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Netflix and the Downfall of Society

Netflix dot com¹. The quintessential movie-watching, TV show-viewing spot on the internet. It seems, at first glance, the perfect blend of affordable technology and moving picture delight. But is there more to Netflix than just watching TV shows and movies? Is the ease of use perhaps too easy? And what does the “*Suggestions for you” section say about man’s ability to choose for himself? All these questions and more² arise while visiting Netflix dot com.

As an avid TV and movie viewer since before I can remember³, Netflix is like a gift from God. There are countless⁴ numbers of TV shows and movies I can watch whenever I want. Shows like *That 70s Show*, or⁵ *The Office*, or⁶ *Monk*, or⁷ *Breaking Bad*, can be viewed whenever I please. When I used to only watch cable, I was lucky to find any of my favorite TV shows on and even luckier to find one I hadn’t seen. I used to come home after school and tune into FX and watch the couple of *That 70s Show* episodes they had on and then continue to complete my homework. Now, with Netflix, there is no stopping my TV viewing pleasure.⁸ There is always another episode no matter what. Even when I am completely done with a series, I find another series I enjoy watching. While I’m still in the middle of *That 70s Show*, I am just beginning *How I Met Your Mother*⁹ and still need to finish *Monk*. And right there lays the main issue¹⁰ of Netflix: I feel the *need* to watch shows from start to finish. I don’t exactly know what compels me to keep watching. Maybe I just really enjoy the shows I’m watching.¹¹ Or maybe it’s something else entirely.

¹ I am writing this essay with the assumption that most people know what Netflix is. I won’t go in to great detail about the service itself, but I will discuss my personal experiences on the website.

² Like, why are there so many crappy, unwatchable movies and shows? Is there any point of having them here? A quick Wikipedia search shows they (Netflix) has over 100,000 titles to chose from. I don’t know if that’s only instant or both instant and delivery.

³ *Blues Clues* is the first TV show I remember watching back when I was in preschool; *Lion King* was the first movie.

⁴ See foot note 2.

⁵ and

⁶ and

⁷ and

⁸ In fact, sometimes I spend hours I wish not to share here watching episode after episode of my favorite TV shows on Netflix.

⁹ Which, to my dismay, isn’t actually that good of a show. Countless people have recommended it to me but frankly, at its core, it’s just about a complainy 30 something year old bitching about how he can’t find a meaningful relationship. Boo-fucking-hoo. Neil Patrick Harris is pretty much the only reason I watch it.

¹⁰ Or one of the main issues.

¹¹ Which in some cases is true. Try watching just one episode of *Breaking Bad* and you’ll know what I mean.

I'm always one to defend TV, movies, and video games. Whenever someone claims they're all mindless and kill brain cells, I'm there to refute them and argue about their artistic integrity.¹² But there is a point where even the most well thought out shows¹³ start becoming mindless once you watch them in mind numbing succession. I could be perfectly content sitting in front of my computer all day watching Netflix while merging into my desk chair.¹⁴ With Netflix, I find it near impossible to stop watching. It's gotten to the point where I am seriously considering taking a break from this essay and watching some *How I Met Your Mother*, even though I don't really like that show too much. I might need some Netflix rehab.¹⁵ All of Netflix's best qualities¹⁶ are also its worst. Netflix gives me no reason to stop watching. When I was a mere cable viewer back when dinosaurs roamed the Earth, I had reasons to stop watching. Like, nothing is on, it's an episode I've seen, daytime television, etc. I don't have those reasons anymore. Even taking bathroom or stretch breaks during the commercials are gone: there are no commercials on Netflix. I just sit there. Like some kind of baby sitter who takes his job too literally and confuses chair with baby.

And there lies another problem I found: watching all this TV makes me view life through the perspective of a character. Any situation I find myself in, I connect it to some kind of story telling device¹⁷ like a rising action or climax.¹⁸ I can't just view life as real life with real problems. Any time I'm getting serious, I tell a joke or act funny in some way to lighten the mood.¹⁹ It's like I can't take anything seriously anymore. If you know me, then you know I usually make jokes. I've been that way my whole life.²⁰ But after watching all this TV, I've noticed that even when things get really serious I'm always there to lighten the mood a little.²¹ This isn't necessarily a bad thing (I try not to be mean when I attempt to be funny) but it keeps all my emotions bottled up.²²

¹² What does "artistic integrity" actually mean? Good question. Because in this context I usually just say something like that but I really mean that a lot of thought goes into directing shows and movies. There's also a lot of thought in set design and costumes and in the writing. Granted, there are many crap shows and movies but I don't watch those.

¹³ *Breaking Bad*

¹⁴ They would call me Chairtan. It would be a sad life as a chair but being able to swivel a full 360 degrees would be a perk even owls couldn't imagine.

¹⁵ Not even joking here.

¹⁶ Ease of use, large amount of content, symmetrical layouts (well that's not really bad in any way), etc.

¹⁷ Or whatever it's called.

¹⁸ Right now would be the rising action I suppose.

¹⁹ This is done all the time in sitcoms. It will be some serious scene, like Eric Foreman in *That 70s Show* being caught smoking marijuana and his dad making it funny by saying something like "I'll shove my foot up your ass, dumbass."

²⁰ Whether they're funny or not is a whole different issue.

²¹ I'm blanking on an example right now from my own life but it's like that episode of *30 Rock* where writer Liz Lemon gets into an argument with her boss Jack Donaghy about how she always uses humor to deflect and hide real emotions.

²² This makes me sad ☹. See? Right there. That was an attempt at an ironic joke showing how my lack of emotions make me sad.

I asked the question at the start of this essay about the suggestions section of Netflix.²³ Netflix is divided into intricate sections of all sorts of categories. You've got anything from "romantic independent comedies" to "mind-bending sci-fi thrillers." It is very easy to find something you'll like watching. I tend to watch a lot of TV shows so I stick to the categories of TV shows like "TV action and adventure" and "TV comedies." Netflix is incredibly well designed and easy to find what is right for you. So why in Tim Berners-Lee's²⁴ name is there a suggestions section? Were they²⁵ thinking "Hey, in case our incredibly streamlined, easy to use graphical user interface is too hard to use, we've got the suggestions section so you'll never have to think for yourself again!"²⁶ This just furthers my transformation into a chair hybrid.²⁷ At some point I'm not even going to need to use the mouse, Netflix will just know what I want to watch.²⁸

This brings me to my main point, I guess. Netflix does what it does too well. It doesn't just have amazing programs to offer, it has all of their episodes. It doesn't stop there: there are no commercials to interrupt your viewing pleasure.²⁹ The sections aren't just divided into easy-to-browse categories, they're also divided into suggestions and "like *That 70s Show*." Netflix is a perfect example of a utopia dystopia clash.³⁰ Netflix is turning our society in to mush. There's going to be an army of swiveling chair people³¹ like the movie *WALL-E*.³² Will I stop using Netflix knowing that it could be responsible for destroying society? Absolutely not. I love TV. I love movies.³³ If I'm going to die,³⁴ it might as well be doing something I love. But I probably won't die; I'll probably just continue to procrastinate on my assignments and kick back and relax while eating wasabi seaweed from Trader Joes.³⁵ Well, I've got some shows to watch. See you next week.³⁶

²³ Netflix is also hindering my ability to create sequiturs between paragraphs. I'm stuck with good ol' fashioned non sequiturs.

²⁴ Another joke. He's the inventor of the World Wide Web. Another quick Wikipedia search gave me this.

²⁵ Netflix programmers and what not.

²⁶ Granted, this is clearly an exaggeration.

²⁷ TV show idea: man can transform into a chair at will and his name is Chairtan. Genius. Another crappy joke to make this essay less serious.

²⁸ One step further: Netflix will come with robots designed to change the diaper I'll inevitable be wearing since I'll be too lazy to use the bathroom.

²⁹ Although, there is still product placement which is arguably more effective than commercials. Eric Foreman eating a Twinkie made me want one more than any shitty commercial. So, in a sense, the lack of commercials and product placement is actually brainwashing viewers. This reminds me of the book feed.

³⁰ Or the old too much of a good thing mentality.

³¹ Led by Chairtan. (note to self, add army of chair people to TV show pilot. Title: Chairtan and Friends.)

³² Which, by the way, is not available instantly but can be delivered in the mail.

³³ I also love a good deal. 8 bucks a month is crazy. Probably too crazy: Netflix is going to have to raise their prices if they want to make money.

³⁴ Or at the very least merge with my chair. Yet another joke. Way to kill the resolution of the essay. Crap.

³⁵ See? Now don't you want wasabi seaweed?

³⁶ Or next minute if you're reading me on Netflix.