

Mapping the Extended Frontiers of Escapism: Binge-watching and Hyperdiegetic Exploration

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**Mapping the Extended Frontiers of Escapism:
Binge-watching and Hyperdiegetic Exploration**

Length of film: 19.58

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Video link: <https://vimeo.com/231742345>

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Declaration:

The presenting author will register, attend and present the videography at any time between Wednesday May 30 at 9:00 and June 1 at 17:30.

Short teaser abstract

The videography, seeks to explore the contemporary practice of “binge-watching” and unpack the nature of the escapism that is sought through watching episode after episode of a TV series in one sitting. To get close to this screen-based escapism, a screen-based form of representation, proves more than apt for this. Within consumer research there has hitherto been a distinction between active and passive escapism. In the videography, we complicate firm categorisations of escapism and suggest the boundaries between passive and active forms of escape are more porous than previously imagined. We document how binge-watching TV episodes, for sustained periods of time enables consumers to prolong and extend “the frontiers” of what might have previously been considered passive escapism in ways that involve participation as *more* than an observer.

Extended abstract of the videography

The concept of escapism – or the self-selected separation of oneself from one's immediate reality – through the consumption of media resources, or *texts*, such as television, music, games and movies has long been an important subject of consumer culture studies (Batat & Wohlfeil, 2009; Giddings, 2009).

The videographic research centres not just on a solitary text as a resource for escapism, but is attentive to the complete temporal, spatial and cognitive commitment consumers make to this resource. Specifically, we account for the alchemy of space, narrative involvement, personal time, and imagination captured within “binge-watching” which we define as the marathon-consumption of serialised content from the same TV show for an extended period of time. While previous work has explored the liberatory dividends consumers as escapists can enjoy from short-term engagements with characters and stories in texts through theories such as narrative transportation (Batat & Wohlfeil 2009; Green & Brock 2000), immersion (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010) and parasocial interaction (Giles, 2002), we suggest new concepts are needed to interrogate the wider existential nature and character of escaping through narratives over longer, more sustained periods.

We draw upon the potential of binge watching to extend beyond the frontiers of a “passive” or observational form of escapism, and induct escapists into the more active arena of what Matt Hills (2002) refers to as “hyperdiegesis”, i.e. the potential for playful intervention and ideation with a narrative. In short, we

contend with the ability of consumers to *actively* fill in gaps and secure answers within the TV narrative itself but also within their own life-worlds throughout and around the time spent binge-watching. We classify this state of thinking about and engaging with a text over and beyond the core site of consumption (i.e. beyond the point of actual watching/observation) as the “extended frontiers” of escapism.

Through a micro-ethnographic engagement with consumers’ binge-watching experiences of the Netflix series *House of Cards* (*HoC* here after), our videography problematises invoking clear distinctions between “active” and “passive” categorisations of escapism (see Kokho & Birch, 2014; Kuo *et al.* 2016). In total, our research is guided by the following question: how, under certain conditions, might forms of escapism which are traditionally considered passive exhibit aspects of an active character and what does this ambiguity mean for our understanding of consumers’ use of escapist texts?

The value of videography

The decision to conduct our research using a videographic design rather than more conventional modes of representation was largely galvanized by nascent conversations that center on the belief that videographic work can and must have an explicitly critical orientation (Hietenan & Andéhn, 2017). The graphic nature of film, we felt, provides a suitable canvas to theorise the ambivalence between both the passivity and activity of escapism as it is lived and might otherwise lose its communicative impact in more conventional, textual forms

of representation. Videography makes visible what otherwise might never be seen or remain unsaid (Belk & Kozinets, 2005) and, in our study, allows for the passing of time and the changing of space to be captured as they occur rather than retrospectively summarized in the static, introspective accounts of traditional interview-based work.

In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant (fifteen participants in total) to ascertain their binge-watch motivations, their thoughts on the narrative worlds of *HoC* to date, and to gain an a priori understanding of the role of the binge as a resource and medium for escapism. A number of these interviews were video-recorded and a collaborative approach between the first author and participants was nurtured to produce videographic images of the material settings (Belk & Kozinets, 2005), chiefly consumers' living rooms, kitchens and bedrooms over long periods, sometimes late into the evening, capturing what binge-viewers do in a relatable and accessible way.

Over the course of the videography, we document three areas of interest. First, we found consumers “project” their concerns into the TV shows that they spend so long with. *HoC* becomes something that they can use to figure out their real-life world. Second, we observed the displacement of time passes differently during a sustained binge-watch than to regular life. Finally, our film captures the various ways that consumers try to overcome their anguish when their binge is over.

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