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# Amateurism

## Exploring its Multiple Meanings in the Age of Film, Video, and Digital Media

**Abstract:** In the current digital age, media amateurs seem to have taken over a large part of cultural production and revised traditional hierarchies between professionals and amateurs. This development has been characterized as a form of "mass amateurisation," or even "mass cultural production." This present state of affairs is deeply embedded in an ongoing discourse on the value of being an amateur. Both in public discourse and in scholarly debates, amateurism has been conceptually categorized as either a self-assigned role or as a label that is conferred by others. To explore the multiple meanings of amateurism, this chapter demonstrates how a media historical approach helps to better understand the full complexity of the concept. In addition, we propose that future research can benefit from the development of clear analytical approaches to identify various amateur modes of practice, while also acknowledging the ongoing hybridity of the media amateur.

**Keywords:** amateurism, amateur media practices, hybridity, modes of practice

Amidst the explosion of social media platforms in the first decade of the 2000s, when consumers transformed into producers and distributors of expressive cultural content, Ralph Rugoff (2008, 9), a curator of contemporary art, observed how "amateurs have returned with a vengeance." He noticed how cultural production saw a strong resistance in the arts against "hyper-professionalization," which resulted in nothing less than a "cultural revolution" (Rugoff 2008, 9). This resistance to the cultural industry and artworld was an ongoing concern for many artists in the twentieth century. One such artist was Andy Warhol, who explicitly praised the amateur in his book *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*: "Every professional performer [. . .] always does the same thing at exactly the same moment in every show they do. What I like are things that are different every time. That's why I like amateurs . . . You can never tell what they'll do next" (Warhol 1977, 83).

The appreciation that speaks from the quote underlines an interesting moment in both art and media history. Warhol's observations should be understood within the context of the 1960s and 1970s when a quest for alternatives to the mainstream, a plea for better access to the means of cultural production

and a desire for authenticity and real-life experiences were taken up by many media makers and artists. In the current digital age, however, amateurs seem to have taken over a large part of cultural production and revised traditional hierarchies between professionals and amateurs. This development has been characterized as a form of "mass amateurization" (Shirky 2008), "mass cultural production" (Manovich 2009) and an "amateurized media universe" (Zimmermann 2013). One could even argue that amateur media production moved from being marginal to a mainstream pursuit, thereby reconfiguring the media landscape (Motrescu-Mayes and Aasman 2019).

This present mode of amateurism is embedded in an ongoing discourse on the value of being an amateur. One that is furthermore embedded in a history of everyday media use, with material, economic, aesthetic, cultural, and social dimensions. However, the question remains whether the ideals Warhol and others adhered to have come to fruition in the digital age, or do they represent a mythical conception of what the amateur and amateurism mean? Should we value amateurism as something that is closely related to ideals of democratisation, valuing a specific aesthetic and a desire for personal and intimate representations of everyday life? In order to deconstruct and better understand the current debates and discourses surrounding the notion of amateurism, we think it is crucial to historicise these notions of the amateur. By exploring the historical dynamics of the media amateur, we will be able to understand the multidimensional complexities of what it means or meant to be (called) an amateur.

In the first part of this chapter, we will discuss various scholarly debates around the amateur and trace the main themes and perspectives, in particular those related to amateur media. As we will show, the complexity of the debates around the amateur are connected to the idea of how amateurism has been conceptually categorized as either a self-assigned role or as a label that is conferred by others. The latter distinction will be conceptualized in terms of "emic" and "etic" approaches to amateurism. In the second part, based on empirical research, we historicise the notion of amateurism by focusing on film, video, and digital media as amateur media technologies and their appropriation by users within three historical periods of time. For each media technology and time period, we discuss the ways in which "the amateur" has been defined and how conceptualisations of amateurism have developed over time.[1] In the conclusion, we propose two

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[1] This chapter is based on the results of the NWO-funded research project "Changing Platforms of Ritualized Memory Practices: The Cultural Dynamics of Home Movies" (2012–2016), in which the authors traced the history of amateur media from a long-term historical perspective. More information about this research project can be found on the project's weblog: https://homemoviesproject.wordpress.com/.

complementary conceptual lenses – amateur modes of practice and hybridity – for analysing the notion of amateurism in its historical complexity.

# 1 Getting a Grip on the Amateur

Over the years, the meaning of amateurism has been subject to change. Today, the term amateurism often refers to informal, self-taught, hobbyist or do-it-yourself practices, all of which tend to evoke mostly pejorative connotations, such as being unqualified, or non-professional. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, identifying oneself as an amateur was often a matter of pride and honour: being an amateur meant that someone devoted a considerable amount of time, energy, and commitment to practicing a particular hobby for the purpose of sheer enjoyment. Etymologically speaking, the word amateur is derived from the Latin word *amare*, meaning "to love." This etymology thus clearly connotes a favourable, even idealist meaning of amateurism. The amateur practitioner loves the hobbyist pursuit in and of itself, without any financial motives, as opposed to the professional practitioner.

In her 1965 essay "Amateur versus Professional," the American avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren argued that amateur filmmakers should take inspiration from this original meaning of amateurism and "make use of the one great advantage which all professionals envy him, namely, freedom – both artistic and physical." At the same time, she underscored how "[t]he very classification 'amateur' has an apologetic ring" (Deren 1965, 45). Four decades later, media scholar Broderick Fox argued that in the digital age "the ringing has only intensified, negative connotations of the term moving up to first definition status in the dictionary of popular consciousness" (Fox 2004, 5). Clearly, current connotations and understandings diverge from the original idealist meaning of amateurism which, as film historian Ryan Shand argues, is "so out of step with contemporary ideologies that it requires a historical explanation to be properly grasped" (Shand 2007, 7).

A number of historians, sociologists, and scholars from the field of cultural studies have tried to grasp amateurism, both as a historical and a sociocultural phenomenon. The American historian Steven Gelber, for instance, understood amateurism as part of the broader rise of hobbyism, a phenomenon that came to prominence with changing notions regarding the relationship between work and private life during the processes of professionalisation, industrialisation and modernisation in the nineteenth century. Amateurism, then, according to

Gelber, was understood in relation to meaningful "leisure", which served as a bridge between working life and the home (Gelber 1999, 2–3). Moreover, leisure and amateurism were often strictly gendered categories. Whereas public leisure was often seen as male oriented, women's leisure was considered strictly private, belonging to the domestic sphere. As a result, a "distinctly female culture" developed with characteristic home-oriented activities (Gelber 1999, 157). It is important to note that this led to new cultural hierarchies and values related to male hobbies, such as photography or home movie making, as opposed to typical women's "crafts" like embroidery or sewing. This gendered division of activities remained dominant throughout the twentieth century. For instance, in the early 1960s, a manual for amateur filmmaking encouraged husbands to buy a film camera while their wives were presumed to acquire a sewing machine (Aasman 2004). Of course, there were also forms of "leakage" (Gelber 1999, 157), because these categories were and are much more complex, and do not endlessly reproduce the "ideology of 'separate spheres'" (Jordan 2000).

The sociologist Robert Stebbins, in his writings on "serious leisure," furthermore distinguished between amateurs, hobbyists and volunteers. Unlike Gelber, Stebbins did not define amateurism as a form of hobbyism. A hobbyist, he argued, does not have a professional counterpart: "hobbyists are often enamoured of pursuits bearing little or no resemblance to ordinary work roles" (Stebbins 1992, 11). Amateurs, on the other hand, always have a professional counterpart. Therefore, according to Stebbins' typology, "the term 'amateur' should be used only with those activities that constitute [. . .] a *professional* work role. That is, there must be a professional counterpart to the status of amateur" (Stebbins 1992, 41–42; original emphasis).

However, this division between the amateur and the professional (or expert) is not always straightforward. As Kristen Haring shows in her study on the technical culture of ham radio: "Despite hams' proud insistence at times on their status as 'amateur' radio operators, there was a significant overlap between the groups that worked with electronics during the day for wages and in the evening for pleasure" (Haring 2007; cf. Douglas 1986). The same applies to the group of home computer amateurs from the 1960s and 1970s, who were likewise positioned "between work and play" (Gotkin 2014; cf. Kerssens 2016). The blurring of boundaries between amateurs and professionals seems to intensify in the digital age, as indicated by the rise of such new terminology as "pro-ams," "prosumer" and "produsers" (Leadbeater and Miller 2004; Bruns 2006; van Dijck 2009). These new terms are not neutral, however. Andrew Keen, for example, underscored the more negative connotations of amateurism in the digital age by stating that "On today's Internet [. . .] amateurism, rather than expertise, is

celebrated, even revered" (Keen 2007, 37). Others point at more positive meanings of the term that, according to Nick Prior, relate in particular to a renewed valorisation of the amateur: "In the last two decades or so, the status and position of the amateur have been redeemed and a new, less aristocratic, breed of amateur has emerged" (Prior 2010, 401).

In tandem with these broader discussions on amateurism, various conceptualisations of media amateurism have also been discussed in scholarship on the topic over the years. Defining amateurism clearly, with analytical precision, has proven to be more challenging than might be expected for such a seemingly quotidian phenomenon in media culture. A recurring trend in the scholarly pursuit of a clear definition, or conceptual framework, is the pervasive impulse to understand it in terms of what it is not. Broderick Fox, for example, remarked that when we ask "for a concrete definition," we rarely "respond with an answer of what amateurism *is*, constructing a meaning, [but] instead, in terms of what it is *not* – not sophisticated, not technically adept, not pretty or polished, not of popular interest, or perhaps, most frequently and opaquely, 'not professional'" (Fox 2004, 5). This stance furthermore seems to align with the manner in which the amateur is defined in everyday discourse. The Cambridge Dictionary Online, for example, defines an amateur as "a person who takes part in an activity for pleasure, *not as a job*," and as "someone who does *not* have much skill in what they do" (Cambridge English Dictionary 2020; emphasis added). Moreover, in addition to the efforts to define the amateur in terms of what it is not, as media scholar Kevin Gotkin (2014, 5) observed, amateurs seem to "emerge in the cracks between extant categories, and even the label 'amateur' has a historically mutable character." He furthermore reminds us that every intellectual effort to grasp the amateur, whether from a synchronic or diachronic perspective, must acknowledge that the amateur is essentially "a moving target" (Gotkin 2014, 6).

## 1.1 Fixing the Target

In order to make some headway in "fixing" the target, we hence propose to cluster the definitional strategies derived from the historical sources and literature on the topic according to four types of amateurs. This typology of amateurs, we should emphasise, is by no means exhaustive or exclusive but rather serves as a pragmatic categorisation of the amateurism debate, in which each amateur type places a different heuristic or analytical emphasis.

The first type is the amateur as non-professional user. This amateur type, for instance, is discussed by sociologist Robert Stebbins (1992) and media theorist Patricia Zimmermann (1995; 2008), who respectively defined, analyzed, and

criticized the amateur in relation to their professional counterpart. Furthermore, the amateur as non-professional user is prevalent in marketing discourses that regularly differentiate between "amateur" and "professional" types of technologies and their (configured) usages, e.g. the domestic consumption of technologies (cf. Silverstone and Hirsch 1992). In the current context, where amateurs are taking to commercial social media platforms like YouTube, the classification of the amateur as non-professional has been challenged further. Media scholars such as Jean Burgess (2013), for instance, observed amateurs crossing the line from traditional, domestic to more public, market-oriented modes of participation. This then started a large-scale process of professionalisation and formalisation of amateur media production.

The second type is the amateur as tinkerer. Unlike the first amateur type, this one does not merely regard amateurs as (passive) consumers but rather considers they play an active part in the innovation and development processes of media technologies. Through tinkering, that is the technical playing with technologies and their (creative) appropriation, amateurs can function as active agents in the co-shaping, or "co-construction," of a technology and its usages (Oudshoorn and Pinch 2003). The amateur as tinkerer and innovator foregrounds a technical and political understanding of amateurism in the debate (cf. Haring 2007; Gotkin 2014; Bruyninckx 2018). In the words of media theorist Sean Cubitt (1999), this type of amateur "is ready [. . .] to transform every material, to show respect through manipulating and changing what comes to hand, seizing a technology, a technique, a shape or melody or image and making it anew". Moreover, the idea of "craftsmanship" is equally important, which implies that the development of skills and making an effort are part and parcel of the amateur practice (cf. Sennett 2009; Roepke 2013). Thus, the amateur as tinkerer type strongly foregrounds a particular do-it-yourself mentality.

The amateur as tinkerer is closely related to the third type: the amateur as avant-gardist. The discourses surrounding, or representing, this type of amateur are less technically oriented but rather underscore the amateur's wish to experiment with new technologies and explore new topics or alternative aesthetics. This type also spurs a more political connotation that refers to the potential of amateurism in processes of cultural participation, democratisation, and valorisation (Prior 2010). This is done, for instance, by emphasizing the amateur's sense of freedom (Deren 1965) and do-it-yourself ethos. Therefore, this category received various different labels over the years, such as counter practitioner, grassroots artist, media activist, or independent media maker. According to Michael Z. Newman (2008, n.p.): "The notion that do–it–yourself amateurism can stand on equal ground with media industry professionalism signals a democratic challenge to hierarchies of aesthetic value. And at the same time that

amateur media are gaining ground, so is the communitarian alternative to tradi-tional, top–down mass media distinctions between production and reception."

The multiple, often contrasting discourses surrounding the fourth type, the amateur as naive practitioner, demonstrate the complexity of this category. Within the debate, this type of amateur is often conceptualized as someone who lacks cer-tain expertise or particular skills, which resembles the popular, dictionary under-standing of the amateur pointed out earlier. In the influential book *The Cult of the Amateur*, Andrew Keen (2007) used this negative definition to typify the amateur as a non-expert. However, the amateur as a naive practitioner is not only limited to negative discourses and contemporary definitions. It can also reflect positive con-notations, in which the naive is valued as "authentic" and can therefore be re-garded as an asset. Here, the amateur is someone who, unlike professionals and serious hobbyists, is not hindered by any aesthetic conventions or pre-defined so-cial structures as an operational framework. The amateur as naive practitioner, in this sense, reminds of the distinction between "naive artists" and "integrated ar-tists" made by art sociologist Howard S. Becker. Naive artists lack institutional training and work independently from any artistic points of reference, whereas in-tegrated artists do operate, often collectively, in such art worlds (Becker 2008; cf. Flichy 2018). It is exactly this (ideal of) amateur naïveté that was pursued and cher-ished in the avant-garde filmmaking practices of members of the New York under-ground, such as Jonas Mekas, Stan Brakhage, and Ken Jacobs. The notion of the naive practitioner is furthermore prominent in the work of the visual anthropolo-gist Richard Chalfen. He connects "cinéma naïveté" with home movie making as a specific form of visual communication, in which the main goal is to make "use of filmmaking technology to symbolically record, document and *reproduce* a reality" (Chalfen 1975, 93; cf. Odin 1995). In the amateur handbooks, magazines, and in-struction guidelines, the naive practitioner is often contrasted to the more ambi-tious or "aspirational" practitioner (Buse 2018).

## 1.2 Emic versus Etic Approaches

Following these four types of amateurs within the debate, we can detect a clear pattern that shows either a form of self-assignment or labelling of the term ama-teur as a particular value, either positive or negative, or appropriating it as an identity. To better understand this dynamic, we can learn from the field of an-thropology, where the division between "emic" and "etic" is used to distinguish between the perspectives of the observer, or outsider, and participant, or in-sider, of a social group (Goodenough 1970; Harris 1976; Headland, Pike, and Harris 1990). An emic approach includes the ways in which the participants of a

social group perceive themselves, their behaviour and beliefs from an insider and cultural-specific or "native" perspective. An etic approach, on the other hand, includes the ways in which a (scientific) observer analyzes the behaviour and beliefs of the participants of the social group from an outsider and cross-cultural perspective.[2]

When looking at the four types of amateurs described above, we can see how the distinction between emic and etic approaches to amateurism can be helpful for better understanding the historical dynamics of the appropriation and labelling of the term "amateur." The amateur as tinkerer, for instance, can be found in emic approaches to amateurism. As became apparent in discussions on radio and computer amateurism, this is how amateurs saw themselves especially in the early twentieth century. The amateur as naive practitioner, on the other hand, is more dominant as an etic approach in the amateurism debate. This perspective comes to the fore most prominently in the work of Andrew Keen (2007). For the amateur as avant-gardist, the emic approach is more dominant again, as Jonas Mekas and other filmmakers from the New York underground exemplify. The amateur as non-professional is more neutral and can therefore be found in both emic and etic approaches. Emic approaches include those amateurs who did not pursue professional standards, while etic approaches include the perspective of the industry when striving for a standardization and domestication of non-professional technologies. Nevertheless, emic and etic approaches can be found in all four amateur types. Instead of deploying the emic-etic framework in an oppositional or mutually exclusive manner, we would rather regard it as a complementary concept in the historical analysis of the dynamic between appropriation and labelling in amateur discourses.[3] In other words, both the etic and the emic should be taken into consideration when historicizing amateurism. We will show the benefits of such an endeavour in the next part, where we focus on amateur film, video, and digital media in three different historical time periods.

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**2** For a history and development of the emic-etic concept, and its different conceptualizations within the field of anthropology, see Headland, Pike and Harris (1990).

**3** In the field of anthropology, the complementarity of the emic-etic approaches is likewise embraced. As Jingfeng Xia argues: "Although emics and etics are sometimes regarded as inherently in conflict and one can be preferred to the exclusion of the other [. . .], the complementarity of emic and etic approaches to anthropological research has been widely recognized, especially in the areas of interest concerning the characteristics of human nature as well as the form and function of human social systems" (2011, 78).

# 2 Historicizing Amateurism: Film, Video, Digital

The history of amateur media in particular can help us to understand the constantly evolving discourses on amateurism. Several important observations point at the relevance of a historical approach to the topic: the ongoing stream of emerging and disappearing media technologies; a longstanding tradition of vocal practitioners embracing various ideological positions; a strong rise in the economic interests of the media industry; and last but not least, the increasing cultural and social investments of millions of practitioners, or media users, make this a fascinating but complex and contested field of historical research. As Patricia Zimmermann (1997, 74) observed: "any study of amateur film throws us into a mapping of submerged historical discourses on technology, aesthetics, politics and social relations." Indeed, we should acknowledge how histories of amateur media can reconstruct socially and culturally specific experiences of meaning that do justice to media as "unique and complicated historical subjects" (Gitelman 2006, 7). Therefore, in this part, we will historicise the notion of amateurism by discussing the ways in which the amateur has been defined and conceptualized in the age of film, video, and the digital (cf. Aasman, Fickers, and Wachelder 2018). Media historians are often confronted with a sheer diversity of direct and indirect sources that can provide various possible answers (Motrescu-Mayes and Aasman 2019). The sources available to reconstruct the historical media amateur allow for the analysis of complex dynamics between discursive labelling, self-assignment, and perhaps also the "othering" of the amateur (Buckingham, Pini and Willett 2007, 191).

## 2.1 Film Amateurism

Who or what is the film amateur? While the first users of the film camera can be called amateurs, there was arguably no strict distinction between amateur and professional filmmakers between the late nineteenth century and the early 1920s. Rather, as Zimmermann (1995, 9) argues, "professionalism and amateurism complemented each other" in this early historical period.[4] This changed in the years 1922–1923, when the French Pathé Frères Company and the American Eastman Kodak Company respectively introduced their 9.5mm and 16mm "small-gauge" film technologies for the amateur user. While several attempts had been made by

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**4** For a discussion on the definition of amateur film in relation to its professional counterpart, see among others: Hogenkamp and Lauwers (1997); Hielscher (2007); Czach (2014).

the industry before to release a substandard film format for amateur and domestic usage specifically, such attempts failed to produce a truly cheaper, safer, and easier to use alternative to the standard 35mm film technologies that were used by professionals (Kattelle 2000). With the releases of the Pathé's 9.5mm and Kodak's 16mm (and later 8mm) safety film formats and accompanying film equipment, amateur filmmaking developed into a practice of its own right as it became accessible to a larger group of middle-class families and amateur hobbyists who had grown curious about the possibilities of recording and screening moving images.

Among such users were many amateur photographers. In the amateur photography magazines, they could read about the latest developments of the practice of filmmaking – then called "kinematography". Two ideals of amateurism are particularly dominant in these discourses. The first is the nineteenth-century ideal of the amateur as someone who could elevate the profession to a higher artistic level. This ideal type reflects the amateur as avant-gardist: someone who, unlike their professional counterpart, is not bound by the conventions and limitations of the medium as set by their profession, but rather can explore new aesthetic avenues or directions to the medium in its development. In 1928, the Dutch amateur photography magazine *Lux-De Camera* projected this ideal type of amateurism onto the emerging practice of kinematography as follows: "Amateurism stimulated a better and artistic form of photography, and this will happen with respect to kinematography as well" (N.N. 1928, 222; translated from Dutch). This ideal type of amateurism was particularly prominent within the avant-garde movements of the late 1920s and 1930s (Horak 1998; Zimmermann 1995; Linssen, Schoots, and Gunning 1999). In several countries, cine-clubs became the sites where amateurs and the avant-garde would meet, exchange ideas, and cross-over practices occurred (Hagener 2007; Shand 2007; Craven 2009; Nicholson 2012; de Cuir Jr 2014; Tepperman 2015; Slootweg 2018b). The second ideal of amateurism is the amateur as tinkerer who, similar to the amateur photographer, maintained a certain do-it-yourself mentality. This ideal type of amateurism can be found in normative discourses emphasizing the importance of film amateurs to develop their films themselves instead of outsourcing the development process to a manufacturer, so as to maintain as much technical and aesthetic control over the creative process as possible.

It should be mentioned that these two ideal types of amateurism originating from the domain of photography are not applicable to all amateur filmmakers; neither for this specific time period nor in later times. Rather, they particularly apply to the category of serious hobbyists and leisure practitioners who were interested in filmmaking as a hobby and form of expression. This in contrast to the large group of users who did not carefully plan, shoot, and edit their films but were primarily interested in the function of the amateur film camera to

record and preserve family memories (Hogenkamp and Lauwers 1997). This last group of users corresponds to the type of amateur as naive practitioner, who similar to the snapshot photographer practiced their hobby as a private or "home mode" form of communication (Chalfen 1987). Within this home or family mode, the French film theorist Roger Odin (1995) argued, the social function of (recording and watching) family films is more important than their aesthetic quality. Although for many users the making of family films was indeed the main reason to buy a film camera in the first place, the more ambitious or aspirational amateurs often regarded this only as a first step towards becoming a "real" amateur (van der Heijden and Aasman 2014).

This tension between amateur filmmaking as a hobby and memory practice is a recurring theme in the history of amateur filmmaking (Aasman 2004, 254). With the emergence of amateur ciné-clubs in the late 1920s and 1930s, the differentiation between user groups would only solidify (van der Heijden 2018b). The amateur in the film era, in other words, is neither synonymous nor complementary to the non-professional user. What makes or defines the amateur is rather the outcome of a complex negotiation process between labelling (etic) and appropriation (emic), in which various ideas, norms, values and motivations play a role.

## 2.2 Video Amateurism

Who or what is the video amateur? Can we even speak of the video amateur? These questions arise when engaging with the historical traces left behind by the video cultures of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Media scholars David Buckingham, Maria Pini, and Rebekah Willett attempted to create some clarity when they analyzed not only the discursive construction of the historical film amateur but also of the video amateur. They concluded that the latter in particular shows an ever "increasing diversity of amateur video production [that] is making life more difficult for those who would seek to discipline and regulate it" (Buckingham, Pini, and Willett 2007, 199). Scrutinising the numerous amateur video productions made in the past will indeed reveal a staggering amount of diversity: home videos, activist and community videos, video diaries, spoof videos, bootlegs, amateur porn, skate videos, and the list goes on (cf. Hilderbrand 2009). Having a look at the content of these videotapes is nevertheless only one path to take in order to trace the video amateur. We can locate them as well in amateur magazines, manuals, in oral histories (memories), and other material sources.

The historical context in which the dynamic of the emergence of the video amateur comes to the fore is different from that of the film amateur. Media

scholar James M. Moran (2002), for instance, pointed at the various sociocultural and aesthetic ramifications of video technologies for amateur practices. Moreover, as an electronic medium, video was intimately related to television, the dominant mass medium of the latter half of the twentieth century. As Michael Z. Newman reminds us, this intimacy dates back to the 1950s and early 1960s when "video was another word for television" (Newman 2014, 2). Moreover, the various consumer video formats and cameras at the disposal of the amateur from the late 1970s onwards afforded many new possibilities to the amateur as non-professional user. Two of the most prominent new features were the automatic recording of synchronous sound and image and the significantly extended amount of recording time, sometimes up to several hours, compared to the precious minutes available on small-gauge film formats (Moran 2002; van der Heijden 2018b; Slootweg 2018b). Interestingly, video's proximity to television and its new technological features were approached differently by various types of video amateurs, representing various versions of labelling and self-assignment.

The first example comes from the work of Jan A. Kleyn (1927–1998), a cineclub member since the late 1950s and a prominent figure in the Dutch world of amateur film and photography. In 1990, he published a book on video after years of writing on various, more advanced topics, such as the creative use of editing, sound, and cinematography in amateur filmmaking. Embracing a do-it-yourself mentality, he represents the amateur as tinkerer. For Kleyn, video aroused considerable suspicion among serious film amateurs and he highlighted that "good" video amateurism was a highly controversial notion (Kleyn 1990, 8; translated from Dutch). Video was based on different technological principles than film and belonged to the often-maligned electronic world of television. According to these amateurs, video encouraged sloppiness and furthermore lacked the "aura" of analogue film (Slootweg 2018b).

These concerns were not shared by every new user, especially those who were part of socially progressive video collectives from the 1970s and 1980s. An example might be the members of the Dutch video collective Meatball who recounted what attracted them to video: they explained how video's intimate relationship with television was not seen as problematic but rather as an opportunity for media democratisation and participation (Slootweg 2016; Slootweg and Aasman 2015). They were certainly not the only ones who labelled themselves activists or experimenters seeking to challenge mainstream television broadcasting by exploring the social use of video. With various experiments of community and local television, the video collective aimed to give a "voice" to those people who in their view were absent in media discourses at the time (Slootweg 2016, 144). As such, these video amateurs represent the amateur as avant-gardist type, highlighting the amateur's

potential as a counter practitioner in processes of cultural participation and media democratisation.

The third example underscores the importance the "voice" video can literally give to its user thanks to the new technical affordance of synchronous sound. For the father of an expat family in the 1980s, the camcorder allowed for the recording of his "autobiographical voice" when capturing and narrating on noteworthy events of his family's everyday life abroad (Slootweg 2018b, 214). The home video of his family furthermore showcases many choices that would be considered as "bad" video amateurism in the first example, such as unsteady handheld long takes, poor synchronous sound recording and unsophisticated in-camera editing. At the same time, the condescending tone of "bad," as a label for a particular form of amateurism that is represented by the type of amateur as naive practitioner, reminds us of Roger Odin's analysis that there is no such thing as a "bad" home movie or video, because it should be understood in the context of the "space of communication" of family and friends (Odin 2014, 15). In other words, according to Odin, "mistakes" only add to the social function of this practice. The new features of video furthermore allowed for a far more layered, narrative mediated memory artefact of the family, certainly when compared to home movies (van Dijck 2007). For now, however, the cases discussed above indicate that it is perhaps more accurate to speak of video amateurs, in the plural, with a wide variety of practices, intentions, beliefs, worries, hopes, and expectations.

## 2.3 Digital Amateurism

Who or what is the digital amateur? In the twenty-first century, the amateur has become an even more complex category. Consumer media technologies diversified, adding to ongoing processes of multi-mediatisation, miniaturisation and convergence, which further widened the affordances for everyday users to document their life or create stories. Moreover, the ubiquity of digital video cameras, as something that is potentially always with us and ready to be used, truly transformed it into a vernacular technology, deeply embedded in our daily life and our communication routines. This process was strengthened by the ability to produce user-generated content as an integrated functionality of a wide variety of emerging (and sometimes quickly disappearing) apps and platforms like Vine, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. In the current digital era, media amateurism merged with social media. People communicate more than ever via (moving) images, whether they pull pranks on one another, make selfies, perform a beauty tutorial, record their day

in a life while in self-quarantine or videos of themselves preparing evening meals.

It is interesting to note that users perform these practices not only in private but also in public spaces. The World Wide Web made possible the distribution of their footage beyond the confines of the home, the club or other locally defined spaces. This attraction of the Internet, as a participatory space where anyone might share, exploded after 2005 when YouTube became almost overnight the dominant platform for sharing videos online. The amateur has become a highly visible category in contemporary media culture, which forces us to rethink Roland Barthes' description of the amateur as someone "who does not exhibit, the one who does not make himself heard" (Barthes 1991, 230).

Scholars have observed how discourses on the amateur became central in ideals about empowerment through a "participatory culture" (Jenkins 2006; cf. the chapter on fandom by Benecchi and Wang, in this volume). Even before the emergence of YouTube, the rise of a more empowered form of amateurism was acknowledged, notions of the amateur as non-professional were redefined through an increasingly hybrid terminology, such as "prosumer," to denote how user agency alternates between bipolar categories of producer versus consumer, and professional versus consumer (Bruns 2006; cf. van Dijck 2009). This rethinking of the amateur also becomes clear in the notion of "pro-am," which redefines the hierarchy of the professional as expert and a mark of high standard versus the amateur as the non-professional: "Pro-Ams are knowledgeable, educated, committed and networked, by new technology" (Leadbeater and Miller 2004, 12). Instead of a hybridisation between the amateur and professional, Patrice Flichy rather speaks about the amateur in the digital age as an "in-between" category: "Amateurs find themselves halfway between non-professionals and professionals, between the ignorant and the expert, and between ordinary citizens and administrators and/or politicians" (Flichy 2018, 172).

In conclusion, the digital amateur as a non-professional practitioner has become a contested label (etic), but also as a form of self-assignment (emic), in which – as with the film and video amateur – again ideas, norms, values, and motivations play a role. A good example of this would be the popular YouTuber Casey Neistat, who publicly complained when YouTube in 2017 changed its rules and demonetized certain vloggers (Motrescu-Mayes and Aasman 2019, 44–65). This had a devastating effect on the income of many YouTubers who were now unable to make a living. Many of Neistat's followers applauded him for defending the "small creators" or "small YouTubers," as some of them described themselves. The rhetoric used here has an interesting connotation, referring to "small-gauge" filmmakers, a historical term indicating amateurs using a substandard film format. However, not all commentators agreed with him as they

fiercely rejected the emphasis on monetisation. Indeed, they considered the act of monetising (and with it the idea of professionalisation) to go against the idea of YouTube as a place for amateurs as independent, grassroots or non-professional practitioners (Hunter et al. 2013).

## Conclusion

Both parts of this contribution show that, as Andy Warhol claimed, with amateurs "you can never know what they'll do next," or, as we would like to add, who they are from a media historical perspective. Not only have many scholars explored a variety of ways to get a grip on the amateur, also among the various historical sources can we detect many points of departure to answer this seemingly straight-forward question. In the first part, we concluded that much of the academic debate on the amateur revolves around etic attributions, broadly grouped into four ama-teur types. We furthermore proposed conceptualizing attempts at self-assignment by historical amateur media practitioners as mostly being emic in nature. In addi-tion, we would like to note here that the plethora of heterogeneous historical traces available, to be found both inside and outside of institutional archives, might also trigger what could be termed an etic impulse in the historian as an observer and interrogator of the past. The inherent "messiness of history" (Darnton 1990) can entice historians to "discipline" and "regulate" it for their own purposes, by using carefully chosen analytical and heuristic lenses with an acceptable degree of explanatory power or sometimes allowing for normative evaluations. The lack of scholarship on women as amateur filmmakers, for instance, requires more attention. Only recently have several initiatives in film and video archives dug up historical traces of these neglected amateurs (cf. Hill and Johnston 2020; Motrescu-Mayes and Nicholson 2018).

In this concluding reflection, we bring together three points, based on the insights yielded in this contribution that merit further reflection. First, we want to include some additional reflections on our specific usage of the con-cepts of emic and etic. What is the heuristic value of such a distinction for un-derstanding the debate on amateurism, and for analysing historical cases and time periods? These concepts, we believe, will help to historicise the notion of amateurism because it allows for distinguishing how amateurs – as actors within a social group at a certain moment in time – have been appropriating the term to describe their own ways of doing and thinking compared to how ex-ternal observers have been using the term to analyze and label certain historical actors and their activities as such. Making such a distinction is meaningful in

relation to the four amateur types we have distinguished in this chapter. More-over, as we have shown, to understand the amateur, one needs to be conscious of the complexities in the explicit or implicit labelling and self-assignment to certain categories.

In addition, by exploring the film, video, and digital media amateurs in particular, we can work towards identifying continuities and discontinuities in the practices of and discourses on the amateur, in particular by those practitioners who, over different periods of time, were committed to using various media technologies to capture moving images and later also sound. By doing so, it is not our intention to make a determinist argument on the transformative impact of certain media technologies on their users at a particular historical juncture. What we rather propose is to make a rough distinction between eras where the use of certain media technologies dominated amateur media practices and discourses. Such a technology-oriented perspective hence allows for a more precise analysis of the similarities and differences in amateur media practices between various moments in time, including the current digital age. In relation to the film amateur, for instance, we have shown how amateurism at the beginning of the twentieth century still draws on the nineteenth-century idealist meaning of the amateur originating from discourses on amateur photography. For the video amateur, the meanings of amateurism had already become more complex due to the diversification in the use of amateur video technologies within a rapidly changing media landscape. In the digital age, this complexity intensified, which has not only given rise to new, hybrid terminologies, like the "pro-am," "prosumer" and "produser," but also made the amateur more ubiquitous and visible within popular culture and the public domain (Flichy 2018).

Finally, on the basis of the two previous reflections, we would like to emphasise the need for conceptual lenses that help to understand this increased complexity in the amateur debate. From a media historical perspective, the proposed typology of four amateur types, in combination with etic and emic approaches to amateurism, can be productive as an analytical framework for analysing and grasping the multiple and ever-changing meanings of amateurism. However, we believe that media historians could benefit from additional or complementary conceptual lenses that enable both diachronic and synchronic analyses of media amateurism. This is particularly relevant when taking into consideration the variety of perspectives on media amateurs found among the sources and historical actors discussed in the second part of the chapter. Elsewhere, for example, Slootweg proposed the discerning between three, sometimes overlapping, modes of practice and functioning: the community mode, counter mode, and home mode (Slootweg 2018a). As Motrescu-Mayes and Aasman furthermore pointed out, "the counter mode, represented by social and political activists who embraced video

as an oppositional practice, the home mode, driven by a desire to use video as a technology of memory, and the community mode, presented by self-proclaimed serious organized film amateurs" (Motrescu-Mayes and Aasman 2019, 16–17).[5] Distinguishing between these three modes of amateur practices can be helpful in adding a "perspective on media amateurism that will provide the means to bring more descriptive and analytical clarity to the different intentions among historical film and video amateurs" (Slootweg 2018a, 204–205).

In addition, the notion of hybridity is crucial to emphasise as a key term for describing the blurring of boundaries in the digital age (Moran 2002, xiii). Elsewhere, van der Heijden suggests applying the notion of hybridity not just as a descriptive category but rather as an analytical lens for studying "the intermingling and co-existence of old and new media technologies, user practices, and discourses as evolving in an ongoing process" (van der Heijden 2018a, 36; 2018b). Maintaining both a synchronic and diachronic approach to media historiography, the notion of hybridity provides a potentially valuable heuristic and analytical lens for studying media transitions in their historical complexity. Moreover, van der Heijden argues, this can be helpful for highlighting "the actual complexity and 'messiness' of media history and historians' preoccupation with constructing narratives of change and discontinuity, rather than highlighting also the things that happen 'in between'" (van der Heijden 2018a, 40).

In conclusion, we can therefore say that this chapter not only explored the multiple meanings of amateurism from a media historical perspective but also revealed how the notion of the amateur, which is so central to our contemporary digital age, can also function as an analytical lens in and of itself – both synchronically and diachronically, as historical actors within various modes of practice, and as a hybrid construct.

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**5** For definitions of the "home mode" and "community mode", see Chalfen (1987); Shand (2007); Moran (2002).

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