really present in terms of the amount of arthouse theatres and events. The five respondents who happen to live in cities where there are only one or two arthouse theatres (e.g. Haarlem, The Hague and Utrecht) often encountered a lack of available films that they can choose from. To reflect back on why arthouse fans prefer arthouse, one of the reasons is because every arthouse theatre has its different programming. In a city such as Amsterdam, which is considered an arthouse hub, the accessibility of arthouse theatres and arthouse content is much higher in contrast to the rest of The Netherlands. Therefore, from the interviews with these respondents, it seems that there was a form of being envious because of the big arthouse scene in Amsterdam. Bart, a 25-year old male student from Utrecht said:

When I'm in Amsterdam with friends, there are so many movie theaters. There are so many options. There it is like, 'Of course we go to the movie theater'. Because if you look at the program it's like 'What! They are showing this classic at this cinema?' And every day there's a movie I really like. In Utrecht that's not the case. (Bart, 25)

The respondent continues by explaining that the poor availability of arthouse theatres and films in Utrecht, is the reason why he would not go to the film theatre as often as he would like. This shows that the lack of arthouse theatres, in cities other than Amsterdam, has negative consequences for the expansion of the arthouse audience. Amsterdam, but also Rotterdam are the cities with the most arthouse theatres. These are also the cities where most of the Dutch film festivals take place. Other commercial aspects of arthouse like cross-over programming in theatres and Cineville, have a larger impact of success in these cities than the rest of The Netherlands. More film theatres allow for more cross-over programming and diverse film programs, which eventually stimulates the commercialization of arthouse. Therefore, the location-differences show that arthouse accessibility, in terms of the physical theatres, is not equally divided within The Netherlands. Therefore, the expansion of arthouse audiences, as a result of arthouse commercialization, might grow faster in cities like Rotterdam or Amsterdam, compared to other cities.

Film festivals are trying to make their events accessible by means of marketing. However, the respondents feel like film festivals remain having this niche image. Generally speaking, the respondents had a positive view on film festivals in the Netherlands. Film festivals tend to serve as enriching events for the visitors, because one gets to see film screenings that he or she normally would not be able to see. This makes the content that is shared within film festivals quite exclusive, which is an element that all the respondents seem to enjoy. In addition to the benefits for the visitors, the respondents also put emphasis on how film festivals are especially made for the people in the film industry. This relates to the article by de Valck (2014), where she explains that film festivals are meeting points for the international film industry. Film festivals are ideal for filmmakers to meet other filmmakers or even to get in touch with distributors. Overall, film festivals were thought to be favored by arthouse fans and the film industry, but the respondents seemed critical about the accessibility of film festivals for new audiences. The marketing of film festivals gives a lot of exposure to the festivals, which shows that these festivals do

encourage new audiences. This reflects the modern approach of cultural marketing, in which film festivals are receptive of commercial marketing whilst acknowledging the need to maintain artistic integrity (Unwin et al., 2007). However, the actual outcome still seems inoperative from two perspectives. Lisa, a 23-year old female explained her view on the accessibility of film festivals from a consumer's perspective:

It's all around the cities so everywhere you see the symbol of IFFR. But on the other hand, for me, if I didn't work at Kino, the marketing of IFFR would be a bit too far from something I would care for. I think it would be a bit overwhelming almost. Maybe they can ask themselves 'How can we make it more accessible?' So that people have the feeling they can go. It's still a bit too big and untouchable. (Lisa, 23)

Noah, who organizes a small film festival himself, explains:

It's also a place to get picked up by distributors. I actually see it really as something that is more for the industry, like a convention. Although it is fun and it feels exclusive and that's nice. But I'm not really a consumer of film festivals, so yeah. It's probably more fun than I feel. But for instance, festival Vers. We do this film festival every year. It's called Vers film awards and it's basically a festival where all the Dutch graduates send their film to. We only pick short films from the first, second or max third film you've ever made. I would say that as a festival, we tried to make it really accessible for people who are not filmmakers or friends of the filmmakers. But in the end, if you look who show up as an audience, you see it's still just the industry and some of their friends. So yeah. I don't know. (Noah, 26)

Both perspectives show that film festivals remain a niche product. However, it also depends on which film festivals were discussed. Some of the bigger festivals like IFFR and IDFA, do have more capital and sponsors to take actions on attracting diverse audiences to their festivals. Festivals like these have shown to be a bit more accessible than smaller film festivals. Joris, who went to IFFR for the first time this year, said:

I had to be there before I was able to answer this. But I was there this year, first time. And I think a lot of people are super dedicated to be there. I love that, but also

the Bank Giro Loterij gives away tickets to all their members. So, there you'll see like regular people. All of a sudden you go to arthouse screenings in Pathé 1 and it's fully booked. Like you have to log in at 10:00 AM on a Monday morning to get the tickets you want, because otherwise they'll sell out. (Joris, 29)

It seems that film festivals try to be accessible for larger audiences, by incorporating cultural marketing (Unwin et al., 2007). But the larger festivals have more room to actualize that, compared to smaller film festivals. Therefore, saying that film festivals in The Netherlands encourage more commercialization of arthouse by expanding the audience, is too one-dimensional.

4.1.2. Audience Diversity

According to popular belief and the literature by Bourdieu (1993), artistic cultural production has its intention to be designated towards a niche audience. This automatically justifies the idea of having another audience besides the niche. In this case, it is the mass audience. Analyzing the interviews showed that there is indeed a distinction between audiences that can be made.

A significant number of respondents agree that arthouse audiences tend to be more intellectual, and therefore they consider themselves somewhat intellectual. Hence, the image of arthouse as being tied to an intellectual audience is most certainly acknowledged. Sandy, a 23-year old student, said:

I think that's also because arthouse can get more deep than normal films. Not that I don't enjoy mainstream or blockbuster films. Because I also go to, I don't know, Marvel films or that kind of stuff. I do think that arthouse films are more intellectual, so it makes me feel intellectual. Like, I don't read books. So, arthouse is my book. (Sandy, 23)

This relates to the theory and the old-fashioned idea that arts are made for the intelligent (Willinsky, 2001). Willinsky (2001) describes the former perception of the niche arthouse audience as an elite group of people, characterized by intelligence and high artistic values, who wanted to distinguish themselves from the ordinary filmgoers. This image of the arthouse audience, does not fit with the answers of the respondents. As quoted above,

respondents also enjoy watching blockbusters from time to time. This contradicts the idea of the distinctive elite-to-mass hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1993; Willinsky, 2001) and actually confirms the theory of the cultural omnivore by Peterson (1992). Arthouse fans have shown that they can have interest in various kinds of high-brow (arthouse) and low-brow (mainstream cinema) cultural products (Peterson, 1992). Even though the respondents consider Willinsky's (2001) description of the arthouse audience as an extravagant and outdated image of the current arthouse audience, it seems like this image is still present for others. As Sophie, a 24-year old film student, explained:

Also, after bringing some of my friends to the film theatre for the first time, they told me that they really liked it. But they wouldn't have gone by themselves because they thought film theatres were only for serious intellectual people. They were afraid that the arthouse audience would look at them in a weird way. (Sophie, 24)

This image of a restricted arthouse audience, in which people have to be intelligent and serious, is something that the respondents perceive as wrong and outdated. Even though they recognize that more intellectual audiences watch arthouse and go to arthouse theatres, they do not think arthouse films are specifically made for and with an intelligent audience in mind. According to them, arthouse should not only be restricted to the intelligent, but for everyone. This contradicts the idea of a niche audience (Bourdieu, 1993; Willinsky, 2001) When discussing the idea of an arthouse niche audience, Sophie also explained:

I think that the positive thing about that, is that you maybe have an audience that you have more in common with. If you go to the movie with some knowledge before about it, then it's really nice to have a niche audience around you that also knows a lot about it. Then maybe you can talk with someone afterwards. But I think it also shows to me that it can be a little bit disappointing to only see that niche audience going to it. That it wouldn't appeal to a broader audience. So, it has its both ways. It can be positive, but mostly negative. (Sophie, 24)

Wanting to change this outdated image of arthouse and opting for different types of audiences, shows how much arthouse fans value the importance of audience diversity within the arthouse audience.

Cross-over programming in arthouse theatres and multiplexes is an aspect that encourages audience diversity, according to the respondents. Not only is cross-over programming beneficial for arthouse theatre goers in order to be able to watch more types of movies, respondents also find it important that arthouse films get screened in multiplexes. As Sophie explained:

I think it's a smart move. I think that maybe for that the audiences that would go to something like Pathé, they would be maybe more willing to see other kinds of movies by this kind of programming. Because maybe they would just go to the cinema and they see an arthouse movie and they would think 'Oh, maybe let's try that'. Maybe they would like it. So, I think it's a smart move. And, in the other way with the small theatres, showing more mainstream films can attract another audience that would also be more interested in watching arthouse movies that they would normally not choose. (Sophie, 24)

Thus, cross-over programming works two ways for the sake of audience diversity. First of all, screening arthouse films in multiplexes can create a more diverse audience regarding the viewers of a certain arthouse film. Second of all, screening mainstream films in arthouse theatres can create a more diverse audience in terms of the visitors of the arthouse theatre. As a result of these two situations, more non-arthouse fans might be more interested in arthouse as a whole, which eventually expands the arthouse audience.

4.1.3. Positive attitude towards Arthouse Exposure

This sub-theme takes a step back from the developments within arthouse accessibility and audience diversity, by explaining the perceptions of why the respondents think that expanding the audience is crucial. There are two main points that derived from the analysis of the interviews.

First of all, all the respondents agreed on the idea that arthouse deserves more recognition and thus more exposure. Arthouse films tend to cover unconventional social themes that are relevant for society and are important to be told. This is because arthouse can have a positive impact on the development of people by broadening the perspectives of society. For example, Olivia, a 23-year old female said, "It's super nice that a lot of arthouse movies get the recognition they deserve. Because there are a lot of movies that no

one knows but are so important to watch.” Therefore, the respondents perceive the engagement with arthouse as a learning experience. This learning experience is not only useful for the respondents, but also for the mass audience. Bart, a 25-year old male student explained:

I think it's good because I think that one aspect of art house is that it is trying to tell unconventional stories for a lot of people. Or at least showcase realities that are opposed to the mainstream idea of realities. So, I think it's important and good and nice that a lot of more people get exposed to different kinds of viewpoints, different kinds of realities, different kinds of stories about all the other aspects of the world. I would love people to watch more art house movies, appreciate more art movies, watch more foreign movies, watch more movies made for people who aren't part of the mainstream Hollywood stuff. Because those stories are interesting and necessary to be told in my opinion. So yeah, if that is considered art house, I hope it reaches more people. (Bart, 25)

The learning experience from watching arthouse films, is numerously stressed by the respondents as their motivation of watching arthouse. They perceive it as a motive create more exposure of arthouse to more people, because they learn from arthouse films themselves. Therefore, the theory by Swanson et al. (2008), in which education is a motivator for audiences to visit live art performances, can be applied to arthouse motivations as well.

Another point that validates why arthouse fans find it important to expand the arthouse audience, is that the respondents acknowledge that commercialization is needed for arthouse to stay and to grow in The Netherlands as an industry. By analyzing the interviews, it became clear that the respondents see that there is a level of uncertainty for the smaller theatres in order to survive. More than half of the respondents stated that one of the reasons for them to invest in a Cineville-pass, is to be able to financially support the arthouse theatres in a way. As Olivia said:

But also with the Cineville pass, I support every theater that is involved. And I think that's important because if I'm in another city, I want to go to a movie theater too. I want them to stay there and to exist longer than a Pathé because I think some movie theaters might go away. Especially after Corona because they can't afford it

anymore. Also, right now I still support them. I still pay 20 euros every month, even though I can't see any movies. (Olivia, 23)

In this context, respondents have a positive view on Cineville as an industry because it allows for financial benefit. However, the acknowledgement that commercialization is needed for capital, does not imply that it is considered positive for arthouse as an art form. This relates to the respondent's perception of Cineville being too accessible and not challenging enough in their content. For example, Sebastiaan, a 25-year old male film student explained:

I find it hard to feel sympathy for Cineville as a company. I can have it for, you know, the cinemas itself, the producers, the distributors. But Cineville itself it's... It is completely commercial. Just shifting money around. It is very handy and I appreciate it, but still it is a model to make money of me. I appreciate it. Again, it changes the landscape great. But yeah..." (Sebastiaan, 25)

Here, the dilemma between art versus commerce (Ryan, 1992), as profoundly discussed in preliminary literature, is observed. Nonetheless, the results of the interviews have shown more gratitude towards the commerce part, instead of perceiving it as the opponent. This is because of the benefits that commercialization has for the prosperity of arthouse in The Netherlands, that seems more important according to the respondents. As a reaction to the arthouse content that Cineville creates on their website and social media, Joris said:

I get it, but it's just not for me, so I get it. And rightfully so because the more they sell, the better it is for film, the better it is for arthouse. So, let them do so.... Let's get exposure to maximum and I would love there to be 40 more theaters in Amsterdam with bigger screens, more chairs. I would love for it. (Joris, 29)

Accordingly, these results validate the belief that art and commerce work in coexistence, as a two-way street. Showing no sympathy and taking distance from the commercial actions of Dutch arthouse organizations like Cineville, clearly shows the negative attitude towards the act of arthouse commercialization. It is rather the results of arthouse commercialization that is regarded positively. This supports the theory by Banks (2010), in which the commercialization of the arts, results in increasing production and commodification of the

arts. In addition, the results contradict Willinsky's (2001) view on film audiences that might be interested in keeping art cinema alternative and exclusive. The respondents actually approve arthouse commercialization, by means of the two above-mentioned reasons.

4.2. Importance of the Arthouse Theatre Experience

Because of the deep establishment of arthouse in the respondent's lives, going to the arthouse theatre is an activity that is perceived as naturally. Certain motivational factors that are specific to the experience in arthouse theatres, explain why these theatres remain significantly important to them. It is needless to say that arthouse theatres are not the only providers of arthouse films for a long time already. But with the current digital age in which the accessibility of on-demand arthouse films is growing day by day, together with the trend of cross-over programming in the multiplexes, arthouse theatres have to face some serious competition. This theme shows the results of how arthouse fans perceive the importance of the arthouse theatre experience, with regard to the consequences of commercialization and the possible threats of digitalization.

4.2.1. Possible Treats of Arthouse Digitalization

Arthouse digitalization is evidently present in the lives of the respondents. Now that there are multiple online streaming platforms for arthouse, with a high amount of films to choose from, it is almost unavoidable to make use of them. Consequently, online film watching might overpower the experience of watching films in the theatre. Arthouse digitalization can therefore be seen as disruptive for the arthouse theatre industry (Hilderbrand, 2010). This is also what the respondents realize, but do not find relatable for themselves. Important here, is that the respondents themselves are not feeling affected by arthouse digitalization. As Lisa explained:

I think it's really important that people don't forget that, that the feeling and going somewhere else is also really like a present. It's really nice to be around some people that you otherwise never met. I get that the people do it more often at home, but I don't think you can replace it for it. It's like another option. (Lisa, 23)

According to this respondent, having the digital options at home is just a complementary element to her preference in experiencing arthouse films in the theatre. But, she understands that for other arthouse filmgoers, who are not as involved in arthouse as her, the digital options might serve as a valid alternative. This might have negative consequences for the sustainability of arthouse theatre visits, and eventually the arthouse theatre itself.

Technological disruptions in the film industry have been going around for ages. Before the rise of VOD streaming platforms, there were videotapes and DVD's. The respondents also consider these developments as possible threats; however, they still see people going to the cinema. A recent development that changed the whole dynamic of the home-viewing experience, is the notion of online viewing parties. For example, Netflix has the option of viewing a film synchronically with friends. In this context, the consumer gets to choose its content and the people he or she is going to watch it with. Vitamine Cineville, an online streaming platform that Cineville launched as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, organizes live viewing parties as well. The difference here is that Cineville organizes the viewing parties, which means that anyone with a Cineville account can join. Complimentary, Cineville also offers an introductory talk before the film starts and a Q&A session after the ending. This resembles the theatre experience to some extent, because they try to change the home experience into an online social experience with the same elements that theatres offer. The opinions about this online social experience by means of viewing parties among the respondents are divided. But the majority of the respondents perceive this new online development as positive. Sebastiaan explained:

I have only done it once and at first I was really skeptical. But surprisingly, I became really engaged. So, there was this one film and before it started, they ask you these questions and you could answer through the comment section. And I became really invested. We watched the film and then we were like okay then we can also watch the Q&A. I really enjoyed it. I really enjoyed that whole feeling of... people watching it together online. (Sebastiaan, 25)

This development is closely related to the theoretical concept of collective spectatorship, in which audiences unconsciously enjoy sharing emotions with others during a film. In the literature, this concept is limited to the experiences in the film theatre (Hanich, 2014). Yet, the results show that collective spectatorship for film watching is also present in the online

home experience. Therefore, online streaming platforms, such as Vitamine Cineville, acknowledged the lacking of social experiences at people's homes and took actions accordingly. Moreover, because collective spectatorship and social interactions are considered motivational factors for audiences to visit the cinema (Hanich, 2014; Swanson et al., 2008; Tullekens, 2013), it makes it more valuable to be able to experience this at home as well. However, the respondents who do have a positive perception on online viewing parties, also say that this development is a complementary element of film watching rather than a threat for the arthouse theatres. Ella, a 23-year old female, for example said:

I feel like it is working a little bit, but it's still kind of not the same because you're not like physically together and that's the main difference. You know? I think it just makes people way lazier ... it kind of damages the whole spirit of it. Cause even talking online right now, is completely different. So that's all you need, that physical connection. (Ella, 23)

Here, the respondent clearly states the importance of physical connection in terms of the social experience of film watching, which is an aspect that online collective spectatorship cannot offer.

There is a fear that arthouse theatres will not screen certain new films because of the easiness of digitalization. Studio companies can decide to release a certain film in the theatre on the same date as the online release. Moreover, studios can release multiple films online, resulting in overload of digital availability. Subsequently, arthouse theatres, especially the smaller ones, have to take economic risks on deciding whether they should include that film in their programming. As Michael explained:

The thing is with online streaming is that it's much easier to make much more films available through those things. You can kind of overload and overpower the films that are on offering in arthouse cinemas. Because if you do it at an arthouse cinema, the investment in showing the film was much bigger than just releasing it on online. For streaming, you can just say, 'Hey, let's throw these 10 films online and we'll see which one works.' And that doesn't really work that way in the physical cinema. So, the other threatening thing might be just the overload of availability.

That makes it even harder to invest in a risky film for an actual physical arthouse space. (Michael, 28)

Analyzing the interviews show arthouse fans prefer watching films in the theatre, rather than digitally at home. Therefore, the act of limiting the program schedule by theatres as a result of the overload of digital arthouse availability, shows a negative side of the rise of arthouse digitalization for the arthouse fans. Arthouse digitalization is mostly considered as a complementary option next to the arthouse theatre experience, and therefore perceived as a positive development. However, this perception changes when arthouse digitalization negatively affects the availability of arthouse films in the theatres. Because then, arthouse digitalization negatively affects the respondent's arthouse theatre experience, which they value deeply.

4.2.2. Arthouse Theatre Irreplaceability

Arthouse theatres and multiplexes are tangible aspects of the film industry that can clearly distinct arthouse from mainstream. Subsequently, the differences between the two types of cinemas, are also easier to detect. In the examined interview transcriptions, it became evidently visible that all respondents showed a particular aversion towards the Dutch multiplexes such as Pathé and Vue. This aversion became clear when respondents stated that they barely visit a multiplex, or at least less than an arthouse theatre. Other than the extra technical options in sounds and image (IMAX, Dolby Cinema) that the multiplex offers, or being forced by friends, the respondents would not voluntarily go visit a multiplex. This shows that, the phenomenon of cross-over programming that is also happening in multiplexes, does not serve as a catalyst for arthouse fans to visit the multiplex. The main apparent reason for this aversion, is the visible intention of these multiplexes to make as much profit as possible. Accordingly, other negatively embedded reasons derived from this main belief, such as the multiplexes being impersonal, identical and not inviting. As Noah, a 26-year old film student said about Pathé, "You go in and they make sure that when you go out, you also leave the building immediately. It's just all about making money for Pathé. And you feel it." This relates to the theory by Bourdieu (1993) and the connection he makes between large-scale productions and its focus on economic capital. Because multiplexes, such as Pathé, have venues all over the country, they operate from a large-scale perspective in order to reach the masses. By doing so, the company generally works

with one strategy that fits all the established venues. A few respondents agree with this idea of a strategy by mentioning that multiplexes “work with a formula”. This means that multiplexes are tied to a restricted and commercial way of working, which generates the highest economic success. Hence, a successful formula by e.g. Pathé, is a characteristic element large-scale (mass)productions that Bourdieu (1993) defines. But operating in such a restrictive way, also means there is less room for creativity and time for compassion in the venues. As a consequence, the majority of the multiplexes are identical and therefore lack originality. Moreover, multiplexes do not invite audiences to stay at the venue. When a film screening ends, the goal is to walk out that group of audience and welcome the next big group as soon as possible. Therefore, a multiplex is lacking personal attention and intimacy.

The reasons for preferring arthouse theatres, are relatable to the reasons for disliking multiplexes, in the sense that it works the other way around. What multiplexes do not offer, arthouse theatres can. The respondents feel that arthouse theatres have a different approach to film, which is more from an artistic perspective. This artistic perspective is characterized by the intention of arthouse theatres to create a place for people and by people who are passionate about film as an art form, instead of a product to sell. Arthouse theatres and also the people who work in these theatres, are considered more inviting, personal, passionate about film and being more than just the film. As arthouse theatres are often much smaller than multiplexes, it is more likely to create an intimate atmosphere. These theatres are characterized by the inclusion of small restaurants or cafés, which invites the audience to use the venues as a meeting point and encourages conversations between like-minded people. Furthermore, arthouse theatres are presumably run by people who are passionate about film, which validates a stronger arthouse community that arthouse fans can relate to. Benjamin, a 30-year old filmmaker, explains the differences he witnesses and his preference for arthouse theatres by saying:

“If you go to Kriterion or The Movies in Amsterdam, there is like a great ambiance. You can just sit there for, for a couple of hours and have a coffee or read a book or just write. If you go to a Pathé or a Vue, it's like ‘Hey, welcome to our shiny interior. And then get out.’ It's not really inviting. In theatres you can have a talk with people behind the bar and, you know, I know some of them and that's, I think that's a difference. The smaller arthouse cinema they appreciate their clientele more. There is more like personal connection.” (Benjamin, 30)

This aligns with the literature by Swanson et al. (2008) who emphasize the importance of social interactions as a motivator to visit art performances and are encouraged by the inclusion of restaurants or cafés at the arthouse theatre (Tullekens, 2013). Thus, even though the rise of arthouse commercialization has resulted in more arthouse availability through cross-over programming in multiplexes, arthouse fans express more value for the social interactions that are experienced in an arthouse theatre. This means that the arthouse theatre experience cannot be found in the multiplex, and so the arthouse theatre remains irreplaceable for arthouse fans.

Besides the irreplaceability of the arthouse theatre with regards to the multiplex as the counter pole, it is also important to look at the digital options of arthouse viewing. Growing digitalization of arthouse has resulted in a wider range of content that is available for the viewers at home. Among the respondents, this development is regarded as positive for the overall exposure and accessibility of arthouse. On the other hand, some mentioned the negative outcome of arthouse overexposure caused by digitalization. When there is too much to choose from, there is a possibility that making a choice becomes too overwhelming. Especially for larger streaming platforms that include both mainstream and arthouse films. A significant number of respondents said that they like to discover films in the theatre. Discovery in this context means, for example, going to the theatre without any expectations and allowing the film to surprise you. As Michael explained:

But I feel like some of the films I love the most are films that I did not know I was going to love them until I just watched them... I just really appreciate curators basically. I think that's lacking on the internet. And of course MUBI really does that they say it's curated content. But I really appreciate other people making choices for me and that makes it easier for me to watch and see what happens. Because also, if I'm choosing my own film, I'm going into it with expectations and I like going into it without expectations. (Michael, 28)

Here, the theatre and its programming schedule, serve as a guidance for the arthouse fan to elevate his/her arthouse discovery. With arthouse overexposure due to the rise of arthouse digitalization, this discovery element gets taken away. This is also an argument that stands by the respondents' preference of going to the arthouse theatre, instead of watching films at home.

Another negative aspect of arthouse digitalization that strengthens the irreplaceability of the arthouse theatre, is film designation. Nowadays, films can be watched on multiple types of media platforms. From a large screen in the theatre, to a small mobile device such as the smartphone. Watching a film on different media platforms can be experienced differently, in which one might be preferred over the other. According to the respondents, some arthouse films are made to be watched in the theatre. Some films are experiences at their best, when one is fully immersed in the film. As Michael explained:

When you go to a cinema space and the room goes dark and there's no distraction, you can just completely be enveloped by the film and, and engage with the film fully. And then even if you try to mimic that at home, turning off the lights, wearing head phones, all that stuff, there's always the possibility to just get up and get something from the fridge. And even if you don't do it, there's still that possibility. It makes the experience different for me. I'm never able to completely let go. So, I really curate the films that I watch at home...The ones that are mostly story-based and the ones that are relying more on being put in a different frame of mind or a different state of watching things. I think they kind of fall flat at home, so I don't watch them at home. (Michael, 28)

Therefore, film designation is an important aspect that should be taken into account when discussing arthouse digitalization. Even with the rise of arthouse digitalization and the availability of online arthouse films that comes with it (Hilderbrand, 2010), the power of the viewing experience in the arthouse theatre sustains for the arthouse fans.

4.3. Elimination of Film Dichotomy

Within the discussion of cultural productions in preliminary literature, scholars often times make a distinction between the differences in order to clearly explain the context monolithically (Bourdieu, 1993; Kersten, 2012). With regards to the film industry, the distinction between arthouse and mainstream is normalized. The division that takes place here, together with the corresponding characteristics of each group, makes the discussion between the two types clear and straightforward to understand the theory of film. This also means that, using this film dichotomy in real life conversations is still relevant and

sometimes necessary to do so. However, when applying the theory in the practical context of film production, there seems to be overlap between the two groups on a multi-faced level. This makes it rather complicated to interpret the theory that fails to go deeper than the surface. There is overlap within the content of the film, places of screenings and even audiences, which are validated through cross-over films and cross-over programming. This theme presents the results of how arthouse fans perceive this theoretical distinction between arthouse and mainstream, within the developments of arthouse commercialization and digitalization.

By analyzing the interviews, it became clear that arthouse films are getting more exposure through commercialization, and therefore are becoming more mainstream. Arthouse commercialization is mainly instigated by theatres and organizations. However, the shift of audience changes the position of arthouse to a more mainstream stand as well. In theory, this means that arthouse films are reaching an audience beyond their niche audience.

There are two things that are happening with regards to the mass audience, that has an impact on the changing position of arthouse towards a more mainstream stand. First of all, the mass audience is getting more exposed to arthouse films by means of arthouse commercialization and digitalization. There is more chance for these arthouse films to gain bigger fandom due to the higher audience response. Secondly, to move away from the passive picture of the mass audience, their interest in film topics has changed as well. In today's society, topics such as the importance of inclusion and diversity are undeniable. Challenging topics that used to be distinctive for arthouse films, are now getting the attention of the masses. Many respondents gave the example of the film *Parasite* (2019), which is essentially a typical arthouse film. Arthouse topics such as social inequality and elements like genre-mixing are all evident in the film. However, the film's symbolic success by winning four Oscars, has resulted in the film being picked up by the mainstream. Thus, symbolic capital has led to more economic capital. This contradicts the literature by Kersten (2013), in which she explains that higher levels of economic capital (Bourdieu, 1993), tend to result in lower levels of symbolic capital. The two beforementioned points show that arthouse films are not becoming more mainstream because the content is changing, but because of more exposure by means of commercialization in combination with a change of interests of the mass audience.

A tool that helps with raising the voices of the public is social media, which serves as a medium for audiences to criticize the large-scaled production companies. A 30-year old male respondent explained:

And I think also fans, or like social media helps with, in some ways, criticizing major platforms. You can be vocal about it even. If it's the Oscars only have like white people, you're going to know that and the organization will have to do something about it. So, I think that they're learning. It's getting better and the lines are getting vaguer. Mainstream and arthouse are mixing. (Benjamin, 30)

Social media makes it easier for audiences to speak up about what is wrong in mainstream film representations. As a result, large-scaled production companies, such as Hollywood, act accordingly by delivering what the audience wants. Mainstream production companies and the interest of the mass audience are strongly tied here, because the intention of these companies to obtain big box office hits still remains. Therefore, listening to their audience and producing films they want to see, stimulates their goal of achieving high economic capital.

As a result of the use of arthouse film elements by large film production companies, the boundaries between arthouse and mainstream are blurring. In addition to this, there are also differences in films within the arthouse spectrum. Some might be vague, complex or easy-going. It is the matter of how the audience responds to it, which influences how an arthouse film gets positioned. Arthouse films can be labeled as mainstream according to factors such as high box-office revenues, production, studio company and budgets. This also means that the area in-between pure arthouse and blockbuster, is too grey to specifically pinpoint what a film should be called. The majority of the respondents have said to be against the dichotomy of film. Simply because it is not always possible to label a film as arthouse or mainstream. Especially with the increasing commercialization of arthouse and the rise of cross-over films as a result. As Bart said:

I think the opposition between art house and mainstream cinema, is a really strange opposition in itself. Because you get into discussion, is it arthouse or is it mainstream? And I think a lot of movies these days, like you said before, are so blurry that you can't even say. Like the categorization doesn't really make sense anymore for a lot of cases. And I think that's a good thing because there are so

many different kinds of movies and putting them in either mainstream or art house is doing a disservice for both of them, for mainstream movies and art house. So, I think it's good that the lines blur in a way. (Bart, 25)

Here, the respondent explains his approval of the blurring boundaries between arthouse and mainstream cinema. The works of the cultural industries, especially the film industry, are too complex for it to be categorized into arthouse and mainstream. This connects with scholars like Bordwell and Thompson (2011) and Hesmondhalgh (2006), who critique the works of Bourdieu (1986, 1993) on the distinction within cultural production. The complexity that is illustrated in the quote, validates that the conflux of the cultural and commercial fields, are not discussed enough by Bourdieu (1993). Therefore, the blurring boundaries between arthouse and mainstream cinema, that is made more visible now with the increase of arthouse commercialization and digitalization, is positively perceived as a more realistic view on the current film industry.

4.4. Perseverance of the Arts

The blurring boundaries between arthouse and mainstream, as discussed in the previous theme, has been regarded as a positive development according to the respondents. However, blurring the boundaries is considered positive to a certain degree. The actions and intentions of the production companies should be right, which means that the use of artistic elements should be used for art's sake and not for economic capital. Moreover, as some respondents do not advocate the idea of a niche audience, they still believe that a niche audience will remain by means of the continuation of new artistic films that oppose the mainstream.

4.4.1. Remain Artistic Intentions

When considering the artistic intentions of filmmaking, it is valuable to explain the respondent's perception of artistic elements in arthouse. These elements serve as exhaustive background information, in order to better understand certain comments they make about the importance of the arts in film. During the interviews, the respondents got asked why they like arthouse films. There were two important elements that resulted from the analysis. The first one is creative freedom of the director. Creative freedom shows how

the director is perceived as an artist who makes an artistic product in a film format. Respondents appreciate how arthouse films can be unpredictable and experimental. This could be in terms of tweaking the chronological order of the film or mixing different genres. Through creative freedom, the director can place his or her personal signature in the film, which is highly valued by the respondents. As Joris (29) said about arthouse films, “Just the emotion that's in it. It always has an experimental aspect or, the author gets to have like his sign or his signature to it. I see film as an art form.” This passion allows for deeper connections and meanings in the visual storytelling that actually creates a conversation between the film and the audience.

The creative freedom as explained here, relates to the theory of autonomy (Banks, 2010; Bourdieu, 1993; de Valck, 2012). Independent arthouse directors are characterized by being artistically autonomous from the commercial constraints of adapting their work to the likings of the mass audience. However, this does not always have to be the case now that cross-over films are getting more popular. Another artistic element is the possibility of an arthouse film to impact someone in real life. Most of the time, this impact was explained by a film's ability to change a person's perspective on, for example, social issues. As Olivia (23) said, “When it gives me a different perspective on things that I haven't thought about in any way...yeah, I love that.” Thus, this connects to the idea and the importance of a learning experience that is being guided by arthouse (Swanson et al., 2008).

From the analysis, it became clear that all the respondents gave a negative tone when talking about mainstream films. The majority admitted that they also enjoy to watch mainstream films, however they have their reasons for preferring arthouse films. The most significant reason for this, is the commercial approach of mainstream films which results in working with a formula. This connects with the previous results on the respondent's aversion to multiplexes, such as Pathé. Like the venues, different mainstream films are more likely to work with one formula that generates the highest revenue. As a consequence, most mainstream films are similar and thus have a predictable storyline. The restrictions of a formula automatically block the creative freedom of the director, which is considered the most important motivation of liking arthouse by the respondents. Important to mention is, that this formula changes from time to time, according to the commercial interest of the mass audience. In the end, large production companies that produce mainstream films, rely on the mass audience because they bring the highest amount of money. This is also the difference in arthouse and mainstream. Within arthouse, the

producer leads and has the control to decide what kind of film there will be created. Whereas, within mainstream, it is the mass audience that has that control. Explaining the differences in artistic and commercial elements in films, also shows the artistic intentions of the director and the commercial intentions of the mainstream production company.

In relation to the *Arthouse Expansion* theme, respondents have stated to acknowledge that the arthouse field needs commercialization to happen in order for arthouse to grow (Banks, 2010). Therefore, they perceive arthouse commercialization as a positive development for the Dutch arthouse scene as a whole. Arthouse commercialization in this context can be seen as a romanticized progress, in which only good things derive from it. Contrary, the respondents have also mentioned the possible downside of arthouse commercialization that should be taken into consideration. One thing that is sure, is that the artistic creative freedom of the director should by all means be a fundamental concern. It is important that independent directors make films with full creative freedom, which is autonomous from the restrictions of the commercial industries to achieve the best revenue (Banks, 2010; Bourdieu, 1993). This relates to remaining the artistic intentions of making a film. If then, the film reaches a larger audience response and becomes a mainstream success, it is only perceived as a positive and beneficial situation for the arthouse scene. Usually, these successful arthouse films are accessible crossovers, which are considered to be crucial for remaining and expanding the arthouse audience. Whether the arthouse film is vague and reaches only a small niche audience, or whether the arthouse film is more accessible and reaches a large audience, the artistic intention of the director should be right. Joris, explained the benefits of arthouse commercialization:

If it wouldn't affect the film and the way it was intended. And it only ups budgets and possibilities. And if it's still driven from that same motivation to make art. And then I guess it's just a positive thing and I'll be able to become a lot richer in my future. (Joris, 29)

Analyzing this quote shows how the respondent sees the benefits of arthouse commercialization in order for arthouse to grow, while also emphasizing on the importance of remaining the artistic intentions. The need to remain something, also reflects the possible downside of arthouse commercialization, in which artistic intentions make place for commercial intentions of making money. In theory, this means that symbolic capital

makes place for economic capital as well (Bourdieu, 1993). As Olivia, a 23-year old female explains:

The only problem that can happen if something gets popularized at the movies, is that it tends to suck later, you know, so that's my only problem. I think that maybe some directors in arthouse are going to make movies through the perception of making money and through the perception of making a popular movie or making a storyline that speaks to more people. And I don't think that's really the thing that arthouse is about. It's about putting your life on screen or putting your heart on screen and putting your thought processes on screen in the way that arthouse does. So, I hope that when it gets popularized that most of the directors still stay independent and still release arthouse movies through smaller producers like 824 or something. Like that would be amazing. (Olivia, 23)

Or the other way around, when large production companies use arthouse elements, just because it is a trend and it starts to belong to the formula of achieving high revenues. Ella explained:

I think it's sneaky cause I feel like commercialization is happening because they've realized that, okay, in the art house dimensions you have people of different backgrounds who don't fit the white perfect narratives for Hollywood. So, if they're becoming more successful and Hollywood exploits that.. I, yeah, it's just like disrespectful. It's kind of just all for the money and like whatever is the next trend? Like, okay, we're going to talk about racial issues or migration issues, just because it's become popularized. (Ella, 23)

Other respondents share the same aversion towards the exploitation of arthouse by Hollywood. As Benjamin (30) said, "If the filmmaker or writer doesn't have a chance, or the freedom is taken away. Then I wouldn't agree." An example would be forcing topics like racial issues in a narrative that was not intended by the director to be like that. Thus, within the developments of arthouse commercialization and digitalization, remaining artistic intention from the production side, is perceived as highly important for the perseverance of arthouse.

4.4.2. New Artistic Movement

Taking audience expansion as a result of growing arthouse commercialization and digitalization, arthouse has been growing in popularity. The idea of a niche audience is slowly fading away, because the niche audience is expanding. All the respondents have mentioned to be positive about this development. However, there seems to be a different opinion when the boundaries between arthouse and mainstream get too blurry. If more arthouse films lose their artistic intentions to commercialization and if arthouse is getting exploited by large production companies, then arthouse becomes the new mainstream. Currently, it has not gotten to this point, but half of the respondents have said that there will automatically be a new opposing group if this happens. A male respondent for example said:

Arthouse will become some kind of the new mainstream and people will start to oppose it. If they just say, all right, this is now arthouse and we will put it into the mainstream, then it will eventually and hopefully create a new kind of arthouse.
(Bart, 25)

This respondent explains the cycle of the film industry. Another respondent, Olivia, adds to this idea with her opinion about a remaining niche audience:

You can also see it in the art world when a certain type of genre or a certain type of a technique gets mainstream. Like, the real creatives never stop creating and there will always be a small niche. There will always be new involvements and there will always be new creatives to create something that the masses aren't ready for yet.
(Olivia, 23)

These excerpts show that there will always be a need for a new artistic movement that opposes the mainstream, including a fitting niche audience. The belief in the perseverance of an alternative artistic group that opposes the mainstream, relates to the explanation that Willinsky (2001) gives on the behavior of the arthouse niche audience. In her explanation, the arthouse audience, characterized as the intelligent elite, wanted to distinguish themselves

from ordinary filmgoers (Willinsky, 2001). Although the respondents have said to be against this outdated image, they do seem to believe that there are radical arthouse fans who are essential for the perseverance of arthouse. The belief in the perseverance of arthouse, also relates to the theory of autonomy as posed by Bourdieu and Nice (1980) as discussed by Banks (2010). Applying the autonomy as posed to the arthouse scene, results in radical arthouse fans who take a disinterested stance towards the economic world of commercial mainstream cinema. As a result, this will preserve the authenticity and the belief of arthouse. By doing so, arthouse remains preserved and will in return get recognized by others. This validates the ongoing lifecycle of arthouse. The content of arthouse that we know now, might not be the arthouse that exist in the future. However, the idea of arthouse as a niche product will be preserved, because there will always be an alternative to the mainstream.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine audience perceptions of arthouse by answering the central question: *How do Dutch millennial arthouse fans perceive arthouse in The Netherlands in times of increasing commercialization and digitalization of arthouse?* By conducting in-depth interviews, Dutch arthouse fans generally have a positive stance on increasing arthouse commercialization and digitalization. Arthouse commercialization and digitalization results in more exposure of arthouse, both offline and online. Because of these developments, arthouse reaches a larger audience which has consequences for the position of arthouse in The Netherlands. Instead of being restrained to a niche product and the corresponding niche audience, arthouse has shifted to a more mainstream position. This is a development that arthouse fans appreciate, but to a certain extent. The acknowledgement of arthouse films by the masses, is considered to be important and needed according to arthouse fans. Arthouse films serve as a learning tool because of the often complex topics that give a real representation of the world. Arthouse fans truly believe that arthouse films can change or enrich people's perspectives of society in a positive way. Therefore, arthouse deserves to get more exposure for a better cause. More arthouse exposure results in larger audiences and higher profits. Even though artistic values are known to clash with commercial demands, arthouse fans acknowledge that the arthouse industry needs commercialization and digitalization, in order to be able to make more arthouse films. Hence, by taking a broader perspective, these commercial

developments of arthouse in The Netherlands are considered positive for the future of arthouse. The positive stance on arthouse commercialization and digitalization and the acceptance of broadening the niche audience, contradicts the main ideas of Bourdieu (1993) and Willinsky (2001) on arthouse and the arthouse audience. Whereas Bourdieu (1993) refers to the niche audience that belongs to the artistic field of cultural production, Willinsky (2001) states that arthouse fans might want art cinema to remain alternative and exclusive.

Regarding commercialization in The Netherlands, perceptions on the three commercial aspects were explored. Cross-over programming in the arthouse theatre and the multiplex was perceived as highly positive. This aspect of commercialization creates arthouse audience expansion, with audience diversity in specific. With cross-over programming, audience diversity happens in the physical arthouse theatre and in the total number of arthouse viewers in The Netherlands. Arthouse theatres might attract mainstream audiences by screening mainstream films, whereas arthouse screenings in multiplexes results in mainstream audiences being more exposed to arthouse films. Second of all, Cineville is perceived as a positive driver of arthouse commercialization and digitalization. The easy way of discussing arthouse makes Cineville accessible for attracting new audiences, which is in itself a commercial act. However, for arthouse enthusiast, Cineville is not challenging enough. At last, arthouse fans recognize the commercial efforts of Dutch film festivals regarding cultural marketing (Unwin et al., 2007). Despite these efforts, not all types of film festivals are able to attract new audiences. The larger film festivals, such as IFFR and IDFA, have more capital to invest in marketing their events. But for the smaller Dutch film festivals, commercialization seems like a long way to go.

From the home-viewing perspective, increasing arthouse commercialization and digitalization has made arthouse films more accessible on online streaming platforms. New technologies, such as viewing parties, have made the use of these streaming platforms more attractive. However, arthouse fans perceive these digital options as something complementary to the arthouse theatre experience, instead of an alternative. There is an understanding of the possible treat that arthouse digitalization has created for film theatres, but this is more relatable to regular cinema goers. As true arthouse fans, the social interaction at the arthouse theatre is something that stays irreplaceable. Therefore, the fans are sure that arthouse commercialization and digitalization will not stop them from visiting the film theatre. The importance of social interaction aligns with the literature by Swanson

et al. (2008), who describe social interaction as a motivator for audiences to visit art performances. Together with the importance of social interactions, film designation plays a role as well. Some films are considered to be most suitable to be watched within the immersion of the theatre, to experience the film in its full potential. Furthermore, the offerings of arthouse films that are available through VOD platforms in The Netherlands, are considered to be limiting compared to the US and Canada. This also validates why arthouse fans do not see digitalization of arthouse in the Netherlands as a treat for them. On the other hand, arthouse digitalization becomes a treat when the overload of digitalization negatively affects the arthouse theatres. There can be an overload of availability in terms of online arthouse films or short release dates between VOD services and arthouse theatres. As a result, arthouse theatres have to minimize the economic risk of screening a film, because audiences might rather watch the film digitally. This can lead to limited screenings, or in the worst case, the disappearance of an arthouse theatre. This has a negative impact on the perception of arthouse fans towards the commercialization and digitalization, since they prefer the experience in the arthouse theatre.

With the blurring boundaries between arthouse and mainstream, that is more driven with the increasing commercialization and digitalization of arthouse, the categorical dimensions have been revisited. Overall, arthouse fans have a critical standpoint towards the framework by Bourdieu (1993), in which he distinguishes two fields in cultural production. With the rise of film cross-overs, that incorporate arthouse and mainstream elements, it is considered too shallow to put films into the boxes of arthouse or mainstream. Moreover, arthouse is an industry that aspires economic capital as well. This shows the complexity of the cultural industry in which arts and commerce share an intimate relationship (Banks, 2010; Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Ryan, 1992), which does not align with Bourdieu (1993). Therefore, arthouse fans have an agreed idea on the elimination of film dichotomy.

The possible downside of arthouse commercialization and digitalization, is when arthouse directors are becoming too constraint by the commercial demands. Arthouse fans would find it a shame if the true intention of arthouse directors for making a film, changes from making art to making money. Moreover, the exploitation of arthouse by large production companies such as Hollywood, is also perceived as something negative. It can be concluded that the artistic intentions on the production side of the arthouse films should be remained, with respect to the perseverance of the arts. Even though arthouse is becoming more mainstream, arthouse fans believe that there will always be an alternative

group that opposes the mainstream. This radical perspective of a niche audience that opposes and distinguishes itself from the commercial world, aligns with the ideas of arthouse audiences by Bourdieu (1993) and Willinsky (2001). This also means that an arthouse niche audience, defined by the interest of radical high-art, will remain.

5.1. Limitations and Future Research

From the eleven respondents for this study, six of them live in either Rotterdam or Amsterdam. The results have shown that these two cities have the largest exposure of arthouse by means of theatres and events, especially Amsterdam. In order to get more nuanced results that represents the Netherlands as a whole, the sample could have been more improved by including more respondents from smaller cities. This way, the sample, by means of the respondents' residence, would have been better distributed.

For this research, only arthouse fans were interviewed. However, the commercialization and digitalization of arthouse, has also impacted the mainstream film industry as a whole. Multiplexes include more arthouse films because of cross-over programming. Mainstream streaming platforms such as Netflix include all types of films, including arthouse films. From the study it became clear that arthouse is actually becoming mainstream. These developments not only affect the arthouse fans, but also the mainstream audience. Because of arthouse commercialization and digitalization, mainstream audiences now get more exposed to arthouse films. It can therefore be interesting for future studies to take a different perspective by focusing on film audiences that experience arthouse commercialization and digitalization without being arthouse fans. By broadening the audience perspective, the research on audience perspectives on arthouse commercialization and digitalization, does not stay limited to the already established arthouse audience.

This study focuses on the arthouse landscape in The Netherlands. This is because of the distinctive growth of arthouse theatre visits, compared to the surrounding countries. Thus, it is expected that the Dutch arthouse landscape is more successful than the surrounding countries. However, to really explore this difference more thoroughly across countries, future studies can take a cross-national approach by doing research on the arthouse landscape in e.g. Germany, France and Belgium. The results of the cross-national research, can then serve as an interesting addition to the current study. By exploring the differences across countries, the results can provide meaningful insights for countries where the arthouse landscape might need some help.

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Appendix A: Overview of the Interview Respondents

Respondent 1: Sandy

Gender: Female

Age: 23

From: Rotterdam

Former intern at KINO Rotterdam

Volunteers for Dutch film festivals

Respondent 2: Sophie

Gender: Female

Age: 24

From: Haarlem

Film & Literature student with specialization in Asian film

Volunteers for Dutch film festivals

Respondent 3: Ella

Gender: Female

Age: 23

From: Den Haag

Sociology student

Volunteers for Dutch film festivals

Respondent 4: Sebastiaan

Gender: Male

Age: 25

From: Den Haag

Film & Literature Student with specialization in Asian film

Beginning film maker

Volunteers for Dutch film festivals

Respondent 5: Lisa

Gender: Female

Age: 23

From: Rotterdam

Works at KINO Rotterdam

Respondent 6: Joris

Gender: Male

Age: 29

From: Amsterdam

Freelance Film maker and former Film Studies student

Respondent 7: Olivia

Gender: Female

Age: 23

From: Rotterdam

Leisure Management student

Volunteers for Dutch film festivals

Respondent 8: Michael

Gender: Male

Age: 28

From: Amsterdam

Volunteered and now works for Dutch film festivals

Former Media Studies student

Co-founder and editor of Crème Amsterdam. An online newsletter on cultural events in Amsterdam.

Respondent 9: Noah

Gender: Male

Age: 26

From: Amsterdam

Former Film Studies student

Organizes own film festival VERS

Respondent 10: Bart

Gender: Male

Age: 25

From: Utrecht

Former Liberal Arts and Science student, with specialization of Film Studies

Respondent 11: Benjamin

Gender: Male

Age: 30

From: Amsterdam

Film Maker

Appendix B: Topic List

- **Intro questions**
 - Could you please introduce yourself?
 - When was the last time you saw a movie?
 - Did you see the movie in the cinema or did you watch it at home?

- **Arthouse motivation**
 - Arthouse film theatre
 - How often do you attend arthouse theatres?
 - Why do you like arthouse theatres over big multiplexes such as Pathé? Or vice versa
 - In what ways do you feel like the social aspects of going to the arthouse theatres differ from multiplexes?
 - Think of the café and restaurant that are usually included in the arthouse theatres.
 - Different audiences
 - Do you feel like you're part of an arthouse community? How does that make you feel like?

 - Arthouse content
 - What elements in arthouse cinema, regarding the content, makes you like watching arthouse movies?
 - Why?
 - Why do you like arthouse cinema (over mainstream cinema) in terms of the content or vice versa?

- **Arthouse commercialization**
 - Cross-over programming. *First explain the concept of cross-over programming*
 - Have you ever heard of cross-over programming in the cinema?

- Have you ever watched a mainstream movie in a particular arthouse cinema?
Why?
- What are your thoughts on cross-over programming?
 - Negative/positive

- Cineville
 - Do you have a Cineville account?
 - Why? Why not?
 - Do you go to film theatres more often since you have a Cineville pass compared to before?
 - In what other ways do you think Cineville has influenced your consumption of arthouse films?
 - Do you feel like Cineville puts a lot of effort in making arthouse more accessible for larger audiences? Do you feel like it is working?
 - Think of their marketing/ social media
 - What do you think of Cineville's motive of making arthouse more popular?
 - How does that make you feel like?

- Film festivals
 - Do you attend film festivals?
 - Why? Why not?
 - What do you like/dislike about film festivals?
 - Do you think that festivals have made arthouse more popular in the Netherlands?
 - As a filmmaker, do you feel like these festivals encourage you to make more films? (Only ask when participant makes films)
 - In what ways do you think that these film festivals have changed the position of arthouse in The Netherlands?

- **Arthouse digitalization**

Give short intro on the rise of arthouse digitalization and Video-on-demand services

- When watching arthouse movies at home, which tools/platforms do you use to watch it?
 - Download/VOD/stream
 - What do you like about the option of watching arthouse cinema at home?
- VOD →
- Are you familiar with VOD services that focus on arthouse cinema?
 - Have you ever considered paying for an arthouse movie to watch at home? (Considering the current Corona virus situation with theatres closing their doors)
 - Does VOD/downloading have an influence on how often you go to the actual theatre to watch a film?
 - Could you explain why or why not VOD could be a threat to the film theatre?

- **Autonomy of arthouse**

- Boundary between arthouse versus mainstream
 - According to you, what is the difference between arthouse cinema and mainstream cinema?
 - Apart from the differences, do you also notice any similarities between arthouse and mainstream cinema?
 - Studies have shown that there is a blurring boundary between arthouse versus mainstream cinema. This means that the two types of cinema are not as distinctive as they used to be. Do you recognize this as well?
 - As an arthouse fan, how does this blurring boundary between arthouse and mainstream makes you feel like?
 - Do you like it/dislike it?