Abstract

Binge-watching is the mode of consumption of modern digital media platforms. However, taste-watching, a mode of media consumption that prioritizes breadth over depth and diversity over selectivity, may be proposed as a more revolutionary alternative. Whereas binge-watching tends to trap a viewer in a monomythic, self-oriented, culturally limited, system of control; taste-watching has the potential to open viewers to experimentation, empathy, cultural capital, and political resistance.

A Taste-Watcher's Manifesto

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Introduction:

In our postmodern age, with a growing acknowledgement of the proliferation and power of new media technologies, perhaps we need a new mode of viewership: taste-watching. Taste-watching is what it sounds like: a mode of viewership newly enabled by modern technological conditions, that emphasizes diversified media consumption. This is specifically defined in contradistinction to binge-watching: a mode of viewership that emphasizes focused and perseverant media consumption. In the context of television shows, binge-watching is defined as a practice "in which viewers watch numerous episodes (and sometimes complete seasons) over a concentrated period" (Ames 32). Taste-watching would be the inverse, numerous shows (incomplete seasons) over an elongated period. Whereas binge-watching is a very centered and closed mode of viewer participation, taste-watching would be a decentered and open mode. In this sense, taste-watching promises to provide a range of personal benefits to its practitioners. In summary, these benefits would include: artistic pleasure, personal experimentality, cultural capital, social empathy, and political resistance.

Technology, History, Viewership

Artistic consumption is dependent upon media. Technology largely determines modes of viewership. In the paleolithic age, we wall-stared at cave paintings; in the medieval age, we began worshipping at the decorative altars of the saints; in the enlightenment age, we began contemplating the exhibits of the masters; in the age of television, we tuned in to the network

programming for an evening of show-by-show episodes; but now, in the digital age, with the rise of the convenient replayability of the DVD box sets and online platforms, we binge whole television shows in a single sitting. As a general trend, history has progressed from unique, discrete art objects towards mass-produced, disposable copies. As media theorist Walter Benjamin said, the technological mode of reproduction defines the character of modern art in that "Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art." (Benjamin XII). The Ancient mode of viewership was the that of the cult. The uniqueness of the art object generated an "aura", a psychological feeling of adoration towards it. This was the so-called "cult value" of art, since "Artistic production begins with ceremonial objects destined to serve in a cult." (Benjamin V). However, the modern mode of viewership tends to be related to the exhibit. We no longer look at ancient objects in situ in their temples and shrines, we look at them in a museum as an exhibit. The value of the object is still entertained but it has shifted from cult to exhibit. This so-called "exhibition value" dominates the way we now experience art, whether visual, auditory, or mixed:

> Today, by the absolute emphasis on its exhibition value the work of art becomes a creation with entirely new functions, among which the one we are conscious of, the artistic function, later may be recognized as incidental. This much is certain: today photography and the film are the most serviceable exemplifications of this new function. (Benjamin V)

In any given time period though, the bias of the present tends to make the current mode feel like the only mode, the eternal and unchangeable mode of art. Being in and of our moment, we easily forget that technologies undergird and enable our consumption, as the media becomes invisible behind the art itself. It is easy to see how we create and control our technologies, but it is worth

admitting as well that our technologies create and control us. As Marshall McLuhan foretold, "We shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us" *(*Pariser *6).* Minimally we may admit this is true in the trivial sense: songs are for listening; photos are for looking; games are for playing. More abstractly, we can see by experience how the forms specific to each media of viewing change the mode of viewing. And, because form influences content, each mode of viewing encourages a form-specific content: whether plot structures, settings, characters, etc.. These factors thus inform the viewing experience.

The previous dominant form of viewership was network watching. The rapid development of audio-visual technologies in the twentieth century enabled massive overhaul of cultural consumption. Reproducible film reels allowed for the liberation of theatres from the costs of staged productions. The television allowed the theater to be brought home into the living room. But home viewers were still servile to the network. Televised broadcasting encouraged this mode where shows were watched on a schedule set by the network, rarely in order of release, semi randomly, and never all at once. Network watching makes good on the episodic discrete show plot. Though network watching has the obvious flaws of an outdated medium—commercial breaks, schedule-conflicts, reruns, bathroom-breaks, interruptions, nonsequential episodes, no rewind, no fast-forward, waiting for a show, etc..

The current dominant form of viewership is binge-watching, which emerged concomitant with the release of home viewers from network schedules. Indeed, so appealing is binge-watching that far from being a niche behavioral form of media engagement, binge-watching is the quintessential form. The dominance has been corroborated by statistical study: "Binge watching isn't an emerging trend or behavior: it's mainstream and the new normal. 61% binge watch regularly. (2-3 episodes of a single TV series in one setting)" (West) The invention of the

DVD box set enabled and encouraged this mode. There the shows are, laid out in boxes of your queue, like troughs at a buffet, a bottomless bowl of your very favorite foods and shows. Kompare emphasizes that this new mode was an inevitable effect of "the rapid, exponential growth of the DVD market; the unique properties and distinction of the technology itself; and the successful creation and exploitation of cult audiences. (Kompare 343) Because of the unscheduled availability of episodes, binge-watching permits the long form continuous plot serialization. Shakespeare's "brevity is the soul of wit" has been abandoned for longevity is the goal of it. This is obvious because, "as viewers can bypass full seasons on linearly scheduled television in favor of watching them at once at their convenience" (Ames 28). In this media landscape, typically one show is watched for extended periods of time, all the way through. To be perfectly literal, binge-watching is as tempting as bingeing, with all the side-effects that gluttony entails. Thus, binge-watching, while appealing, has negatives, just like network-watching before it. First, bingeing runs the risk of being too much of a good thing, overcoming our pleasure-capacities as consumers. Second, bingeing tends to be self-enclosing and claustrophobic: in spite of the huge variety of shows out there, bingeing tends to focus on getting hooked on one or two particular shows, ultimately limiting the enforced semi-randomness that was the blessing and curse of television. Third, binge-watching lets viewers watch according to their preferences, thus mostly reinforcing those preferences at the expense of others. Fourth, binge-watching also tends to be antisocial externally, focusing on "my shows" and thus limiting the potential for socialized forms of viewing. And fifth, in the world of algorithms, bingeing tends to pigeon hole a viewer into a particular type, to be used to facilitate targeted marketing.

Extrapolating these trends, we can imagine a new mode of viewership for our new media: Taste-Watching as a potential postmodern mode. In the era of digital platform proliferation, each

different platform—Youtube, Netflix, AmazonVideo—with its slightly modified user interface allow for a slightly different user experience; but most, if not all the modern online viewing platforms, with their surpluses of content, readily available for endless consumption. With the internet, we do not have to watch shows according to a dictated schedule or box set, but can watch them however we please. Benjamin would be proud, in as much as his dream has come to pass: "for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual." (Benjamin IV). Benjamin was wrong to describe the early twentieth century this way, but he very well might have been right to save it for the twenty-first century. So, now that Benjamin's words finally ring true, what alternatives are enabled? Are there alternatives? Might we propose an alternative? Rather than bingeing, investing large amounts of time in one thing; might we invest small amounts of time in many things, like tasting? In contrast to binge-watching, we might dub this mode of viewership taste-watching; or alternatively, watch-tasting to invoke the analogous culinary practice of wine-tasting. Watch-tasting-not to be confused with licking timepieces--or taste watching would treat shows as foods to be tasted as opposed to binge-watching which treats them as foods to be binged. Approaching the ubiquity of media philosophically, with a self-consciousness of diversity but the distinction of connoisseurship, a taste-watching would be a mode of viewership that selects shows and watches small pieces of them, not unlike how a wine-tasting selects wines and tries small sips of them. All of the time invested could be, like a stock portfolio, diversified. Twenty-four hours invested in one show could be one hour invested in twenty-four shows. This comparative viewing experience prioritizes breadth, instead of depth; variety, instead of continuity; and novelty, instead of nostalgia. Of course, such a viewing method may be uncomfortable for the

modes of attention grown accustomed binge-watching. But as we will see, to not taste-watch is to waste the possibilities our technologies offer.

Artistic Pleasure

Binge-watching provides prolonged pleasure in a singular work of art. In as much, the very allure of binge-watching is a combination of suspense and nostalgia. The unity of the narrative work in time gives the viewer the chronic joy of running into old friends combined with the canny dread of hanging off a cliff. Our desire to know what happens next drives our untrammeled attention span. Arguably, this pleasure is simply embedded into the nature of narrative in general and film as narrative in particular: "in the film where the meaning of each single picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence of all preceding ones." (Benjamin VI). The semantic dependency of each subsequent image operates upon us like real life, triggering the very sense of continuity with which we interpret the images of our own eyes and ears.

Furthermore, the more we binge-watch a cultural product, the more invested and interested we often become. A built-up sense of suspense is implied by the very episodic structure of the film as series of images. The film thus requires the investment of continuous segments of uninterrupted time. Television shows are structured episodically, to permit of comfortable narrative breaks between episodes, but still require prolonged attention. Indeed, the impulse of binge-watching is built into the very stop-and-go propulsive timing structure of television narrative itself, so it is only natural that viewers would binge, given the opportunity: "Just before each break and at the end of every episode, something shocking, explosive, or tense happens in order to keep viewers watching" (Ames 29). Without the time constraints of network media, the drive to keep watching is unleashed. This drive, as a feeling of unfinished, unfulfilled,

suspended attention affixes a discomfort until completion. Viewing the "whole" of the work has a feeling of closure, consonance, and resolution that unfinished viewings simply do not obtain. This has been called, ""holistic viewing", a deliberate moniker to avoid "binge-watching"" in order to emphasize the positive aspects of bingeing. (Lacob) These formal features and their psychological analogues serve well to explain and justify the appeal of binge-watching.

However, the repeated investment of time and attention required of binge-watching is subject to diminishing returns. "Too much of a good thing" is an idiom for a reason and binge-watching is no exception to the rule. Even Lacob, an advocate of the mode, explicitly admits that he feels he must frame the behavior more positively to avoid the presumption of ""binge watching," because binge has a rather negative connotation (it implies that you should, perhaps, feel guilt for overindulging)." (Lacob) But overindulging is in fact undesirable and even harmful. Psychological studies have linked binge-watching to feelings of loneliness, depression, and lack of self-control (Sung). Indeed, in as much as these negative affects mimic addiction, binge-watching can be consider a sister or cousin of addiction, if not an addiction in its own right. In the long term these binges lead to feelings of regret; like drinking leads to a hangover or eating leads to being stuffed, the pleasure is not infinitely additive. Binge-watching, like bingeing, has costs.

Switching to different artistic works though can reinvigorate the staleness of experiences. Openness to experiences has been linked directly to psychological well-being (Steel). We can observe the mechanism of pleasure operating here through the fundamental analogy of bingeing. The first bite is often the tastiness, and each subsequent bite is duller and duller; likewise, the first watch is often the most interesting, and each further watch is less and less. These diminishing returns negatively imply that we should not repeat experiences too much (bingeing);

but they also positively imply that we should try new things (tasting). The good life is a life full of first bites.

Taste-watching provides a way to pallet cleanse, to refresh pleasure, and to experience first bites again and again. In our modern media environment, taste-watching is the most obvious way to maximize our aesthetic pleasures. There are enough first bites out there to last a lifetime.

Personal Experimentation:

Binge-watching provides us with modern monomyths. The narratives that we consume, including and especially the television shows that we watch, come to define and constitute the narratives of our own lives. Each show is a mythology that we invest ourselves in with shear attentional loyalty. Even if we do not "believe in" these narratives consciously, their narrative structures tend to structure the ways in which we think about reality and our own place within it. Get-rich-quick stories make us aspire towards wealth; ghost stories make us apprehensive in the dark; science fiction stories make us hopeful or fearful about technology. As mythologist Roland Barthes suggests, in this sense, all art is mythological because "myth is a semiological system which has the pretension of transcending itself into a factual system" (Barthes 12). Our binge-watching fixates upon a unitary artistic work, which becomes our religious text, which carries our set of implicit myths, which becomes our internalize destiny, whether we like it or not. Furthermore, we embrace the activity of binge-watching for its value as inertia, habit, and "ritual". Benjamin says that this "ritual" itself, as used in our way of life, which binge-watching reimagines, is the originating value of art:

> The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition . . . In other words, the unique value of the "authentic" work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. (Benjamin IV)

The very value of art is tied to its social role as frame of traditions.

Indeed, binge-watching is such a tempting activity in large part because, having lost our ancient grand narratives, we crave a story-surrogate. In the earlier days of human civilization, myths were culturally inborn, entrenched, and endeared; after modernity though, gods have been killed, cosmic purposes have been forgotten, and myths have been reduced to fairy tales. Faith has been replaced with doubt. However, in the human gut, the longing for the myth has outlived the myth itself. As Benjamin suggests, this impulse for "cult value" is far from dead:

> Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Beethoven will make films... all legends, all mythologies and all myths, all founders of religion, and the very religions... await their exposed resurrection, and the heroes crowd each other at the gate. (Benjamin II)

In other words, modern media regurgitates old monomyths.

However, ultimately, the monomythic nature of the grand narrative is limiting and illegitimate for modern sensibilities. There is something intuitionally unsettling about the monomania of binge-watching because it hints at a type of ideological extremism: so-called "cult audiences" (Kompare 349). Of course, as Kompare ominously points out, "While loyalty to series television is certainly encouraged by the media industry, the term "cult" reveals an anxiety about potentially excessive loyalty. (Kompare 349). Accepting the one narrative presented to us feels closed minded and self-limited. It also, according to postmodern philosophy, is intellectually untenable, as "grand narratives" are largely discredited. As postmodern theorist Jean Francois Lyotard puts it, "We no longer have recourse to the grand narratives. we can resort

neither to the dialectic of Spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for postmodern scientific discourse. But as we have just seen, the little narrative remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention most particularly in science" (Lyotard 60). Even if we were to enjoy the narratives we binge-watch, we do so in bad faith because we commit the affect of religious zeal to an object which cannot receive it.

Thus, we must turn to experimentation because there is no way to legitimize our grand narratives anymore, except by experimentation. Instead of trusting in the "monology" of a single narrative, we must defer our faith to the multiplicity of many stories. As Lyotard defines is, the spirit of our postmodern age should be one of "paralogy", where we find the legitimacy of knowledge through diversity and experimentation; not through "monology", the unification of knowledge, as in the past. Experimentation maximizes exposure to different concepts. As Lyotard puts it, it "is productive not of the known, but the unknown. And it suggests a model of legitimation that has nothing to do with maximized performance, but has as its basis difference understood as paralogy" and "is useful in the same sense that any sophisticated theory is useful, namely as a generator of ideas" (Lyotard 60). In other words: we do not truly know if we will like a show until we watch it. Thus, when binge-watching and re-watching the same shows, we are constantly making an irrational decision, the proverbial sunk cost fallacy: choosing the devil-you-know, instead of the devil-you-don't. We consume our zealotry at the opportunity cost of idolatries we haven't tried. For every story you love, it is possible there is a story that you would love even more, if you only knew about it. Of course, in experimentation, we are committing ourselves to the real acceptance that we will not like every show we taste, but also to the eager prospect that we will be pleasantly surprised. Some might counter that we have to watch a season

to know its good, but this makes binge-watching a type of sunk cost fallacy of our attention, mistaking the "watched" for the "watch-worthy", the fallacy of the grand narrative.

Taste-watching provides experimentation. We must develop a method, in the postmodern spirit, to diversify our knowledge. Lyotard says, "A recognition of the heteromorphous nature of language games is a first step in that direction." (Lyotard 66). This is what we attempt to do by analyzing our watching habits, acknowledging them as a "language game", and pushing them towards diversity. In as many words, "there are more things in heaven and earth . . . than are dreamt of in our philosophy".

Social Empathy:

Binge-watching lets us enter the world of the main character in the narrative and identify with them intimately. Having seen the first episode, one has already identified with characters, grown accustomed to their world, and invested in their stories. With hours and hours of consecutive episodes, the viewer becomes one with the hero: it becomes not their story, but our story, provoking what philosopher Richard Rorty calls an "imaginative identification with the details of others' lives" (Rorty 190)

The great moral appeal of literature and film is this form of narrative empathy: the ability to view the world from another's eyes. Identifying with characters in stories is and exercise of the psychological process that makes this possible. These stories provide "the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of "us" . . .. (in, e.g., novels or ethnographies)" (Rorty 192). Long-form television shows—unlike feature-length films—can develop characters and complicate plots in the manner of large novels that deepens this sense of empathy. This empathic immersion is a true benefit of the long-form, binge-watching included.

Binge-watching is an exercise in empathy because the extended viewership almost always implies an extended identification with the characters viewed. Binge-watching is a sure sign of our emotional engagement with the experience. Furthermore, since binge-watching is so popular, by participating we are engaging in a form of communal participation, a form of participatory solidarity between audience members (West). In a devalued world, empathizing is one of the last great projects of humanity. Although avowedly dismissive of grand moral systems, Rorty suggests that "human solidarity" through interpersonal empathizing is the only remaining standpoint left unscathed by the postmodern condition (Rorty 189).

However, we cannot really empathize widely when we have tunnel vision on a narrow range of cultural products. Binge-watching is necessarily, definitionally a deep focus on one artistic work for extended time periods. This mode acquaints the viewer intimately with that artist, character, and point of view; but blinds the viewer to the buffet of other possible perspectives. In this way, binge-watching has the potential to reify the tribal tendencies that plague human thinking: the self and other distinction: the fact that "we still instinctively think of as "they" rather than "us"" (Rorty 196). With binge-watching, the tendency is to focus on one show and therefore one character, or perhaps a few characters in ensemble shows. Because of this, binge-watching forecloses the horizon of empathy to the circle of the viewed. Exclusive bingers do not further expand their empathy to other shows and other characters. Binge-watching, in as much as it limits us to a narrow purview, is a type of empathetic dead end. We allow ourselves to empathize, but only with "our favorite characters"; we commit ourselves to altruism, but only for a friends; we resign ourselves to love, but only for those we already love. At its extreme, this emotion is the formative power of tribalism, valuing the other as an extension of self, but only as far as our influence extends. This is not to say that binge-watchers are bad

people, only to suggest that the ethical impacts of our viewing experiences are potentially limited by the number of alternative experiences and perspectives to which they open themselves through the medium if film.

Absorbing lots of media narratives can increase empathy because we enable a type of empathy and solidarity by looking outside our comfort zone. If watching one show can provide empathy one person, then surely watching many shows can provide empathy for many people. Indeed, the modern media buffet provides precisely this opportunity. Stuart Hall suggests:

> This is the first of the great cultural functions of the modern media: the provision and the selective construction of social knowledge, or social imagery, through which we perceive the "worlds", the "lived realities" of others, and imaginarily reconstruct their lives and ours into some intelligible "world-of-the-whole", some "lived totality" (Hall 140)

Therefore, taste-watching is a way to increase empathy by increasing our diversity of cultural exposure and our potential for different insights. It is not our ethical imperative to be watch-tasters, anymore than it is our duty to watch anything at all, but an expanded viewing experience has the potential for an expanded ethical one.

Cultural Capital:

Binge-watching provides a special dose of cultural capital. At least part, possibly a large part, of the viewing experience is the social experience. Experiencing things with others can create an experience more valuable than the mere addition of those same individual experiences accrued separately. And, being able to talk about the experiences with others is value added that exceeds the mere duration of the experience itself. This added value is the esteem of cultural capital accumulated through communal experiences. Cultural capital or "symbolic value", as political

philosopher Pierre Bourdieu defines it, is the type of cultural value that "depends on the value which [objects] are recognized to possess by the academic market." (Bourdieu 269) Bourdieu was referring to the type of value we assign to books in university classrooms, but modern cultural capital is even bigger than academia, for art objects are recognized as commoditie on the popular culture market at large. The social benefits of viewing afforded by cultural capital account for much of the disproportionate attention and esteem placed on "popular culture". Otherwise, we would all be individual viewers with our individual preferences in a scattershot world, a world with much fewer block-busters and viral videos. But being able to talk about the latest shows at a party can mean the difference between being a bore and not. This cultural capital, the familiarity with works of pop or high art, provides invaluable esteem and clout. That your boss loves a show might be reason enough to watch it, even to binge-watch it all the way through, just to mention in a meeting. We must be well-versed in the contemporary trivia that composes small-talk if we would want to make a good impression. Binge-watching helps this ambition.

Indeed, mirroring the economy, cultural capital, the wealth of culture, is unequally distributed anyway, and must be pursued relentlessly if we want it. Indeed, capital is a juggernaut and the cultural variety is no easier on the eyes. Bourdeiu suggests as much: "it is difficult to break the circle in which cultural capital is added to cultural capital" (Bourdieu 266). The rich get richer; the poor get poorer. But also, the cultured get culturer; the crass get crasser. Breaking this unconscious cycle requires true commitment to the arts. Binge-watching, in this sense, mirrors capital accumulation in that it encourages its own repetition. Likewise, capital; likewise, culture. It is not enough to merely earn money, but we must earn more, more, more. It is not enough to merely watch shows, but we must watch more, more, more. Hence, the propensity to

binge-watch has real socioeconomic baggage. You missed the latest episode because you were working late? What an uncultured bore! You're fired!

However, we only gain specific cultural capital by watching more of a single show, not broad cultural capital. And, worse still, the possibility of cultural capital at all becomes more and more diluted as the number of media options increases:

> The assumption that "everyone" watched last night's episode of a hit TV show no longer holds water, as it were, because the odds have grown slimmer that everyone watched the same show at any time. Water-cooler interlocutors now contend with countless consumption options (Ames 38)

Indeed, the value of entertainment as cultural capital is increasingly suspect. Sociologically speaking, the studies suggest that the consumption of entertainment in particular is not a high status behavior and, furthermore, those with high cultural capital already tend to keep it: "High status consumers tend to use electronic media more productively than low status consumers, thus reproducing their high and low status respectively" (Van Deursen et al.). Indeed, in statistical surveys, low status users actually claim to use technology a lot, but their usages tend not to be "capital-enhancing", rather "those with higher levels of education use the Internet for 'capital-enhancing' activities" (van Deursen 511). Notably, this can be found to be true even though low-status users partake of the internet even more regularly than high-status users do: differential media usages provide differential advantages, but differential rates do not. In other words, in the twenty-first century where digital media is available to the rich and the poor, the shear volume of consumption is not itself a sign of advantage: more is not necessarily better. Thus, binge-watching, as a paradigm of high-volume consumption, is surely not high on the list of advantageous behaviors. If we want cultural capital, we should probably do something else.

Alternatively though, we can gain broader cultural capital by absorbing lots of different media. Although we may believe pessimistically like Benjamin that in the past "there was no way for the masses to organize and control themselves in their reception", this does not mean it is now true (Benjamin XII). Just because users may not be using the internet to their benefit does not mean they cannot. In fact, studies show that the connection between personal intentions and personal outcomes is strong: there is a "relationship between the motivation and usage" (van Deursen 516). In other words, those consumers who are motivated to better themselves are strongly correlated with actually doing so. Even if we doubt the efficacy of our own agency, we recognize that personal motivation is the only place where such agency could reasonably claim purchase. Thus, we might turn away from those usage habits (e.g. binge-watching) that are underserving us, and turn towards the gamut of other options. There is an avenue for personal agency, even under the anvil of economic determinism:

> The results of the current investigation suggest that overcoming digital divides is a rather complex challenge that goes beyond improving access or Internet skills. Clearly, this article among others has shown that they are related to individual motivations and socio-cultural preferences. In a free society, such preferences can only partly be changed by, for example, governmental, social and cultural policies in education and community building. (van Deursen 522)

In other words, our individual behavioral patterns and how we think of those patterns has a strong impact on our own outcomes, even amidst greater forces.

Therefore, taste-watching is a way to maximize cultural capital using our own agency. If we are honest, we can admit that most of the tone, style, mood, and appeal of a show can be gleaned from a small sampling of it—just a taste. By the end of a first episode, all the major

characters, settings, and conflicts should be fairly well-established—if its good writing. Thus, a lot of cultural capital can be gained by taste-watching. Bingeing will discriminate the true fans from the perusers, but having watched even a single episode will save the embarrassment of appearing like a cultural pariah. In this social sense, taste-watching maximizes the acquisition of cultural capital because it diversifies your trivia, thus allowing the taste-watchers to fit in casually at the maximum number of cocktail parties. Whereas binge-watching is excellent at entrenching a person into a specific fandom, taste-watching has the virtue of extricating ourselves from hyperfocus and networking with more and more real world nodes of contact. The more shows you watch, the more people you can talk to, in an almost one-to-one relationship, the more opportunities you may have, economic and cultural.

Political Resistance:

Binge-watching is exceptionally appealing because it feels like an exercise of personal preferences. Indeed, statistics corroborate the perceived positivity of binge-watching: according to data "73% viewed binge-watching as positive". (West 2) Binge-watching is the reflexive mode of participation of modern times. When given opportunity, most people think binge-watching is not just good but chosen. Indeed, the feeling is in an important sense real: "to some extent we've always consumed media that appealed to our interests and avocations and ignored much of the rest." (Pariser 10) The platforms parade the importance of our choice before us in the abundance of the catalogue. After all, the algorithm "helps you find the right movie to watch in its vast catalog of 140,000 flicks. (Pariser 11). With freedom just a click away, we click away. And, when the burden of responsibility becomes too great, we can just wait for the queue to time out and the next episode to roll, and feel happy with our chosen conveyor belt.

No wonder we feel this way, since exercising preferences is traditionally and self-reflectively the most salient mode of resistance. After all, what could be more freeing that exercising choices amongst preferences. In the shopping mall, amongst the menagerie of things it sells, the feeling of exuberant freedom emerges from the inundation of consumer choices. The wilderness gave cavemen no such freedom. When faced with the infinity of options we bite down on the tongue of our existential angst and embrace radical freedom. Even conforming feels like a choice, complete with the liberating feeling of choosing: “pleasure will be conforming and reactionary, but it will still be experienced as self-generated: the subject will feel that he or she is voluntarily adopting a social position that happens to conform to the dominant ideology and is finding genuine pleasure in it.” (Fiske 234) We might observe the cynicism of this kind of joy and the futility of this kind of choice, but those criticisms do not even dampen the lived experience within them. Especially now, in the digital world, with the ubiquity of online viewing platforms, our personality "profile" is being constantly optimized. Although many of us may cringe about privacy-infringements, the sheer convenience of targeted marketing overwhelms the creepiness: “we don’t watch TV anymore as much as it seems to watch us, recommending, recording, and dishing up all manner of worthy product” (Ames 30). The machines know what we like and try to feed us what we like in an eternal infernal feedback loop. We cannot escape this loop, cause what would be do—stop doing what we like and start doing what we don’t like? Rather than feeling eyes looking over our shoulder, most of us point eyes straight at the screen and never look back.

However, in the commercial agendas of Hollywood-scripted narratives and especially in a digital landscape, our preferences themselves are increasingly becoming algorithmically determined. The overwhelming and persistent sensation of consumption as preference is part of

our complicity in the system which delivers us those choices. More and more, we do not want things, the algorithm wants us to want things. As Benjamin prophetically reported, “I can no longer think what I want to think. My thoughts have been replaced by moving images.” (Benjamin XIV). Benjamin said this about the television, but the internet is arguably much more pervasive and invasive. As we allow digital media to enter every aspect of our lives, we have become the prisoners of filter bubbles, self-enclosed informational worlds. Scholars have pointed out the insidiousness of these digital structures:

> “When you enter a filter bubble, you’re letting the companies that construct it choose which options you’re aware of. You may think you’re the captain of your own destiny, but personalization can lead you down a road to a kind of informational determinism in which what you’ve clicked on in the past determines what you see next—a Web history you’re doomed to repeat. You can get stuck in a static, ever narrowing version of yourself—an endless you-loop.” (Pariser 14)

The personalization filters in digital media are distorting our worldview and narrowing our freedom of choice into a range of stereotypical and manageable preferences. Our preferences are no longer resistances, but resignations. In many ways binge-watching is just a type of filter bubble. We watch our shows and “what we’ve watched in the past determines what you watch next”. The algorithm spoonfeeds us our own so-called “preferences” and all the while we lap it up, proclaiming our consumer choice.

But, if we wanted to truly choose, escaping the filter bubble is the only real way to undermine the powers that be, we must learn to choose differently. As media theorist John Fiske points out, we do have the power to choose within constraints: we might work the media if we understand how the media is working us. Thus, audiences can choose their mode of reception

and thus alter and resist meanings. If we want to escape the trance that we've been trained to accept, we must deliberately reject our own preferences, often and loudly. The reason for this is the introduction of randomness. By turning away we deliberately insert random views into our experience, allowing for: "the chance encounters that bring insight and learning. Creativity is often sparked by the collision of ideas from different disciplines and cultures." (Pariser 13). In aggregate, in the mathematics of algorithm, these views average out to create a different sense of self. This is a way to stick it to big data without necessarily sacrificing our enjoyment. This mere exercise of control is itself enjoyable: "At the simplest level, children enjoyed the control that the set gave them over the signifiers themselves - . . . Part of the delight . . . seemed to come from playing out their mastery over the little box" (p. 58)." (Fiske 231) Furthermore, the algorithm may change in your favor, rather than regurgitating the same preferences, supplying truly novel suggestions, instead of self-reinforcing ones. We must embrace what Fiske calls "the pleasure/power to be different." (Fiske 234)

Taste-watching can resist the powers of media. Taste-watching is one way to break the algorithm without expending our own pleasurable viewing. In contrast to binge-watching, which feeds the algorithm a consistent experience, making the categorization of your viewing personality easier to judge, in taste-watching, the cacophony of one-offs and outliers break the algorithm by muddling our preferences with the noise of trial and error. In other words, watch something else, anything else!

Conclusion:

All of the above cultural arguments reduce to a question of diminishing returns. In the long run, more of the same yields less than more but different. The only true tradeoff here is time: the

zero-sum-game for attention. We can only watch so much. Time is limited. Time management is always important. Even rejecting time management is a form of time management. With limited attentional resources, the only crime is wasting time. Finishing a show just to finishing it is like finishing your life just to finish it. We do not owe shows thirteen hours of season runtime, nor even thirteen minutes of preview, especially with so many other shows available; if a show cannot capture our attention, then it has botched the most important job of attracting an audience. Binge-watching just because you are bored is not worth the watch

All this considered, the practice of "Taste-Watching" is a mode of culturally conscientious participation in the postmodern condition. Taste-watching is a useful alternative to binge-watching and, if we are honest, most of already taste-watch daily, just by the name of "browsing". Taste-watching though takes the next step: deliberately clicking play in the face of reluctance.

But after all this, what if we get attached to a show? Maybe you have just fallen for a pretty pilot episode or maybe you have discovered truly great art. Each mode of viewership has its flaws. To truly taste-watch, one would have to give up many good things: the certainty of a sure thing; the joy of continuity; the familiarity of favorites; the community of ardent fandom; and the convenience of algorthmic suggestion.

We might compromise here because watch-tasting and binge-watching need not be mutually exclusive. Nothing about taste-watching forbids binge-watching, except perhaps the investment of time and attention. We can taste our shows and binge them too. Indeed, perhaps the end game of taste-watching ultimately is binge-watching, in as much as the goal of wine-tasting may be to find some favorites. So, then perhaps taste-watching has achieved its purpose by delivering something truly worth your time. We do not have a fundamental philosophical

opposition to binge watching as a mode of viewing. There is no fundamental conceptual contradiction that makes them incompatible. But the taste-watching is a necessary step to justify the binge-watching. To quote Bourdieu:

> …One cannot fully understand cultural practices unless 'culture', in the restricted, normative sense of ordinary usage, is brought back into 'culture' in the anthropological sense, and the elaborated taste for the most refined objects is reconnected with the elementary taste for the flavors of food. (Distinction 1)

In other words, we cannot choose a High Culture or High Taste before we have studied the milieu of other cultures and tastes. We should never binge-watch before we taste-watch. First we must slog through everything else, all the stuff that we would overlook at first pass, perhaps even the stuff we do not like, perhaps even the stuff that makes us feel uncomfortable, perhaps especially that stuff. Watching shows diversely and deliberately—utilizing taste watching—is the new way towards maximum viewing pleasure. There is nothing wrong with bingeing as long as we do not forget to taste.

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