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# WHEN THE AUDIENCE OF ART MOVIE THEATRES IS NOT THE AUDIENCE OF ART FILMS

Michaël BOURGATTE

*Every form of society has been based [...] on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes. But in order to oppress a class, certain conditions must be assured to it under which it can, at least, continue its slavish existence.*

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels<sup>i</sup>

## Introduction

The cinema is one of the best cultural objects for examining the concept of *non-public* – as conceived by French philosopher Francis Jeanson – because it probes the border between the field of entertainment and the field of artistic experience. Also, the cinema seems to be one of the best cultural objects for examining this concept because it is so popular in modern Western society and because it refers ambiguously to two things: it is both a place and an artistic work. Thus, we never really know to what the concept of *non-public* is referring. Is it an audience absent from cultural places, or a group of people that has never encountered certain works of art? In analyzing this ambiguity, we will not focus on private film practices, although they no doubt raise many questions<sup>ii</sup>. Our focus here is on the study of cinematographic practices in movie theatres<sup>iii</sup>.

The notion of *non-public* appeared in France in the spring of 1968, during the political and ideological protests of May '68. This period is credited with giving rise to a particular observation: certain people do not have access to culture. But the minute this notion is raised, it over-defined its subject by dramatizing it. The cultural agents of the period wondered how an entire section of the population could lack access to cultural places and objects. And so, the concept of *non-public* immediately introduced a reductive split between a group of people cut off from “the cultural phenomenon”<sup>iv</sup> and real or potential audiences. This categorization allowed inequalities in the possibility for accessing culture to be identified. And yet it offered little nuance. The concept is deeply holistic, and failed to take into account individual characteristics that required more caution, as emphasized by two books of proceedings published in 2004 following a conference on this concept<sup>v</sup>.

This late-sixties approach is part of the rise of a “theoretical phenomenon” formulated and identified by Pierre Bourdieu in *The Love of Art*<sup>vi</sup>. In this book, the sociologist demonstrates that access (or non-access) to culture is symbolic and not material<sup>vii</sup>. In other words, social determinism influences cultural practices, an idea confirmed by The Survey on French Cultural Practices carried out during the same period<sup>viii</sup>. The brilliance of this approach has met with little

opposition because so much statistical data, still being collected, supports this theory. And yet, Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* has its limitations. The ties between individuals and culture are knotted in a more complex fashion, largely surpassing their social affiliation (belonging to the upper socio-professional category or to the lower socio-professional category) or their geographical affiliation (living in a city or in the country). German sociologist and journalist Siegfried Kracauer had already emphasized this point in the 1920s in a study on the emerging middle class composed of "salaried masses"<sup>ix</sup>. Not entirely belonging to the upper socio-professional category or to the lower socio-professional category, these "salaried masses" were numerically dominant in society and formed the vast majority of the audience in movie theatres.

How, therefore, do we examine the concept of *non-public*? To what does it refer? Does it designate people who do not visit certain cultural places, or people who do not encounter certain cultural objects? Processing these questions should shed light on the ambiguities inherent in this notion of *non-public* notably because it deals with *non-reception* and *deviant reception* (from the spectator's point of view, we could say *non-practice* and *deviant practice*). These ambivalences, which lie at the very heart of the concept of the *non-public*, raise questions about its relevance and its usage.

This article will investigate the relation between the concept of audience and the concept of *non-public* using the results of two studies carried out with spectators attending Art movie houses in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (PACA) region in south-eastern France. These movie houses are dedicated to presenting Art films to which the national film authorities designate cultural value with an Art label. As such, Art movie theatres are officially designated and recognized as important cultural agents in the French cultural landscape. But these Art movie theatres also screen commercial films, with no Art label, which attract large numbers of spectators<sup>x</sup>. Thus, the existence of this national standard of value raises a question: is there not an audience of Art movie theatres that is also a *non-public* of Art films?

To answer this question, we propose first to test the notion of *non-public* against the place of film practice, and ask whether it would be a better idea to investigate the dichotomy between the notions of place and non-place. As a second part of the analysis, in symmetrical fashion, we inquire if we should not focus our attention on the division between Art films and commercial films – or from a conceptual point of view, between art and non-art – in examining the notion of *non-public*. Finally, in the third and last part of this analysis, we review the debate around the notion of audience itself, its conceptual significance and its use. Is not the *non-public* simply part of the audience the instant this term of "audience" is made plural?

## **1. The *non-public* put to the test by the concept of non-place**

### **1.1.1 *The commitment to Art movie theatres***

In cinema practice, the cinema-going is more important than watching the film. This is because cinema is above all a social experience<sup>xi</sup>. This assertion, valid when the Lumière brothers screened their movies in 1895, is even more valid today with the new ways in watching movies (Internet, VoD, pocket desktops). Cinema-going allows audience exposure of taste. Above all, it

allows viewers to talk about films rapidly, as movie houses have the exclusivity of newly released films.

More than regular movie theatres, Art movie theatres show this effect, because they screen a much wider range of films, which allows researchers to identify different groups of viewers. This is the reason we focused on this type of movie theatre. Appearing for the first time in the 1920s, the first French Art movie theatres were dedicated to screening avant-garde films. From 1955 on, they began receiving support for screening Art and Experimental films. But the movement's orthodox nature is soon replaced by a desire and a necessity to become competitive. So, many Art movie theatres began to split their programming between Art films and commercial films, firstly, to continue their work of discovering movies and to benefit from the Art label, and secondly, to qualify for the relevant subsidies.

Today, France has over a thousand Art movie theatres. While they can be identified by their cultural activities, they still play the role of a local movie theatre, allowing captive audiences (young people and seniors) access to movies. They also respond to people's expectations during large, sometimes long-awaited and (over-)mediatized film releases, (American comedies or Walt Disney movies). Screening these commercial films ensures them a good financial return because they attract huge numbers of people. However, they continue to ensure an exploration of Art films, often quite discreetly. This assessment contradicts, to some extent, the simplistic representation in which two kinds of cinema houses exist: one devoted to artistic films, the other to mainstream movies.

During the survey taken in the PACA region (n=984), spectators are asked to name the film they had watched immediately prior to taking the survey. The answers allowed us to identify two groups of viewers: one group attending Art movie theatres to watch Art films, the other attending Art movie theatres to watch commercial films. A first difference can be observed in the rates of attendance in the studied movie theatres (see Table 1).

**TABLE 1**  
**Rates of attendance at Art movie theatres by audience of Art films and by audience of commercial films**

	1x/yr	2-3x/yr	1x every 2-3 mths	At least 1x/mth	Several x/mth	At least 1x/wk	Several x/wk	Total
Audience of Art films	0,8 %	3,9 %	10,4 %	21,4 %	33,8 %	19,1 %	10,6 %	100 %
Audience of Commercial films	0,8 %	7,1 %	23,5 %	21,3 %	31,1 %	9,3 %	6,8 %	100 %
Total	0,8 %	5,3 %	16,0 %	21,4 %	32,7 %	14,9 %	9,0 %	100 %

*Source : Michaël Bourgatte – Audiences in PACA, 2007 (n = 984)*

Viewers who preferred Art films went to the movies more often than viewers of commercial films. The study also shows that viewers of Art films are statistically older, as if adapting to Art films is progressive. This is, no doubt, linked to the complexity of the films' plots, at both the narrative and visual levels, which require learning and repeated encounters before they can be appreciated (this is probably easier for retired people who have attended movie theatres for years and who have more free time) (see Table 2).

**TABLE 2**  
**Rate of attendance (by age category) at Art movie theatres by audience of Art films and by audience of commercial films**

	-15yrs	15-17yrs	18-24yrs	25-34yrs	35-49yrs	50-64yrs	65yrs+	Total
Audience of Art films	0,4 %	1,8 %	3,3 %	5,5 %	25,9 %	43,3 %	19,8 %	100%
Audience of Commercial films	2,3 %	3,2 %	11,6 %	11,0 %	30,9 %	25,4 %	15,6 %	100%
Total	1,1 %	2,4 %	6,9 %	7,9 %	28,1 %	35,6 %	18,0 %	100%

*Source : Michaël Bourgatte – Audiences in PACA, 2007 (n = 984)*

Looking at Table 2, we can see a statistical reversal at work between the two types of audiences in the 35-49-age category, a turning point corresponding to the target audience of Art movie

houses. The 50-and-overs are over-represented among those who prefer Art films. The audience of commercial films is, in turn, composed primarily of less elderly viewers, supporting the hypothesis of a progressive adaptation to Art films. This tendency is confirmed by a result obtained in another study carried out in 2006 on high school students participating in a visual education program (n=250)<sup>xii</sup>. For these young people, the attendance of movie theatres is more of an event, associated with the desire to watch that year's big movie releases. The film adaptation of the popular novel *Twilight*, a new production from Pixar studios or the last episode of the *Harry Potter* saga are relevant examples.

**TABLE 3**  
**Attendance rates in movie theatres by high school students**

	Attendance rates		Attendance rates
None	10,4 %		
Only once	14,0 %		
2 or 3x	29,2 %	} Occasionals	66,8 %
1x every 2-3 months	23,6 %		
At least 1x per month	10,8 %		
Several times per month	7,2 %	} Regulars	18 %
At least 1x per week	3,2 %		
Several times per week	1,6 %	} Dedicated	4,8 %
Total	100,0 %		100,0 %

*Source: Michaël Bourgatte – Study on high school students participating in a visual education program, 2006 (n = 250)*

Note that rates of attendance in movie theatres by high school students are moderate. Two thirds of them (66.8%) stated that they attend between one and six times per year, which roughly corresponds to the French attendance average of around three film outings a year per person<sup>xiii</sup>. But their rate of home film consumption is higher (nearly two thirds said that they saw two or three films, sometimes more, per week), permitting them to shape their knowledge of film through television, VHSs, DVDs and all other digital formats (VoD, streaming). Modalities for encountering films are diverse: purchases, recordings, or downloadings.

And yet, these young people, like all audiences of commercial films, show a real commitment to the Art movie theatres where they are surveyed, even if their rate of attendance at these movie houses is weak. The study carried out in Art movie theatres in the PACA region (n=984)

confirmed this: 75.3% of people surveyed stated that they came exclusively or mainly to these specific movie theatres.

### 1.1.2 *The tangible part and the symbolic part of Art movie theatres*

Certain differences between the two groups of viewers are noted. But consistencies are also seen when spectators are asked to express their level of satisfaction with the Art movie theatre where they are surveyed. Using a series of nine criteria (programming, the program, cost, reception, schedule organization and screenings, projection quality, comfort of the rooms, accessibility of the movie theatre, and, finally, its commitment to activist activity), we noted that the average level of satisfaction expressed for each one of them is 93%.

These data indicate two things. First, there is no actual *non-public* of Art movie theatres. Anyone can go to this type of movie house when he or she wishes to watch a film, be it an Art film or a commercial one. Even so, it is still possible to designate as a *non-public*, viewers attending this type of theatre who do not watch Art films. Nevertheless, all of the people surveyed expressed a real loyalty to these movie theatres. That is our second result. Despite their attraction to different categories of films, both viewer groups that we identified maintain a close relationship with their movie theatres.

Thus, it seemed interesting to shift our inquiry onto the concept of place – and by extension, to non-place – upon which the relevance of the concept of *non-public* depends. Michel de Certeau defines place as a space *to come to* in which “elements are distributed in relations of coexistence”<sup>xiv</sup>. When these elements become significant for people and begin forming relations between themselves, then we think in terms of space. “In relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken [...]. In short, *space is a practised place*”<sup>xv</sup>. This results in a potential representation of non-place in which elements are distributed, but for which practitioners are not always capable of creating relations of coexistence. Because a place is, on the one hand, a space *to come to*, made up of elements both tangible and symbolic, and because, on the other hand, it is these tangible elements that permit, at the most basic level, the construction of practitioner status, then it is possible to say that the practitioner’s ability to understand the symbolic part of a place allows us to think of a place as a non-place. When the practitioner fails to appropriate the symbolic part offered by the institution, then the term non-place comes into play<sup>xvi</sup>.

To return to the subject of this article, Art movie theatres play both a tangible role in screening movies and a symbolic role of supporting these films (artistic support that even extends, in some cases, to political and social causes). By paying for a ticket and entering an Art movie theatre, viewers call upon the tangible part of the movie theatre. In some cases, however, they might only have a practical relationship with the movie theatre. They attend films and ignore the specific place it occupies in the social space. In fact, these movie theatres provide symbolic discourse about films (and society) in screening and supporting Art films. This discourse is manifested by the simple act of programming films with an Art label, which in itself is a symbolic subject. However, these movie theatres also set up communication strategies (publication of a program, organization of cultural activities, talks). A lack of attention for or interest in this symbolic part led us to conclude that some viewers *practise* these movie theatres, these places of

supermodernity, as non-places<sup>xvii</sup>. In short, they do not commit to these culturally and socially committed places.

Thus, every place can be a possible non-place: a university where students take courses without caring about the intellectual stance of professors, television programmes during which viewers do not grasp the ideological intentions of a journalist, or a movie theatre where audiences go without thinking about the symbolic significance of the programming. But what about the subject matter itself? What about the object that is at the heart of the existence of these movie theatres? In the second part of this article we will examine the relationships between audiences and films independent of their relationships with the movie theatres as places.

## **2. The *non-public* put to the test by the concept of non-art**

### **2.1.1 *The cinematographic culture of audiences in Art movie theatres***

In France, all films screened in movie theatres are examined by a committee of experts made up of people from the world of art and culture. After watching the films, this commission grants or not the Art label. This exercise is aimed at judging cinematographic quality, organizing the production field into two groups (those labelled and those not) and providing financial support to movie theatres devoted to Art films that attract few viewers. According to film authorities, this also permits supporting movies that help develop film creation and experimentation.

We wondered about the relevance of the labelling criteria used by these experts because they tend to be vague. Art films qualities are judged depending on their geographical origin or on some putative artistic gesture that allows for recognition of a particular director.

A film from a country that exports few movies cannot guarantee its quality. However, this geographic criterion becomes acceptable in the sense that films from little known countries encourage the exploration of other cultures. So, the issue seems really to be the creativity of a director who introduces aesthetic and discursive changes within the field of film production. Indeed, no rules exist for identifying innovation, experimentation or the treatment of social issues in movies. The Art labelling exercise depends largely on the sensitivity and subjectivity of the labelling experts. Nevertheless, consensus, albeit loose, does exist over quality or the absence of quality in a film production, and thus over the skill or lack thereof of a director who might then be considered as an artist.

Thus, an institutional cinematographic value exists independently from the audience's reaction to the film. Are we to conclude, however, that films with no Art label and that attract a bigger audience have no value? While Art films play a cultural or educational role for audiences who watch films as objects of knowledge and learning, commercial films attract audiences looking for distraction. This latter group likes the entertainment value of film (see Table 4).



**TABLE 4**  
**Opinions about films by the audience of Art films and the audience of commercial films**

	Films are good distraction	Films are good way to learn	Films are good entertainment	Films are a passion	Other	Total
Audience of Art films	22,0 %	38,0 %	17,4 %	17,9 %	4,7 %	100%
Audience of Commercial films	35,6 %	28,5 %	19,9 %	10,4 %	5,5 %	100%
Total	28,1 %	33,8 %	18,5 %	14,6 %	5,1 %	100%

*Michaël Bourgatte – Enquête Publics en PACA, 2007 (n = 984)*

This raises the issue of programming, which is at the heart of the triangular relationship linking the viewer to the film he or she comes to see in a particular place (see Table 5).

**TABLE 5**  
**Level of satisfaction with programming at Art movie theatres by the audience of Art films and the audience of commercial films**

	Very satisfied with programming	Quite satisfied with programming	Quite unsatisfied with programming	Not satisfied at all with programming	Total
Audience of Art films	51,7 %	46,7 %	1,5 %	0 %	100%
Audience of commercial films	38,5 %	59,2 %	2,3 %	0 %	100%
Total	46,0 %	52,2 %	1,8 %	0 %	100%

*Source : Michaël Bourgatte – Audiences in PACA, 2007 (n = 984)*

It makes sense that the audience of Art films is very satisfied with programming in movie theatres where they were surveyed, because these houses offer a wide choice, meeting most of their expectations. The audience of commercial films held a more tempered opinion, reflecting its weaker integration. To understand these variations better, we focused our attention on two indicators. The first is the place and role attributed by these audiences to the concept of director, closely correlated with the concept of Art, as we saw earlier. The second is the attention given to

the projection of films in their subtitled version. The first of these two indicators was chosen for its ability to examine the artistic value of a film. The second was chosen for its ability to explore how Art film authorities and Art film houses function.

A specific question is asked in our inquiry. Spectators are urged to imagine that they had to request a famous director to shoot a film about their best friend. The results obtained are relevant, in terms of the difference between the audience of Art films and the audience of commercial ones (see Table 6).

**TABLE 6**  
**Most appropriate director to shoot a film about the life of the best friend of each spectator surveyed**

	Woody Allen	Luc Besson	Pedro Almodovar	Jean-Luc Godard	Steven Spielberg	Won Kar Wai	Yourself	Other	Total
Audience of Art films	21,4 %	4,7 %	31,0 %	6,1 %	5,7 %	9,3 %	9,6 %	12,3 %	100 %
Audience of Commercial films	18,9 %	14,2 %	25,1 %	5,9 %	13,3 %	3,4 %	12,7 %	6,5 %	100 %
Total	20,3 %	8,9 %	28,4 %	6,0 %	9,0 %	6,7 %	11,0 %	9,7 %	100 %

*Source : Michaël Bourgatte – Audiences in PACA, 2007 (n = 984)*

The audience of cultural films named renowned directors of Art films like Pedro Almodovar and Won Kar-wai. They also came up with widely varied answers. In fact, they are twice as likely as the audience of commercial films (12.3% compared to 6.5%) to name a specific director. The audience of commercial films showed a greater commitment to popular directors like Steven Spielberg or the French director Luc Besson, often dismissed in the field of Art cinema<sup>xviii</sup>.

Screening films in the original subtitled version, which is a characteristic of Art movie theatres, also allows us to see more clearly the relationship viewers have with films (see Table 7).

**TABLE 7**  
**Opinion on screening films in the original subtitled version in Art movie theatres expressed by the audience of Art films and by the audience of commercial films**

	100% in favour of subtitled screening	Indifferent to subtitled screening	Watches subtitled films but prefers watching films in French	Only watches films in French	Total
Audience of Art films	69,2 %	10,5 %	14,1 %	6,1 %	100,0 %
Audience of Commercial films	39,1 %	13,3 %	21,5 %	26,1 %	100,0 %
Total	56,1 %	11,8 %	17,3 %	14,8 %	100,0 %

*Source : Michaël Bourgatte – Audiences in PACA, 2007 (n = 984)*

Opposition to the original subtitled version, quite common in the youngest portion of the audience, is very common in the audience of commercial films. They are two times less likely than the Art-film audience to express interest in the original subtitled version. And even if a part of these viewers go to see, slightly unwillingly, subtitled screenings, over a quarter of these respondents specifically states that it attends only French-version movies.

### **2.1.2 The cohabitation between Art films and commercial films in Art movie theatres**

The replies given to the choice of a director and the importance accorded to screening films in subtitled version demonstrated the existence of two distinct groups of spectators with distinct relationships to films. On the one hand, we found spectators attached to the programming of Art films and their referential universe, and on the other, spectators focusing on commercial films. As this second group of spectators showed no interest in cultural films, it could be considered a *non-public*. However, this group of viewers definitely attends movie houses and watches films – *bona fide* cultural objects.

Thus, the concept of *non-public* has something to do with a split in the field of film productions and the institutional legitimization of one part of it (Art films) to the detriment of other films qualified as commercial. This coupling of, on the one hand, “audience and legitimate films” and, on the other, “non-public and illegitimate films” enabled us to move beyond the concept of *non-public* as a simple *absent audience* to see an audience that, above all else, avoided movies coming from the so-called (or recognized) legitimate culture, and that could be considered as cinematographic art. In short, the concept of the *non-public* refers to that part of the audience that

is not *expected, idealized* or *imagined* by authorities, cultural agents or film industry professionals.

By exploring the concept of art in this way, and by extension, the notion of non-art, we broached the relevance of the notion of *non-public*. The artistic work is understood here as a work recognized by film authorities as having value. Art films can therefore be considered as works of art. But non-art does not necessarily refer to productions lacking in value. The notion refers to the group of works to which authorities do not give the Art label. In short, non-art is a cultural product that is not defined as artistic work by authorities, but which could perfectly well be so from the spectator's point of view.

According to common definitions, non-art refers to everything that cannot be classified and that runs against the existing order. It is the *aesthetic shock* leading to astonishment, the chaos that sparks imagination, the scandal that divides the audiences. The non-artistic work is, in short, an unconventional work that time alone can lift to the status of a work of art<sup>xix</sup>. Our contribution challenges this current definition according to which non-art is composed by artistic works opposed to an "already constituted art"<sup>xx</sup>. In the field of movie production, non-art will be understood as what the authorities, critics and part of the audience in fact do not recognize as cinematographic art. It involves movies that rely on classic film-script formulas, that have ambitiously mercantile goals, that work with elements recognizable to spectators, like a clearly defined genre (comedy, drama, Western), the presence of a star in the film, or may be a film adaptation of a best-seller.

Note that the notions of audience, *non-public*, art and non-art are intimately linked. So, we can say that the notion of audience itself stigmatizes tensions around the notion of *non-public*. Indeed, the audiences of Art movie theatres (i.e. the audience of Art films and the audience of commercial films) together allow this notion of non-art to be introduced into the debate over the notion of *non-public*. Consequently, in the third and last part of this article, we will examine the meaning of the notion of audience and its eventual dismissal.

### **3. The *non-public* put to the test by the notion of audience**

#### **3.1 *The audience, the films and the movie theatres***

Audience designates a group of people temporarily gathering in a given place in the presence of a given object. The use of the plural in *audiences* permits the introduction of specific features and allows us to imagine heterogeneous groups of spectators. The shift from singular to plural is one of the main contributions of social science research in the last few years. The first studies of Art films spectators promoted an image of a homogeneous audience made up of educated people, from upper-level socio-professional categories, or big film consumers. Recently film authorities have decided to act on an important fact: Art movie theatres include both Art films and commercial films in their programs<sup>xxi</sup>. Thus, nuances have been introduced into our studies to take account of the correlation between films and movie theatres.

The two groups of spectators we identified revealed that while distinct judgements about films existed, no differences could be seen in the commitment to movie theatres, which function as

places of gathering. And yet, examining the notion of audience requires a concomitant examination of the relationship to film and the relationship to place. This is accomplished by turning our attention to programming, which identifies both a group of specific films and the theatre's act of *making a program*. We tested it against a series of variables, two of which – closely linked, as it later turned out – enabled us to establish the idea that people learn to like Art films progressively after having been long-time fans of commercial films. These two variables are the age and the attendance rate (see Table 8).

**TABLE 8**  
**Satisfaction level with programming as a function of age**

	15-17yrs	18-24yrs	25-34yrs	35-49yrs	50-64yrs	65yrs+	Total
Very satisfied	29,2 %	32,8 %	36,6 %	50,8 %	47,6 %	45,8 %	45,8 %
Quite satisfied	70,8 %	65,5 %	59,2 %	46,9 %	51,5 %	50,6 %	52,0 %
Quite unsatisfied	0 %	1,7 %	4,2 %	2,4 %	0,9 %	3,6 %	2,1 %
Not satisfied at all	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Total	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %

*Source : Michaël Bourgatte – Audiences in PACA, 2007 (n = 984)*

After eliminating the under-15 age category because its participation in the study is minimal, we noted that satisfaction rates grew as age progressed. It is moderate in the youngest viewers and stabilized in adulthood in 35-49 year olds. Such satisfaction-age results are in correlation with the satisfaction-attendance rates in Table 9.

**TABLE 9**  
**Satisfaction level with programming as a function of attendance rate**

	1x/yr	2-3x/yr	1x every 2-3 mths	At least 1x/mth	Several x/mth	At least 1x/wk	Several x/wk	Total
Very satisfied	14,3 %	34,0 %	38,7 %	36,7 %	48,2 %	52,5 %	64,1 %	45,4 %
Quite satisfied	85,7 %	64,0 %	59,3 %	59,5 %	50,3 %	45,3 %	35,9 %	52,6 %
Quite unsatisfied	0 %	2,0 %	2,0 %	3,8 %	1,5 %	2,2 %	0 %	2,0 %
Not satisfied at all	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Total	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %

*Source : Michaël Bourgatte – Audiences in PACA, 2007 (n = 984)*

These figures show us that the more frequently people go to a given movie theatre, the more their attachment to films programmed there grows. Unless, perhaps, a growing interest in films causes the increased attendance? Although we cannot answer this question definitively, the results showed a real correlation between affection for a given movie theatre and affection for Art films. To proceed with this secondary line of thought, we explored the issue of loyalty, which raised the issue of the relationship that spectators have with films and movie theatres. Once again, we noted that loyalty increased with age and intensity of attendance, even though spectators in Art movie theatres are, on the whole, loyal to *their* movie theatres.

**TABLE 10**  
**Loyalty to movie theatre as a function of age**

<b>Age</b>	Under 24yrs	25-64yrs	65yrs+	Total
<b>Attendance</b>				
Exclusively	8,6 %	16,3 %	21,6 %	16,6 %
Mainly	53,1 %	57,4 %	56,1 %	56,8 %
Occasionally	38,3 %	26,2 %	22,2 %	26,6 %
Total	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %	100,0 %

*Source : Michaël Bourgatte – Audiences in PACA, 2007 (n = 984)*

Exclusivity (or the act of always attending the same theatre) is a phenomenon that grows with age. A joint study on the “degree of loyalty to the movie theatre where the survey is carried out” and on the “number of annual outings to this theatre” confirmed this attachment<sup>xxii</sup>.

**TABLE 11**  
**Relating loyalty level for a movie theatre study participant to overall attendance level in movie theatres**

<b>Total group of respondents</b>	<b>Group of viewers attending movies less than 12x/yr</b>	<b>Group of viewers attending movies at least 1x/mth</b>	<b>Group of viewers attending movies at least 1x/wk</b>	<b>... Declaring they attend a movie house study participant</b>
<b>16,8 %</b>	14,2%	17,3%	17,9%	Exclusively
<b>56,1 %</b>	44,8 %	59,5 %	58,3 %	Mainly
<b>27,2 %</b>	41,0 %	23,2 %	23,8 %	Occasionally

*Source : Michaël Bourgatte – Audiences in PACA, 2007 (n = 984)*

Of those surveyed, 72.9% declared that they attended exclusively or mainly that particular movie theatre. Spectators who attended only occasionally had a weak overall cinema attendance rate: 41% of them said they went to the movies fewer than 12 times a year. Those who confirmed having a strong movie attendance rate defined themselves as regulars or completely loyal to the

movie theatre in which the study is carried out. On average, 76.5% of them attended this particular movie theatre over others<sup>xxiii</sup>. Spectators of Art films in the PACA region can then be qualified as loyal, which means that attendance rates registered in movie theatres where the study was carried out are based on a small number of viewers practising intensely these theatres. A number of questions can thus be raised concerning the efficiency of data-collection methods in the social sciences, and concerning the relevance of the notion of audience.

Carrying out a self-administered survey study on people's relations to movie theatres raises two types of questions, the first relating to methodology and the second to using the notion of audience to designate the population surveyed. To the question of what constitutes a *representative* sample, we answered, a *spontaneous* sample. That is, one composed of people willing to participate in the study<sup>xxiv</sup>. Because engaging in this type of exercise requires the respondent to invest considerable time, and only those who are the most committed agree to do it<sup>xxv</sup>. People who fill out surveys are therefore all willing and loyal to the place. At least, they see themselves as having a privileged relationship with the movie theatre in which they completed the survey. Thus, this sample is not entirely representative, as a substantial segment of the audience avoids this data-collecting exercise out of ignorance, denial or choice.

### **3.2 From the notion of audience to one of viewing community**

We could consider then that this study is not so much about an audience as about a viewing community. In fact, all of the people participating in this study used the same strategy, in which going to the movies, like participating in the survey, involved a performative gesture because of a desire to *communicate something about oneself among others*<sup>xxvi</sup>. The concept of community is useful here because of the recurrent presence of two invariants in both definitions offered for this term: the presence of common traits or interests among members of the community and their congregation in a given place (this congregation being permanent or episodic). In other words, the community is a symbolic space for collaboration<sup>xxvii</sup>.

For all of these reasons, it seems appropriate to speak of “viewing community” <sup>xxviii</sup> in designating the group of people surveyed in this study. However, it is unrealistic to imagine that a community must be completely uniform, without a hint of tension. It is more a congregation in which continual adjustments are made, whether episodic or permanent. Therefore, a viewing community depends on a coexistence of individual histories, experiences and ambitions. It is influenced by structures and conflicts, the principal one in this study being the interest in Art films of one part of the community, while the other part rejects them, preferring commercial films.

The study carried out in our French Art movie theatres updated the notion of community to one made up of viewers with leaders and followers status. The first group, who are older and frequently attend movie theatres, master the criteria of films with Art labels and engage in a coherent relationship with their movie theatre (especially when taking social or political stances). The second, younger and attending movie theatres less often, are working more on assembling their viewer career. They want to understand Art films, either to join the first group or to place themselves outside its field.



A viewing community is a social form – otherwise understood as a configuration encouraging the setting up of a network of interrelations – resulting from the arrangement of linked desires of viewers’ socialization and distinction. Its existence depends upon the balance its members manage to establish between themselves. This balance is characterized by the play of adjustments that helps a community come into being and evolve. As Norbert Elias said, the question of understanding how and for what reasons human beings form connections amongst themselves and form particular dynamic groups is one of the most important issues, if not the most important issue, in the social sciences<sup>xxix</sup>.

Understanding interaction and adjustments is fundamental to understanding what a viewing community is, as opposed to tribal or social interdependencies involving groups of people relying on each other for survival (barter or the capitalist system comes to mind). There is no interpersonal need, *per se*, in a viewing community. It is more of a temporary consensual gathering. From a methodological point of view, this positioning encourages reconciliation between holistic and individualistic approaches. It shows the considerable malleability of the concept of community, within which interactions may be more or less long and more or less numerous, but still retain links to the gathering’s context and object, which is not always true with the notion of audience(s).

## Conclusion

The concept of the *non-public*, created in opposition to the concept of audience (or *public* as it is in French), designates at times a homogeneous group of absent or non-expected people, at other times a heterogeneous group of individuals not forming a meaningful entity. The example of movie attendance permits a debate on this subject, this practice being particularly widespread in the population (in 2000, a study on the cinematographic culture of French people showed that 97% of French citizens have been in a movie theatre at least once in their lives)<sup>xxx</sup>. Therefore it is hard to envisage the existence of an absent audience, even though in studies carried out on Art films, this *non-public* has been described, as recently as 2006 in a national inquiry, as lacking cultural, economic, social and symbolic capital<sup>xxxi</sup>.

Of course this approach is reductive, and precisely for this reason, we decided not to pursue it. Indeed, the Art films audience is much more heterogeneous than it first appears, as is the entire film audience. With an ever-growing rate of occasional viewers (this is the point that the most recent report, published in 2008, dwells on, revealing how forcefully this media is penetrating society<sup>xxxii</sup>), it seems difficult to pinpoint a *non-public* for film. In fact, all movie theatres in France, including Art movie theatres, are characterized by the composite character of their audiences.

We can therefore ask whether, in the case of Art films, the *non-public* is not more of an non-expected audience, or rather an non-imagined one, since it does not correspond to the image of the Art film audience currently circulating in the world of film scholars. This manner of thinking about the concept of *non-public* led us to discuss non-place and non-art as they pertain to the Art film field, which itself carries a heavy connotative weight in that it conveys an image of film places and productions of real value, or at least which have been institutionally validated. As an analogy to this image of cultural places dedicated to the projection of masterpieces of the seventh

art, it seemed useful to ask, first, whether Art movie theatres could also be identified as non-places, and second, whether all or some of the films screened in these movie theatres could be designated as non-art. We answered yes to both these questions.

First of all, it is possible to speak of non-places, provided one recognizes that a place and a non-place are not separate entities but rather interchangeable notions designating the same space, depending on whether it is used for practices which respect the symbolic conditions decreed by this place, or whether it is used for practices without any grasp of its “relational, historical and identity” aspects<sup>xxxiii</sup>. Art movie theatres are, therefore, both places and non-places depending on the relationship that viewers have with their symbolic side. Next, it is possible to speak of non-art, as long as no value judgement is made of the contents of the productions under study, and as long as film authorities are allowed to speak. Non-art is everything these authorities putatively reject because it lacks creativity (even though the notion of classicism in film is variable over time, which leads to regular re-evaluations of the status of a number of productions).

Although Art films provoke disagreement, they also have a rallying power. In fact, the way viewers as a whole group perceive Art films gives them their very existence. This perception is shaped by what they consider as valuable or not, but also by the viewpoint they have of the discourses circulating in the social space. Thus, using the term “viewing community” to designate Art film audiences allows reintegration of all the spectators into communicable frameworks, taking into account that any social group will always feature those who lead and those who are follow to, those who are informed and those who are excluded, those who are Established and those who are Outsiders<sup>xxxiv</sup>. Even if it seems difficult to see how the notion of *non-public* actually works in the field of reception studies, we can at least question its relevance, debating three related fields of investigation: place of practice, the artistic or cultural object practised, and the notion of the audience, without which the *non-public* quite obviously cannot exist.

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## Abstract:

In France, we can find films and movie theatres that are subsidized by film authorities and that are designated with an Art label. This support entails the labelling of some of the films that come out every week – approximately 3 out of 5 of all new films. Said films are recognized for their cinematographic value. It materialises as assistance given to movie theatres which devote at least some of their programming to Art films. However, Art movie houses do not only screen this type of films, thus the question arises: is there an audience of Art houses that can also be considered as a *non-public* of Art movies?

Based on results we gathered from two surveys (n=984 and n=250) conducted in a number of Art houses, we will demonstrate that certain spectators can, in fact, be an *audience* in said theatres, all the while being a *non-public* for the films that allows these theatres to obtain an institutional recognition. We will point out how the *non-public* category is a socio-discursive construction used to indistinctively label a group of viewers who does not go to certain venues and do not expose itself to certain artistic or cultural objects, while both these activities – the use of a venue and the artistic delectation – are to be dissociated.

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- <sup>i</sup> K. Marx and F. Engels (1998 [1848]). *The Communist Manifesto*. London: Verso. 49.
- <sup>ii</sup> “Private film practices” here mean cinematographic practices exercised in front of one’s television or computer screen, as well as the cinematographic practices involving digital players and other portable readers.
- <sup>iii</sup> In this paper, we specifically chose to use the word “audience” as it commonly used. We are aware that we lose the balance “public/non-public” as its sounds in French, but we prefer to focus on the readability of our proposal.
- <sup>iv</sup> F. Jeanson (1973). *Déclaration de Villerbanne*. In *L’action culturelle dans la cité*. Paris: Le Seuil. 119-120.
- <sup>v</sup> P. Ancel, A. Pessin (2004). *Les non-publics : Les arts en réception*. Paris: L’Harmattan (2 tomes).
- <sup>vi</sup> We are stressing, in quotation marks, this “theoretical phenomenon” that we offer here in contrast to Francis Jeanson’s term “cultural phenomenon”.
- <sup>vii</sup> P. Bourdieu, A. Darbel (1990 [1969]). *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and their Public*. Stanford University Press.
- <sup>viii</sup> Secrétariat d’État à la Culture. Service des études et de la recherche (1974). *Pratiques culturelles des Français*. Paris: Secrétariat d’État à la Culture (2 tomes).
- <sup>ix</sup> S. Kracauer (1998 [1930]). *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*. London: Verso.
- <sup>x</sup> A movie theatre is labeled and receives assistance when it shows films with an Art label. The rate of programming of Art films required to obtain the label depends mainly on the number of screening rooms, the quality of films, and the geographical location of the movie theatre. For this study, films without an Art label and screened in these theatres are designated “commercial films”. The reader should not attach any value judgment to this term, the only aim of which is to facilitate the paper’s readability and clarity.
- <sup>xi</sup> M. Bourgatte (2008). *Ce que fait la pratique au spectateur. Enquêtes dans des salles de cinéma Art et Essai de la région Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur*. Thèse de Doctorat [What does the Practice do with Spectator? A Survey in Art Houses of the French Region Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur. PhD in Media Studies and Social Sciences].
- <sup>xii</sup> “Lycéens et apprentis au cinéma” [“high school students at the movies”] is a visual education program started by French government and film authorities. The main objective of this program is to watch films in their privileged place of screening: the movie theatre, during school time. Screenings are accompanied by debates and followed up with work in class.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Centre national de la cinématographie (2009). *Le public du cinéma*. CNC Info: Bilan 2008, 310 (51-59).
- <sup>xiv</sup> M. Certeau (de) (2002 [1984]). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press. 117.
- <sup>xv</sup> *Ibid.* 117.
- <sup>xvi</sup> M. Augé (1995 [1992]). *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. London: Verso. 75-115.
- <sup>xvii</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>xviii</sup> The balance of responses in the case of Woody Allen and Jean-Luc Godard demonstrate the ambiguous status of these directors. Their names are extremely well known, and, at the same time, are associated specifically with Art films. This explains why the less-informed of the two audiences seems to remember them.
- <sup>xix</sup> On this point, see J.E. Muller. (1970). *L’art et le non-art*. Paris: Ed. Aimery Somogy ; D. Vallier (1986 [1969]). *Art, anti-art et non-art*. Caen: L’Échoppe.
- <sup>xx</sup> N. Heinich (1998). *Le triple jeu de l’art contemporain*. Paris: Minuit.
- <sup>xxi</sup> CNC (2006). *Le public du cinéma Art et Essai*. Rapport d’étude.
- <sup>xxii</sup> We divided our sample into three sub-groups. One group contained viewers who declared that they went to the movies less than 12 times a year, representing 21.4% of the total sample (n=984). Another group contained viewers who declared that they went to the movies at least once a month, representing 55.3% of the sample. And finally, a group of viewers declared that they went to the movies at least once a week, representing 23.3% of the sample.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> This average is calculated using the total group of individuals who declared that they went to the movies 12 times a year or more and “exclusively” or “principally” attended the movie theatre in which the study is carried out [76.8% + 76.2% / 2].
- <sup>xxiv</sup> See J-M. Guy (2000). *La culture cinématographique des Français*. Paris: La Documentation française. The back cover stipulates that they tried to estimate “the size and structure of the capital of film references [...] by means of a survey study carried out on a sample that is, *a priori*, representative.” This “*a priori*” (stressed with italics in the text) is revelatory of the doubts that could be raised regarding the representational nature of the sample in the overall structure of the publics of film.

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<sup>xxv</sup> With 40 questions and 69 facts to supply, the survey required several minutes to fill out, any way you looked at it.

<sup>xxvi</sup> U. Eco (1989). *Lector in fabula*. Paris: LGF.

<sup>xxvii</sup> F. Tonnies (2002 [1987]). *Community and Society*. London: Dover Publications.

<sup>xxviii</sup> M. Bourgatte (2008). *op. cit.*

<sup>xxix</sup> N. Elias (1983 [1969]). *The Court Society*. American ed. Pantheon.

<sup>xxx</sup> J.M. Guy (2000). *op.cit.* 40.

<sup>xxxi</sup> CNC (2006). *op. cit.*

<sup>xxxii</sup> Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, Centre National de la Cinématographie (2009). *op. cit.* 53.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> M. Auge. *op.cit.* 77.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> N. Elias (1983 [1969]) *op. cit.*