Viewing Diary about Netflix Original Series in 2021—Behind Her Eyes

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*Abstract:*The practices of the television industry and viewer behaviours have endured constant changes over recent years with the enhancement of technologies. Viewers can change channels and time-shift television to experience a pure context without advertising and other inappropriate material.
Key words: Binge-Watching; Epic-Viewing; Insulated Flow; Mini-Cliffhangers

Introduction

Netflix is one of the streaming platforms that abandon traditional schedule linear television without distributing texts in weekly instalments but rather in seasons per year. Here, Netflix adopts the full drop-release 'binge model' as its publication model (Honecker, Jenner and Kendall, 2018). The term binge-watching refers to viewing experiences in which the audience watches a series for a long time in one sitting (Jenner, 2018). Namely, the audience can decide their schedule without waiting for the timeline. Based on the notes of a viewing diary regarding the Netflix original series called Behind Her Eyes (Netflix, 2021) directed by Erik Richter Strand, this essay will introduce the theorisation of linear television to analyse the organisational framework and processes of Netflix. It explores how Netflix draws on Perks' insulated flow and entrance flow to examine how Netflix organises them. This analysis will highlight Netflix's narrative techniques and distribution, fuelling the phenomena of binge-watching and providing credence to what Djoymi Baker refers to as an "epic-viewing" encounter.

The development of 'flow'

Before moving deeper on how Netflix shapes viewing experiences, it might be necessary to know the concept of flow. Raymond Williams in 1974 addressed 'flow' as a key concept in how television works in the book titled *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. He considers television a medium that combines various forms of media, such as traditional programming, product and service advertising, and programming advertising. These elements constitute the actual flow. Here, the 'flow' illustrates an ongoing structure in which one programme transitions into the next one programme seamlessly (Jenner, 2018). After eight years in 1982, Ellis wrote *Visible Fictions Cinema: Television: Video* criticised Williams› concept of flow. The author contends that Williams› concept of flow is a characteristic of TV that seriously compromises the different texts that TV has manufactured. Moreover, Ellis advocates for the principle of segmentation, where television is divided into recognizably distinct ‹segments› or objects and advocates that audiences can be constantly tasked with identifying various segment genres.

Williams' concept of flow from one unit's programme to the next emphasises the text's sameness without differentiation between them. In this regard, Perks regards this viewing experience as insulated flow: viewers are directed from one episode to the next within the same program, rather than from one program to the next (Jenner, 2018).

Viewers are immersive in a fictive world.

The experience of insulated flow

When I finish watching each episode, there is a time interval of approximately 8 seconds before the next episode playing (post-play). I usually clicked 'Next Episode' button and continued to enjoy the series (see Figure 1). There is no title sequence or advertisements between each episode. Each episode presents a 'pure text', without promotional material, pollution and adverts, as Jason Jacobs (2011) terms. The interval here illustrates insulated flow, emphasising the flow of pure text and keeping viewers interested through textual features (Jenner, 2018). As perks (2014, p456) mentions, 'This insulated flow announces itself, making viewers take ownership of their experience, but its automaticity makes it difficult for viewers to escape the insulated flow'.

Likewise, I still remembered that when I first watched the first episode titled 'Chance Encounters', I felt a little confused about what on earth the series will tell about and whether the chance will be lost or discovered further, so I got many questions at that point. Then, during the interval, I clicked the button of 'Watch Credits', and the interface presents episodes of thumbnail and synopsis (See Figure 2), thus bringing me to the series' storytelling world and making me immersed in it. Accordingly, this post-play function drives the attention of the spectator and makes escape from the insulated flow impossible (Perks, 2014). Viewers are encouraged to remain inside the series' insulated flow rather than returning to the season's 'overview' page to pick the next episode.

Insulated flow, which encourages viewers towards binge-watching, is an essential organisation function for Netflix that helps to clarify the way to watch it (Jenner, 2018). The use of insulated flow may mitigate alienation regarding deciding which programme is watched. Viewers, therefore, do not need to make a new decision instead of allowing the text to pass through. As Tanya Horeck, Mareike Jenner and Tina Kendall argue (2018, p500), 'Binge-watching is Netflix's schedule'. In other words, a linear television schedule demonstrates how a programme is required to be watched from one programme to another. Rather Netflix resolves how it is watched via insulated flow.

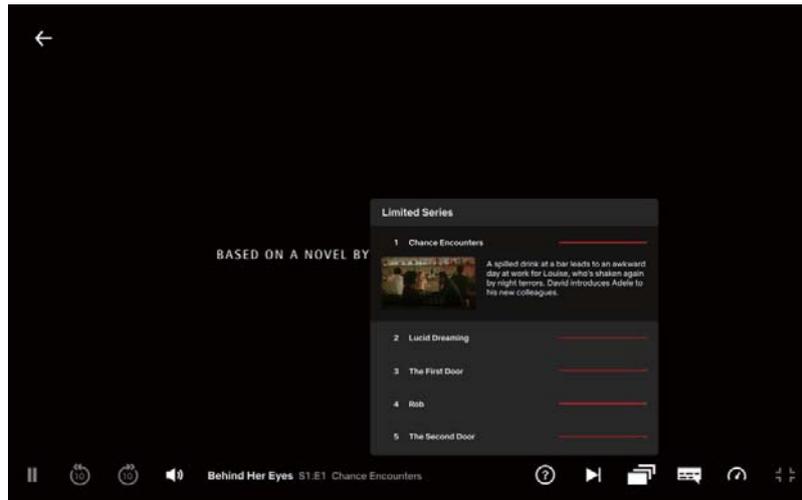**Figure 1: The screenshot about the post-play function between E.2and E.3**

Figure 2: The screenshot about clicking the 'Watch Credits' button

The experience of Entrance flow

How I choose *Behind Her Eyes* starts from this strategy of entrance flow. It is coined by Perks (2014) to focus on the flow of entry and how viewers finish watching one text. This type of flow is analogous to ‹preview channel›, which give audiences recommendations and numerous advice by algorithms (Perks, 2014). I follow Netflix›s suggestion from my previous viewing history concerning Netflix original series called *Who Killed Sara?* (Netflix, 2021). It has a 94 per cent similarity compared with *Behind Her Eyes.* Therefore, when I saw the similarity and similar genre (mind-bending and suspense), I followed Netflix's recommendation. The framing of series as 'recommended' dependent on prior searchers rather than advertising to an audience is central: it sets Netflix to describe something individualised and more applied to viewers' taste.

The other feature that enhances my emotion towards the serial content is the autoplay function. When I decided to watch the series, my cursor is rested on one of the segments. Then, it automatically starts playing a short scene of the episode: two female characters were having breakfast at the coffee store (see Figure 3). Consequently, the autoplay function, as an appetiser to hook viewers' interests at first (Zundel, 2019). More specifically, through primal exploration, viewers might know the general plot, information about characters, the number of episodes and general background information, shaping the overall viewers' experience.
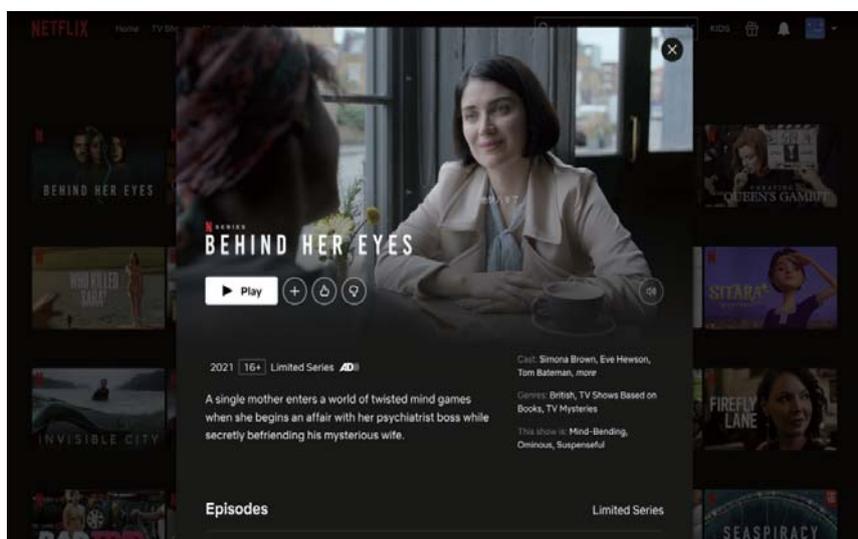

Figure 3: The screenshot of entrance flow via autoplay function

Binge-Watching as Epic-Viewing

Nevertheless, the term binge has been associated with negative connotations: excess and overindulgence. It is sometimes negatively linked to excessive consumption (Baker, 2017). In terms of binging *Behind Her Eyes*, I began to watch the first episode at 22:00. With a plot development, I would be very interested in what happened to the leading actress and her husband before moving to London. This excitement keeps the brain aroused and makes it hard to transition to a sleep state, thus nudging viewers to watch more until the end. According to Page (2017), the process of binging produces a large amount of dopamine, which is similar to the experience of drug addiction. That is why the brain stays in a high state. I eventually binged all six episodes until about 3 o'clock for 5 hours. After binging six episodes, I am still immersed in the plot and feel depressed because there are no more episodes to watch in this series. In other words, ordinary schedule and daily routine are disturbed owing to binging the series. Nevertheless, this does not mean viewers do not have a method to control viewing time. Therefore, binge responsibly depends on the viewer's self-control and self-discipline: set a time limit, balance viewing, binge in a social context with friends or families.

Although there is an adverse effect for binge-watching, the text is also viewed as epic concerning the perspective of aesthetics. Consequently, Barker (2017) redefines binge-watching towards epic-viewing. This is premised on the interpretation of the texts epic entirety (Baker, 2017). Behind Her Eyes illustrates this point clearly. This Netflix original series relies on situational cliffhangers that are constituted by diverse mini-cliffhangers. By watching the first episode, it might be assumed that Adele might have a mental illness. The second, third, and fourth episodes seem to depict a commanding, deceiving, and stereotypical crappy husband. All these mini-cliffhangers direct are a contradiction until the flashback about Rob, who was in love with Adele to gain Adele's property. This explains the cliffhangers that Adele had dead, and Rob controlled Adele's body and loved Adele's husband, David. All episodes' interspersed mini-cliffhangers seem to encourage viewers to view across whole episodes (Baker, 2017).

If any episode of *Behind Her Eyes* are neglected, it would be confused with who projects souls to Adele and what the role of Rob is in the plot. If the middle of the episode is skipped, there is no chance to understand the ending: Adele's soul goes into Louise's body. This means that If any episode is skipped or viewed in isolation, they might not fully understand how each puzzle correlates together (Baker, 2017). As Barker (2017) asserts, the epic requires viewers' endurance of an expanded text that addresses the text's creation as a place of enjoyment deemed deserving of that endurance. The whole series does this to create an epic narrative that allows each episode to flow into another, thus establishing an epic viewing experience. In this regard, Netflix aims to inspire viewers to conceptualize its programmes as epic text. This is meant to provide insight into how current plot constructs are being adapted to enable audiences to continue viewing with keen attention.

Conclusion

To sum up, since the emergence of TV sets came, the viewing experience has witnessed a significant change. Besides, the online streaming platform (i.e. Netflix) proposes a new viewing experience-binge-watching that promotes subscribers to watch what they want and where they want.

From the historical context of watching television, Williams first argues that broadcast TV programs are regarded as liquid, bounding together. Nevertheless, Ellis argues the concept of segmentation in which television is organized into different parts. This can be seen that Williams' theory applies to the strategy of Netflix. It connects to the concept of insulated flow and entrance flow, coined by Perks. It is an insulated flow containing a post-play function that facilities binge-watching and provides viewers with a homogenous storytelling world. It uses algorithms based on previous watching experience to present viewers with a viewing list regarding entrance flow. Also, binging-watching seems to have negative effects that cause overindulgence. To overcome this over-binging might depend on the viewer's self-displace and self-control. In addition, Barker redefines the concept of binge-watching to epic-viewing and points out that the audience's endurance plays a vital role in Netflix's narrative and release techniques. Different epic strategies, such as revealing the puzzle, not viewing in isolation and complicated narrative, push audiences to ask themselves to

marvel at how the authors pulled it off. Through the analysis of viewing experiences for *Behind Her Eyes*, Netflix's distribution flow and narrative techniques appeal to binge-watching phenomena and enhance the credibility of the epic-viewing: audiences will continue watching the episode and pay close attention to every detail.

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