

The Binge-watching Experience on Netflix

Netflix'te Seri-izleme Deneyimi

Önder Kulak, *Philosophy Department, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"*

Abstract

Due to its worldwide influence, binge-watching has become one of the important research topics for philosophy and social sciences such as sociology, psychology, and media studies. Although noticable articles and books have been written about binge-watching, more studies seem needed when considering its influence on individuals. This article depends on such a requirement and aims to examine the binge-watching experience on Netflix. For this purpose, the article is divided into three main parts. After explaining the concept of binge-watching in the first part, the binge model and the binge culture are elucidated according to the Netflix environment. Then, the binge is discussed in the second part as an important piece of contemporary industrial culture. Here, the motivations behind binge-watching and how the attention of the viewer is maintained through the abuse of suspense are explained. Moreover, the temporal structure and misdirections in the narrative are examined as the characteristics of the cultural commodity suitable for bingeing. As to the third part, *The Stranger* (2020) series of Netflix is analysed in detail as an example. An evaluation regarding these three parts is given in the conclusion to sum up how binge-watching is experienced in the Netflix environment.

Keywords: Binge-watching, the binge model, the binge culture, Netflix, *The Stranger*, industrial culture.

Academical disciplines/fields: Philosophy, sociology, psychology, media studies.

Özet

Dünya çapındaki etkisinden ötürü seri-izleme, felsefe, sosyoloji, psikoloji ve medya çalışmaları gibi sosyal bilimler için önemli araştırma konulardan biri haline gelmiştir. Seri-izlemeyle ilgili dikkate değer makale ve kitaplar yazılmış olmasına rağmen, bireyler üstündeki etkisi düşünüldüğünde, daha fazla çalışmaya ihtiyaç duyulduğu görülmektedir. Bu makale de böylesi bir ihtiyaca dayanmakta, Netflix'te seri-izleme deneyimini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Makale bu amaçla üç ana bölüme ayrılmıştır. Birinci bölümde, seri-izleme kavramı açıklandıktan sonra, seri-izleme modeli ve seri-izleme kültürü Netflix ortamına bağlı olarak aydınlatılmaktadır. Sonrasında, seri-izleme son dönem endüstriyel kültürün önemli bir parçası olarak tartışılmaktadır. Burada, seri-izlemenin arkasındaki motivasyonlar ve seyircinin dikkatinin merakın suistimali aracılığıyla nasıl korunduğu açıklanmaktadır. Dahası, anlatıdaki zamansal yapı ve yanlış yönlendirmeler, seri-izlemeye uygun kültürel metaların ayırıcı nitelikleri olarak incelenmektedir. Üçüncü bölüme gelindiğinde, Netflix'in *The Stranger* (2020) dizisi bir örnek olarak ayrıntılı biçimde analiz edilmektedir. Sonuç bölümünde, seri-izlemenin Netflix ortamında nasıl deneyimlendiğini özetlemek amacıyla, bu üç bölümle ilişkili şekilde bir değerlendirme sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Seri-izleme, seri-izleme modeli, seri-izleme kültürü, Netflix, *The Stranger*, endüstriyel kültür.

Akademik disiplin(ler)/alan(lar): Felsefe, sosyoloji, psikoloji, medya çalışmaları.

- **Corresponding author:** Önder Kulak, Philosophy Department, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".
- **Address:** Yeni Mah. Yürekayalar Sok. No: 7/14 Yakacık, Kartal, İstanbul.
- **e-mail:** onderkulak@hotmail.com
- **ORCID:** 0000-0002-0637-8296
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1. Introduction

Binge-watching was not seen as a serious topic to research in the near past. It was not accepted as a new phenomenon representing a breakpoint in the watching habits so that the arguments at hand were mostly considered satisfactory to explain it. But, after the rapid increase of the viewers who binge-watch, the unique features of binge-watching have become appreciable and undeniable through its influence on different forms of social relations. The investments of streaming platforms upon this increase have also strengthened this recognition of binge-watching.

The influence of binge-watching is still on the rise. While binge-watching gaining new features such as “binge race” (Netflix Media Center, 2017), individuals have begun to ask questions to understand how and why viewers binge-watch and tend to lose contact with everydayness for long hours. The need for more knowledge on this multidimensional phenomenon has then taken the attention of the researchers from different fields of research such as philosophy, media studies, sociology, psychology, and economy. Although noticeable articles and books have been written in these fields, more studies seem needed on binge-watching, when considering its influence on individuals.

As to this article, it aims to examine the binge-watching experience on Netflix. The article is divided into three main parts. After explaining the concept of binge-watching in the first part, the binge model and the binge culture are elucidated according to the Netflix environment. Then, the binge is discussed in the second part as an important piece of contemporary industrial culture. The motivations behind binge-watching and how the attention of the viewer is maintained through the abuse of suspense are explained. After that, in the third part, the temporal structure and misdirections in the narrative are explained as the characteristics of the cultural commodity suitable for bingeing, and then *The Stranger* (2020) series of Netflix is analysed in detail as an example.

2. Binge-watching

Binge-watching is a reception experience that the viewer continuously watches more than two episodes of the same programme in one sitting (Jenner, 2018, p. 109; Merikivi et al., 2019, pp. 3-6; Rubenking and Bracken, 2018, p. 5; Rubenking et al., 2018, p. 74; Turner, 2019, pp. 1-9). What is characteristic for such an experience is not the number of episodes but the persistence of the reception through following them. So that the number of how many episodes the viewer should watch for a binge is dependent on individual circumstances. The point in each circumstance is that the viewer maintains her attention from the first to the last episode. It thus makes the viewer better integrate herself with the plot presented than the discontinuous experience. Here, the experience of the viewer in ‘classic television’ is not continuous, when concerning single programmes.

The classic television depends on a linear schedule known as the programme guide, which forms a flow that it only offers the viewer the choices of following or refusing the given schedule (Jenner, 2018, pp. 121, 124). Meanwhile, the program guide is prepared according to some *generalised* watching habits and customs rather than individual needs and desires. The viewer then has not any *direct control* over this schedule, and she is pushed to adapt to it if she wants to watch the popular series. Moreover, she has no other option than to wait for the next episode until it is televised. The technological changes that make binge-watching possible, conversely, provides the viewer with the opportunity to be free from the program guide. Hence, the viewer becomes able to prepare own schedule, without waiting for the timeline.

Binge-watching has become possible after the release of RCD, VCR, DVD box sets of popular television series (Jenner, 2015; pp. 2, 4-9; 2018, p. 119; McCormick, 2016, pp. 102; Merikivi et al., 2019, p. 4). Through the box sets, the viewer has obtained the opportunity to plan own schedule. However, such binges are mostly dependent on the viewer, not the box sets. The reason is that the materials require the viewer’s intervention in most cases (McCormick, 2016, p. 103). For example, if the viewer wants to continue with the next episode, she is responsible to organise the experience by changing the material with another or by searching the relevant video file within the material. The factors like these decrease the number of episodes that the viewer watches in one sitting. Although the latest DVD technology has overcome the problem in the example by the “play all” function, DVDs are only limited to single contents and they cannot provide the viewer with the transition to other binges. So that Netflix and the other streaming platforms have almost replaced the box sets over time and have become the primary form for the binge-watching experience.¹

¹ For the reasons for this change from the point of viewers (see Steiner and Xu, 2018, p. 12).

Netflix is not only the prominent streaming platform to experience a binge but also the platform which has restructured this experience by making the viewer's intervention unnecessary, in comparison to the box sets. This is a remarkable point because many streaming platforms still need that intervention in some cases (Jenner, 2018, p. 126). As to Netflix, it offers a new model of publishing and distributing that functions *per se*. The *binge model*, which "dictates how content is supposed to be watched on Netflix" (Jenner, 2018, p. 109), may be analysed as consisting of three main stages.

It seems every binge process in Netflix starts with the publication of the whole season of a series. Netflix then continues to publish others until the new season of the relevant series is approved and made ready. After opening the series to access, the interface begins to introduce it to the viewer under the title of *recommendations*.² The viewer, who follows another series at that time, is attempted to be persuaded for the series through some pieces from the scenes. This persuasion attempt corresponds to the *pre-play stage* of the model.

The pre-play stage is followed by the *play stage* if the viewer is persuaded to watch the series. The viewer thus integrates her attention with the presented plot together with the first episode. When the end of the first episode comes, the *post-play stage* arises without asking the viewer. It represents a *bridge* between the episodes through the post-play and skip-intro functions, which provide the viewer with the opportunity to continue with the next episode after a few seconds.³ Therefore, the viewer becomes able to watch the series as a monolithic flow.

The binge model is the constituent part of the *binge culture*, while social interaction is the supplementary part. For social interaction, both real and digital spaces are used by viewers to meet others and talk about the series watched.

The popular series is one of the main topics in daily conversations. Individuals are compulsory to watch them if they want to establish more dialogues with others (Steiner and Xu, 2018, p. 10). Besides this, viewers prefer to binge with other individuals, in comparison to watching television (Feijter et al., 2016, pp. 60-61; Snider, 2016, pp. 124-125). The reason should be that the binge is seen by many as worthy enough for a collective activity. So that viewers like to binge-watch together. After the binge, they organise a time to share their comments on series. Moreover, sharing their activity on social media is also quite common. They become happy to be known as bingers because such behaviours connect them with the other viewers who binge-watch the same series.

Although daily conversations and binge-watching together are common activities, none of them is as effective as social media, when considering the number of individuals for social interaction. As a digital space, social media makes millions of people able to meet and talk about the series watched. They like to inform others on social media after completing the binge and to share their comments immediately, whether they include spoilers or not.⁴ Viewers feel themselves as parts of a community through the binged series, while connecting with other people (Jenner, 2015, pp. 11-13; Matrix, 2014, pp. 126-129; Steiner and Xu, 2018, p. 10). The binge thus continues on social media more intensified than real spaces.

3. Binge-watching and Industrial Culture

Adorno argues that industrial culture offers the unhappy individual of modern society an *exit door* to escape from the everydayness. The individual is mostly ready to accept this offer with the expectation of feeling better.⁵ The ground of this deal relies on the chronic unhappiness resulting from living in the object-dependent society. Individuals usually feel unhappy in the consumer society, which is mostly experienced with individual and social problems (2005, pp. 201-203), and neither modern society nor any other examples give them hope. This case is especially noticed through the individual's complaints about own everydayness. The state of despair at this point may be thought of as pushing the individual to resist and create an alternative to the existing social relations. However, the possibility is mostly prevented at the very beginning, when industrial culture imposes itself and offers the individual false happiness (Adorno, 2002b, pp. 100, 113).

Adorno thinks that industrial culture, which occupies almost all of the contemporary cultural structure, has an *external* character for the individual. According to the philosopher, the individual has no chance to

² For this feature of Netflix as a deceptive experience (see Jenner, 2018, pp. 127-134).

³ For the post-play and skip-intro functions (see Jenner, 2018, pp. 115, 119, 126, 127, 134).

⁴ For the spoiler issue in Netflix (see Jenner, 2018, pp. 223-224; Matrix, 2014, p. 127).

⁵ For an example regarding music (see Adorno 2002a, p. 456).

participate in the constitution of such a structure as an active subject. Her attitude, in other words, is *passive* toward cultural commodities at most times (Adorno, 1991, pp. 109-110; 2002b, p. 96; 2005, pp. 200-201). For example, whatever the individual may be, a reader, a listener, or a viewer, she is either prevented or restricted from the beginning when attempting to change the character of the commodity. The commodity then remains *alien* to the individual all the time. She is not even allowed to be herself in the reception experience. Through the commodities, the individual meets several fictional lives, which, in fact, are the *archetypes* of the existing social order. She is expected to identify herself with them and is thus manipulated through the fictional characters that are specified as the role models (Adorno, 2002b, pp. 110-118; 2002c, p. 76). So that the social relations among individuals are not presented as it is, but in a content *planned* to be in the consciousness (Adorno, 2002b, pp. 114-115).

When the individual allows industrial culture to intervene in her life, she integrates herself with the given content and identifies herself with the fictional characters and their fictional lives. The cultural commodity, therefore, efficiently manages the consciousness, and the individual obtains false happiness, takes the mind away from own problems and fictionally reaches what she cannot have and perform in real life (Adorno, 2002b, pp. 100, 112-113).

The identification of the individual with the fictional characters does not only mean that she forgets own social problems for a while, feels better and moves away from possible 'uprisings'. But, at the same time, it makes individuals compatible with the existing social order (Adorno, 1991, p. 104). As a *rationalisation* environment, industrial culture gives commands on what an individual can think, do and consume (Adorno, 2002c, p. 103).⁶ It persuades or preaches individuals according to the functions attributed by each individual and then makes them adapt to the social relations voluntarily.

Nowadays, binge-watching is an important part of this mechanism (Broe, 2019; Sim, 2016). Beginning to explain its role through the motivations of the binge may be relevant here.

The motivations triggering the binge may be gathered under two relational factors.⁷ The first among them is to move away or escape from everydayness because of the problems causing negative moods. As to the second factor, it is to integrate self with the fictional world presented with the desire of experiencing better conditions, even though all are fictitious. The viewer expects at this point to achieve positive moods through fictional experiences, in comparison to own everydayness. Although the starting points of these factors are different from each other (as respectively negative and positive moods), both depend on the impulse of the *need to feel better*.⁸

The viewer achieves positive moods during binge-watching while depending on one or both of the mentioned factors (Tefertiller and Maxwell, 2018, pp. 284-285). However, these positive moods seem beginning to disappear in a short time, after the binge ends. The consequence may be either a return to the state at the beginning or feeling worse (Castro et al., 2019, pp. 13-14). The viewer thus tends to continue the binge at most times, because it is much more desirable for her to avoid the transition and maintain the *relatively* positive state of mind. This is valid for both mentioned factors. The viewer, in the first situation, refuses to return to the undesired everydayness. In the second situation, she prefers false happiness in the cultural commodity rather than the everydayness in which there is nothing better.

The disposition of the viewer to continue bingeing forms a *vicious cycle*. This cycle causes a *dependency* under the circumstances of losing self-control and becoming passive against the mediums providing the binge (Feijter et al., 2016, p. 66; Panda and Pandey, 2017, pp. 8, 12; Rubenking et al., 2018, p. 75; Walton-Pattison, 2016, pp. 4-6). But, does this dependency indicate an addiction similar to substance use?

Although equalising the binge-watching experience with substance addiction, such as binge-drinking, is not true due to some categorical distinctions, the similarities make some analogies possible. The word binge, which is used both in the concepts of binge-watching and binge-drinking, corresponds to consuming excessive amount in a short time and suffering from the negative effects of this consumption. For example, binge-drinking is to consume an excessive amount of alcohol in an unconscionable time and to experience symptoms of being alcoholic on the body. There are many remarkable pieces of research that the individuals, who complain of negative moods like depression, more tend to experience binge-drinking

⁶ Rationalisation is a *manipulation* form to manipulate the masses by the replacement of every "incoherent" thought and practice in the existing social relations with the "coherent" ones.

⁷ In the empirical researches, the first factor mostly related to the categories of *escape, seclusion, distress, boredom relief, relaxation, passing time*, while the second factor mostly related to the categories of *entertainment, enjoyment, companionship*. For the researches considered about this matter (see Castro et al., 2019; Panda and Pandey 2017; Rubenking et al., 2018; Steiner and Xu, 2018).

⁸ For the impulse of the need to feel better (see Matrix, 2014, p. 129).

(Strine et al., 2008; Paljärvi et al., 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2013). Not the same but a parallel connection also seems in binge-watching (Ahmed, 2017, pp. 201, 204; Sung et al., 2015, p. 15; Tukachinsky and Eyal, 2018, p. 16). The viewers, who are more discontent with their everydayness or who find the fictional world in the cultural commodity better than own everydayness, more tend to binge-watch.

The impulse of the need to feel better succeeds to take the attention of the viewer. But how is it possible to maintain this attention strong all the time for many episodes and cause a dependency? Both take place through abusing the mood of *suspense*. It is a technique which differs from the management of suspense.

Managing the suspense of the viewer to process her attention is a common preferable technique both for radical popular productions and traditional works of art. Through this technique, some chains of events or characters on their own become puzzling for the viewer (Tan and Diteweg, 2009, pp. 294-299; Krutnik, 2013, pp. 10-12). So that the viewer is not able to grasp the whole without some intellectual endeavour. There are various methods used in productions to manage suspense according to this purpose. The most common method among them is to not provide the viewer directly with the knowledge of the relevant events and characters but only with several cues presented scene-by-scene.⁹ The viewer, whichever method is chosen, needs to think on cues and connect them properly for reaching the whole story. Meanwhile, her attention is kept alive to continue watching along with this experience.

The time-use in the plot is the most decisive factor to manage suspense. Both the linear and nonlinear temporal structures are preferable here to arrange the course of events.¹⁰ But the nonlinear structure is richer in the sense of creating puzzles due to the opportunities of time transitions such as flashbacks and flashforwards (Turim, 2014, p. 9). For example, a plot based on a nonlinear structure may provide the viewer with the knowledge of present-time and may push her to make inferences for the past and future events, or *vice versa*. The viewer, in all circumstances, meets the cues inserted in the temporal structure and begins her journey to grasp the whole (Nieding et al., 2009, p. 569-571).

Using suspense to process the attention of the viewer is also common in cultural commodities, as is indicated. However, industrial culture abuses suspense rather than managing it. It, therefore, relies on ambiguities, in contrast to the management of suspense that depends on puzzles. Moreover, the productions based on abusing suspense involve fewer cues. The viewer needs less intellectual endeavour thereof. She, like a missing a person, is only expected to follow the signposts regarding the course of events. Thus, industrial culture achieves to increase the impact of suspense on the attention of the viewer.

As to what is distinguishable in the commodities suitable for binge-watching, it is to intensify suspense and put it at the centre of the plot (Matrix, 2014, p. 131; Rubenking and Braken, 2018, pp. 6-8; Rubenking et al., 2018, pp. 75-76) – this is all valid for different genres in different senses. The “object of suspense” is either specified as the character or the event. The plot, in the first circumstance, makes the viewer concentrate on the character and leaves some blanks for her to be curious about. On the other hand, the events in the plot are built to create high expectations for the viewer, so much so that simple things like buying a gift for a friend are presented as if a big issue, a big mystery (Steiner and Xu, 2018, p. 11). The viewer is persuaded for each expectation that the hidden information is worth to wait, even though it is not.

The abuse of suspense is based on two relational factors in the binge. The first among them is the constantly changing time-use in the plot. The temporal structure of the narrative depends on “various increments of time passing” between scenes and episodes, less or “no flashbacks or flashforwards” (McCormick, 2016, p. 104). The plot does not inform the viewer for these time transitions, in comparison to the traditional examples which inform the viewer through conspicuous signs or texts. Therefore, the viewer is always expected to adapt to ongoing *time-travel*. Such a structure “creates story gaps that require negotiation through attentive viewing, since the narrative only provides subtle clues as to the amount of time that has passed since the last episode and what kinds of events may have occurred in those ellipses” (McCormick, 2016, p. 105).

The first factor is a *sine qua non* for the second. The second factor is to misuse *sub-stories* for misdirections. For that purpose, while “various increments of time passing between scenes and episodes” occurs, the course of events is consciously arranged to cause ambiguities in the transitions between the main story and sub-stories. Therefore, the relevant ambiguities create deceptions in mind while watching. The viewer is misdirected to move away from the truth about the main story and is pushed in the middle of a chain of suspense to spend time until the end of the series.

⁹ For some remarkable comments on cues (see Norden, 1980, p. 72-74).

¹⁰ For examples about the time-use at this point (see Tan and Diteweg, 2009, p. 306; Turim, 2014, pp. 58, 107, 144, 164).

While the questions regarding the ambiguities are transferred to the next episode, the viewer is weakened to resist against binge-watching. Abusing suspense then becomes a means to maintain the attention for the following episodes and to strengthen the disposition of the viewer for bingeing. Meanwhile, the answers of the questions are mostly found unsatisfactory, when comparing to the high expectations created. The viewer thus feels regret many times because of spending much time instead of doing other activities or sleeping.¹¹ But it becomes too late to do anything. The binge-watching is already completed on behalf of industrial culture.

After explaining the abuse of suspense, *The Stranger* series of Netflix may be analysed hereafter to demonstrate how the chain of suspense functions.

4. The Chain of Suspense in *The Stranger* (2020)

The Stranger is a thriller series based on the novel written by Harlan Coben (2015).¹² The season consisting of eight episodes premiered on January 30, 2020 as a part of Netflix Originals. It is now one of the most-watched recent series on Netflix.

The main story of the plot is the sudden and dramatic change in the lives of the Pierces. The members of the family are shown in the series as having polite and friendly relationships with the people of the town. Thomas is a foremost lawyer, while Corinne is an exemplary teacher. Meanwhile, Thomas and Ryan are in the same school that Corinne teaches. Both play football in one of the local sports clubs. It seems everything is perfect for the Pierce family. But then, an unexpected event arises and changes everything.

One day, while the children are on the football training, a stranger wearing a baseball cap sits beside Adam in the sports club and tells him that Corinne lied two years ago about her pregnancy and miscarriage to save their marriage. She also supports her claim with some concrete evidences. Moreover, she suggests Adam to make DNA tests for the children. Adam becomes shocked after listening to the stranger. He wants the stranger to answer some questions, but the woman quickly leaves the place and escapes with a car waiting outside. After the event, Adam decides to check the relevant evidences. He becomes sure about them after some inquiries and waits for a suitable time to ask Corinne why she lied to him.

Corinne accepts the fake pregnancy, but she additionally implies that Adam has also secrets. She then demands some time to explain everything, along with the other secrets hidden. However, Corinne disappears after a phone call from an unknown person. She does not even attend the annual ceremony of the school. Adam receives a text message from Corinne's phone at night. It says that Corinne wants to be away from the town for a short time.

The mentioned events from the first episode form the essentials of the main story of *The Stranger*. As is obvious from the course of events, there are various gaps in the story and these gaps cause many questions in mind. These questions may be put in order as follows:

Who is the stranger?

Why did the stranger talk to Adam about the fake pregnancy?

Why did Corinne lie to Adam?

Is Adam the father of the children?

What are Corinne's other secrets?

What is Adam's secret?

Who was the unknown person on the phone?

Where is Corinne?

It is not false to say that the other episodes are the parts answering these questions and thereof completing the rest of the story. The strong desire to know the complete story makes the viewer suspenseful. But what is more remarkable here is to misdirect her to consolidate this feeling and to grow the expectation. The

¹¹ For the feeling of regret after binge-watching (see Feijter et al., 2016, p. 65; Jenner, 2015, p. 4; Steiner and Xu, 2018, p. 13).

¹² Using suspense other than the management technique is not limited to contemporary films and series. It is available for all product forms. But, at the same time, every product form has unique technical details to be considered. For the unique technical details of the mentioned visual product forms about using suspense to process the attention of the viewer (see Oakley and Tobin, 2012, pp. 57-85).

viewer thus becomes more tending to binge-watch. As is explained, the plot succeeds misdirecting through sub-stories.

There are several chains of events in the series that form semi-independent sub-stories. The prominent among them is the sum of events happening due to the bonfire party. The scenes show that it is a party in which many young people dance, drink and enjoy around a strong bonfire in the forest. Then a naked person, who is also seen around the bonfire, shows up as escaping from someone or something. While the viewer attempts to consider what happens to the boy, a scene about an alpaca farm takes place on the screen. So that the viewer becomes paralysed after these unexpected visuals: What may be the connection between a bonfire party, a naked boy running to escape and several alpacas?

The morning following the party, some policemen and a headless alpaca are seen at the centre of the town. The detectives, Johanna Griffin and Wesley Ross, who are appointed to investigate the case, are also there. While working on the investigation, they find the naked boy, Dante Gunnarsson, by coincidence. Dante is alive but wounded and needs treatment.

The mystery of the naked boy and the headless alpaca begins to be revealed by the second episode. Since the first episode ends after the scene that the head of alpaca is in Thomas' room, it is not surprising to see Thomas and his friends Mike Tripp and Daisy Hoy as talking about the head. Thomas explains to Daisy that Mike is responsible to kidnap the alpaca from the farm, cut off its head and leave the body at the centre of the town. It seems all is because of the drug use in the bonfire party. Additionally, when Mike came to Thomas with the head at night, Thomas could not find any other option than to hide it in his room. That is why the head is in Thomas's room. However, they do not have any idea how to get rid of it. Daisy offers Thomas and Mike to bury the head somewhere in the forest, along with some Satanist signs. She argues that no one may suspect them because of those signs.

Thomas, Mike and Daisy then decide to go to the forest. But while burying the head, someone appears suddenly and frightens them. Meanwhile, the detectives also come to the forest, owing to the real-time location sharing application in Dante's phone. They see only Mike, who runs to escape from the hooded man, and arrest him with the empty bag of the head. Mike is nervous in the police station because he is not sure whether he hurt Dante or not. Hence, Mike is shown in the third episode as the suspect, along with the hooded man.

The mystery is completely revealed only after Dante's recovery in the seventh episode. Dante says about the party night that he was in the forest with Daisy, wanted to swim naked in the lake and undressed. But Daisy tricked him and moved away together with the clothes. Dante then encountered with the porter of the sports club named Max Bonner, who was angry at him because of a complaint to the administration. He frightened and ran to escape from the porter but fell and fainted.

Although the sub-story about the bonfire party has not any direct connection with the main story, the plot attempts to misdirect the viewer in more than one scene to look for connections with Corinne. This misdirection begins with the outset of the series. The outset consists of some scenes about the party as if they are at the centre of the main story. So that the viewer expects to find some connections for a quite long time. Besides this, the most remarkable scene in this scope is in the third episode. It is the scene that there are many secretly taken visuals about Corinne in Dante's computer. Through the visuals, the viewer is pushed to think of some possibilities regarding Dante and the disappearance of Corinne.

Another sub-story is about the stranger's life. This is the answer to one of the questions at the beginning: 'Who is the stranger?' The stranger's name is Christine. Christine is a hacker who finds out the secrets of people and threatens them or their families and friends for money. She does not blackmail alone but with her friend, Ingrid Prisby.

Christine tells Adam in the eighth episode that Martin Killane is not her biological father, but Edgar Price is. After several events, she finds an opportunity to resume this incomplete conversation in the hospital. According to her expression, she learned Edgar and Adam by coincidence, during digging dirt on Corinne for the football coach Bob. Christine then thought that she had to tell her brother what she learned about Corinne to protect him. So that her attempt was not about blackmailing Corinne for money.

The mystery of the stranger is revealed only in the eighth episode. Although Christine has nothing with Corinne, except the information about the fake pregnancy, the plot misdirects the viewer until the last episode to suspect that there is a connection between her and the disappearance of Corinne. These misdirections are also supported by Adam's attempts to find Christine.

The beginning of the second episode represents one of the relevant misdirections. It is the scene that Christine and Ingrid blackmail Heide Doyle, who is the best friend Johanna. Christine tells Heide that her daughter Kimberly has a profile on an escort website to meet and have sex with businessmen for money. She thus demands ten thousand pounds from Heide to not make this information public. The course of events consciously pushes the viewer to ask if Christine also blackmailed Corinne and talked to Adam because of not paying her. So that relating the other secrets that Corinne hides to this assumption becomes possible, even though there is no connection.

Another remarkable misdirection about Christine takes place in the second episode, too. This scene begins with Adam's visit to the school. Adam hopes to find Corinne in the dining hall, but he cannot. He talks to Corinne's friend Vichy Hoy and learns that some naked photographs belonging to her daughter Ela are shared by someone on social media. The viewer is pushed again here to ask if Christine is responsible for this sharing through hacking methods. This question is dependent on the negative impression of Christine until this scene. However, Olivia Katz confesses in the sixth episode that she shared the photos because of jealousy.

The chain of events about Patrick Katz forms another sub-story. Patrick is one of the colleagues of Johanna and Wesley. All work in the same office. Patrick is a nervous and anxious person due to the health of his daughter Olivia. Also, he secretly handles some dirty jobs of a security company to earn more money and pay the medical expenses. As to the last job taken, it is to find and harm Christine and Ingrid because of their blackmail to the boss.

Patrick visits Heide in her café and politely wants information about Christine and Ingrid in the last scenes of the second episode. But Heide becomes suspicious after a while and refuses to talk more because of his strange behaviours. Patrick then shoots and kills Heide. The other events about Patrick in the plot are related to hiding the evidences of the murder and searching the place of Christine and Ingrid. It seems nothing regarding the disappearance of Corinne, but the plot misdirects the viewer in some scenes.

These scenes show that both Patrick and Leila do not like Corinne. The reason for Leila is about Corinne's claim that Olivia is poisoned by her mother. Leila's unfriendly behaviours against Thomas, Mike and Daisy are also suspicious. She does not accept any of them to her house. The viewer is misdirected here to suspect if there is a connection between Patrick, Leila and the disappearance of Corinne. For example, when Thomas hides to the garage because of Patrick's visit, the viewer looks around if Corinne is there.

There is also one more sub-story used to misdirect the viewer. This is about Adam's client, Martin Killane, who is against the urban transformation in his neighbourhood. It is not clear, but Martin hires Adam probably due to the reason that the construction company is owned by his father. So that he wants to use the relationship between Adam and Edgar to stop the destruction. Meanwhile, Martin is a retired detective and has still some connections for possible investigations. Adam thus asks him for help while searching for where Corinne is.

The sub-story about Martin has many gaps that are not even completed throughout the whole session. However, the most important part of this story is revealed in the sixth episode: Martin killed his wife because she wanted to separate Christine from him and buried her beyond the walls of the house. This is also the reason why he is against the destruction of his house.

The last scenes of the fifth episode show that the construction company succeeds to get the official permission to destruct the house. So that Martin cannot resist much. The house is then begun to be destructed immediately. However, it is stopped after a few minutes due to the dead body that falls behind the walls. Although the body belongs to Martin's wife, the plot misdirects the viewer to suspect that she is Corinne. This misdirection is also supported by Martin's apology from Adam.

Adam faces Martin in the police station and listens to him for the whole story. Nevertheless, Adam does not trust him. He believes that Martin knows something about Corinne. The viewer is thus pushed to ask if Martin deceived Adam while helping him.

After many misdirections, the plot shows the right path to find Corinne. It is about the clue that Bob hired Christine to dig dirt on Corinne. Adam rushes to face with Bob when Christine indicates to him. Bob instantly accepts that he asked someone to search Corinne.

Bob blames Corinne to steal money from the sports club, where she is an accountant. This scene in the third episode involves a misdirection, along with some other events. It makes the viewer ask if Corinne stole the money to pay Christine because of her blackmail. According to Bob's expression, Doug Tripp proved him

that Corinne planned to blame Bob, even though she stole the money. That is why Bob hired a hacker to dig dirt on Corinne.

Adam then decides to talk to Doug. Doug tries to persuade Adam that who stole the money was not him but Corinne. After that, Adam threatens him to hurt with a gun if he continues lying. Doug thus offers to go to the place where Corinne is and resume the conversation there. He says that Corinne is in Hollingworth. The viewer is familiar with "Hollingworth" because the Pierces found Corinne's phone on a bridge in this town. It is also heard from the conversation between Doug and Adam that Corinne lived in Hollingworth when she was single.

Meanwhile, Doug says in the car the followings: "I die for them, for my family." There are some reasons to be suspicious at this point: Who is them? Who is the family? Is there anything regarding Corinne here? These questions are related to the misdirections about Doug in the previous episodes.

The relevant misdirections begin with the suggestion of Christine to Adam to make DNA tests for the children. It is seen in the second episode that Adam goes to a pharmacy to buy DNA test kits. He buys but decides not to do them. The viewer is thus pushed to ask if the children are not from Adam, but another person. For example, Doug. Doug is shown in all episodes as a suspicious person, who seems caring Adam and Corinne too much.

When Doug and Adam are close enough to the place where Corinne is, the viewer expects to see her in a house. Because there are fewer reasons to think otherwise. But Doug confesses that he stole the money and killed Corinne because she wanted to report him. He also tells Adam that he was the person on the phone. So that the other secrets that Corinne hid from Adam are all about the stolen money and there is nothing regarding the other events processed in the plot. Additionally, why Corinne lied to Adam seems only about the relationship between Adam and Sally Prentice. Corinne wanted to save her marriage through the fake pregnancy. She supposed that it was a blackmail of Doug, but it was not.

5. Conclusion

Binge-watching has always been introduced by Netflix as more freedom in watching experience. It means the viewer using Netflix can choose what she wants to watch without any time restrictions, along with better quality materials. This flexibility corresponds to the so-called autonomy of the viewer and is seen as the opposite of the experience in the linear schedule, which only gives the viewer two options as 'watch' or 'turn off'.

It seems Netflix provides the viewer with more freedom, at first sight. But, considering the motivations and factors behind the binge to take the attention of the viewer and the abuse of suspense to maintain the attention of the viewer, being suspicious seems more sensible at this point. So that I am not sure whether saying that Netflix has taken away the freedom to turn off the television is an exaggerated expression or not. Also let me ask: Are the Netflix programmes worth to spend too much time or to wait for the new seasons for years?

The contents of the Netflix programmes address and process the most basic emotions to take the attention of the viewer. Here, the viewer is mostly ready to be deceived because she wants to feel better. She is thus easily persuaded to watch. However, the content that she begins to watch such as *The Stranger* is not, in fact, as satisfactory as expected.¹³ Though this is an easily noticeable defect, Netflix hides them by using high-quality vocal and visual stimuli.

The viewer is left in the middle of the chaos of scenes when the binge begins. She becomes paralyzed due to various increments of time passing between scenes and episodes, and misdirections in the transitions between the main story and sub-stories. The viewer thus turns into putty in the hands of the plot. The only option to grasp the whole story becomes waiting for the right time and the right path. This mechanism should not be confused with managing the suspense of the viewer in a work of art. While managing suspense depends on puzzles, abusing suspense depends on ambiguities. There is nothing to solve in such an experience. The viewer is only expected to follow the course of events.

What does this mechanism promise us more? An experience without any advertisement? This would be an overly 'optimistic' expectation. Netflix is now one of the successful authorities of industrial culture in 'hidden advertising'. Although Netflix claims that binge-watching is an experience without any

¹³ I do not deny that there are also some good productions which belong to the categories of the *radical popular products* (see Maddison, 1982) and the work of art. That is why I use the word usually in the sentence.

advertisement, it advertises the whole social system, along with many specific consumer commodities.¹⁴ The viewer thus binge-watches advertisements, too. Many viewers see this kind of advertisement as a small price to be happier. But, does Netflix make us happier? Or maybe, we do not know what happiness is and accept 'false happiness' instead of happiness, as Adorno puts.

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¹⁴ For the specific consumer commodities (see Georgetown University, 2018).

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