

# An Evaluation on Forms of Movie Watching and Interactive Cinema in Digital Age: Bandersnatch Movie

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## Abstract

Cinema is one of the stories telling tools. As Lumière brothers invented the motion capturing camera called "cinematograph", cinema created a unique language. This language, called as cinematography, has evolved along with the production and watching rituals of visual stories. The audience watching movie in exchange for money is one of the main phenomena of this ritual. This situation also created the economy of motion picture production. The production companies were born and cinema became an industry. As a result of distribution and marketing systems and cinema halls becoming widespread, it has established a terrestrial watching network. While the terrestrial watching network is keeping its presence, along with the technological developments and new media, digital watching networks have also emerged. Digital networks influenced the narrative of cinema. With the introduction of the algorithmic language in the digital environment, the watching experiences have also changed. The audience has transformed from a passive position into an active position. The cinema industry is now in this process and faces a new audience profile. Digital network platforms are now a production company. There are films only produced for these platforms. The global circulation of the film takes place through these networks. Television, cinema and computer meet on this global roaming network and on digital platforms. So, after interactive television, interactive cinema has also entered our lives. The most typical example of this is the Bandersnatch movie aired in Netflix. The film presents a watching experience where the audience can manipulate the story just like a computer game and can change the flow of events. This is a new situation. The subject of this notice is the interactive cinema concept through the Bandersnatch film in which the audience plays an active role. In this study, the forms of manipulation of the audience and its effects on storytelling and plot will be examined.

Keywords: Cinematography, Terrestrial Network, Digital Networking, Netflix, Interactive Cinema, Bandersnatch.

## Introduction

History of stories is as old as the history of humanity. It is nourished by signs and myth and shaped by filtering from the mind of humankind. In this context, storytelling is humankind's way of understanding, interpreting and reading life. It is examining, interpreting events and transmitting reality by reproducing it within the historical context.

Storytelling started with cave pictures has proceeded with myths. Sign systems and myths have taken new shapes by feeding on religion and art until today. Carl Gustav Jung's notion of collective unconsciousness affected myths in becoming immortalized and handing down from generation to generation through new stories. Collective unconsciousness consists of images called reality and archetype, which correspond to typical events and phenomenon shared by all humanity. Universal signs that are as old as the history of humanity and have come through myths until today appear in modern narratives (Arslantepe, 2008:241). Functions creating the power of myths are also functions of modern narratives. Accordingly, myths have functions as telling, entertaining, explaining, effectiveness, and

providing validity (Alçora, 2015:48-49). Telling characteristics of stories are fed from these functions. They come together with individuals and masses in the environment determined by technology.

Humans are in every stage of the narration process. They are the creator, narrator, and consumer of the story. They exist as characters of narration within the story. Production and consumption process of the stories are shaped according to the characteristics of the tool, which is used for storytelling. Setting to which story is transmitted also state the type of consumption. At this point, technology, trading and market conditions get involved. Stories have a new appearance with technology's decisiveness. Reproducing unique work of art with the opportunities of technology determine the relationship of mass with art and type of consumption. Reproduction technique pulls the reproduced thing off the area of tradition. Reproducing the reproduced carries the mass existence of it instead of its one-off life (Benjamin, 2012:55). By reproducing work of art, it comes together with the masses everywhere and in every environment.

Cinema is also a storytelling tool. It benefited from all the previous storytelling tools and created a unique narrative structure. Cinema having an empirical appearance in its first years has become an industry having a global impact and circulation power. Cinema, with its popularity, mass interest, and artistic characteristics, continues its existence within this new relationship with communication tools and media emerged after itself. Television and the internet have also become relatively new communication media in which technical and narrative characteristics of cinema are used and adapted. Developments in the communication technology and opportunities brought by digital era affect storytelling in cinema in terms of producing and consumption forms. This effect also transformed the forms of audience's participation in the story. Interactive cinema, like interactive television, also carries the audience into a different dimension and position during the watching process. Now, cinema movies are available on digital platforms and the internet. Digital platforms have established a relationship with the cinema industry today and turned into production companies within the commercial competition environment.

The present study examined this new appearance of cinema in terms of storytelling and particularly, its forms of watching. This study aimed to evaluate and set forth the interaction forms of cinema, under the effect of new communication technologies, during storytelling and consumption of the story within the historical process. *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* movie broadcasting on Netflix, a platform for watching tv series and cinema on the internet, was examined in this study in terms of the audience's participation in the story and intervention to the storyline in cinema. A literature review was conducted in terms of the history of cinema regarding forms of storytelling in cinema and the audience's experiences of movie watching. Innovations brought by digital platforms on the internet to watching experiences were researched, and interactive cinema was discussed within the frame of these innovations. *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* movie broadcasting on Netflix and the subject of the study was analyzed in terms of forms of watching within the frame of interaction phenomenon. The study was technically limited with interactive forms and audience's experiences of interactive watching. For this reason, the following elements were out of the scope of the study: economic structure of cinema, new forms of operation of the cinema industry and content analysis of cinema text during the digital era. Character analysis, inter-characters relationships, inter-textual reading, and lexical structures in the story were not evaluated since they were also out of scope.

## **Cinema as a Tool of Storytelling and Types of Watching**

Stories present us the appearances of our lives. Images filtered from the mind of the narrator are shaped in the world of the people consuming the story. The mental set makes images apparent. John Berger expressed the functioning of the mental set through star cluster metaphor: "Those who first invented and then named the constellations were storytellers. Tracing an imaginary line between a cluster of stars gave them an image and an identity. The stars threaded on that line were like events threaded on a narrative" (Berger, 2012:15). While humans create and perceive a story, they fill in the blanks between images that created the story with an imaginary line illustrated by Berger. The narrative is formed with this functioning form of a mental set. Creation of narrative is a continuous and active process reproducing the reality.

Language of cinema is also similar to the functioning of the mental set. Consecutive film frames that are behind one another constitute a narrative. Fictional structure revealing the narrative of cinema plays with setting and presents a new play by feeding on instruction techniques of previous arts. One of the fundamental elements of transforming cinema into art is a montage. Montage, in the simplest terms, is putting the shots in order by arranging according to certain techniques and cinematic time to produce

specific content. This arranging is a semantic reproduction process (Toprak, 2013:14). Stanley Kubrick stated that every step taken during the production process aimed to montage the relevant movie. William Dieterle, a German film director, defines montage as directing the audience to see some specific things in addition to linking one plan to another (Küçükerođan, 2014:27). Krzysztof Kieslowski, a Polish director, states that the soul of the movie finds meaning in the cutting room. In this respect, montage creating the cinematic language has two areas of usage. The first one is a dialectic process in which a third content that is found from two contents of the two shots. The second one is bringing an array of shots together to transform information in a short time. (Monaco, 2001:208). This two-usage area of montage paves the way for the formation of two traditions that have come until today in the cinema in which images of reality are recorded and reproduced. Movies of Lumiere brother and Georges Melies are the first examples of these two traditions described as documentary and fiction (Armes, 2011:18). Cinema has become one of the most effective storytelling tools by involving many types through these two traditions in its early years.

Cinema is an experimental field improving on saving and presenting motion video (Güvemli, 1960:7-17). First cinema screening was made by Lumiere brothers at Grand Cafe De Paris in Paris in 1895 as a result of the consecutive and complementary inventions. Lumiere brothers 'movie screening done at public and with a device they called cinematograph is the beginning of the cinema. However, there were also individual screenings before this public screening. Kinetoscope named by Edison had the height of 120 cm, was operated with coin and based on a watching motion pictures of the person looking through the visor. The interest in this watching experience caused the production of many kinetoscopes and revealing of kinetoscope halls.



**Picture-1: Kinetoscope (URL-1: Google)**



**Picture-2: Kinetoscope hall (URL-2: Google)**

First kinetoscope hall opened in Broadway on April 14, 1894 (Armes, 2011: 101). Kinetoscope halls designed like game arcade were places where people inserted coins to devices like tokens and watched short stories. Since this watching place made lots of money, Edison did not think or want to screen the movies (Güvemli, 1960:7). Edison's kinetoscope was not suitable for reflecting the reality since the kinematograph camera was heavy and bulky. For this reason, Edison's short movies were shot at the studio and foreshadowed the system of Hollywood (Armes, 2011:102).

Individualistic movie watching experience on Kinetoscope turned into a public watching experience after Lumiere brothers screened the image of the cinematograph. At first, screenings were presented at places such as a cafe, fair, cathedral. Later, they were transmitted to special halls made for these screenings. Several movies were shot within this process and cinema turned into an industry. Movie production company established by Charles Pathe in 1900 was the first step of this industrialization. Industrialization shaped with its production and distribution organization gained speed with the opening of cinema halls (Betton, 1993:7). First cinema hall Omnia Pathe was opened in Paris in 1906. Steps were taken in Europe by Pathe who said that he could not discover the cinema, but industrialized it (Teksoy, 2009:42), paved the way for Hollywood movie industry in the United States of America. Cinema created its own industry presents the story within a ritual peculiar to the cinema. The magical world of cinema reveals within this ritual. Classical storytelling of fictional cinema provides the audience taking place in another reality. Magic of cinema pulls the audience in, make them forget reality and transmit them into another reality level during screen time. Watching experience of cinema has such atmosphere creating this effect. The audience goes to the cinema hall with this awareness. Gong

rings, screen starts, lights turn off and the story begins. The audience watches the story with the people in that society but also isolates themselves from them in a dark place. The audience lives a world apart from reality, is transmitted into another level of reality. The audience is within the world created in the movie and watch events and people without interfering the story flow. This reality reproduced by cinema makes them forget their own reality. Cinema's effect that pulls people toward itself and pulls them from their reality functions like otoscopy illusion defined in psychology as encountering of people with their similar ones ([www.psikiyatronline.com](http://www.psikiyatronline.com)). The audience watches the very image of life on the screen and is passive in this watching experience of cinema.

There are also trends that criticize the narration positioning the audience in a passive watching and that is in search of a new cinema. These new narrations present stories stopping the reality perception and make the audience feel the different and narrative reality created by the cinema. Jean Luc Godard's cinema is the most explicit example of this. These new narrations including Brecht's alienation effect have a technique that prevents the audience from getting lost in the story and turns the audience into a critical observer. Phenomenon aimed to be understood turns into surprising and unexpected from the familiar and known. Therefore, the audience understands that the thing on screen or scene is a play and they critically think about things explained in the story (Brecht, 1990: 216-217). Godard in the movie, *Pierrot Le Fou*, he shot in 1965 cut the objective with scissors and both made a reference to cinematic narration and showed the audience that it was a movie by interacting the characters with them. Godard changing the view of the cinema in 1960 and showing that there was another cinema apart from classical narration revealed what could be done by editing the images and voices. He proved that the audience might not be annoyed from open-ended finales and watch these by interpreting them within their mental narration process (Armes, 2011:249). Godard's narrations aim to suspend the audience from passivity. Position of the audience toward the narration on screen and their form of watching the movie does allow interfering with the movie and change the flow. Participation of the audience is on a mental level with new narrations started with Godard. The audience is asked not to see the virtual reality on the screen like their own reality, but to question the story and think about it.



Picture-3: *Pierrot La Fou* (1965) – Godard (URL-3: Google)

## Interaction Tests in Cinema and The Effects of Digital Technology

Cinema changed with Godard and went out of the halls with video art and experimental studies at the same time. Museums, showrooms, art galleries are the new screening places of this new art and experimental movies. Video art beginning with the studies of Nam June Paik in 1960s presents another watching experience by moving out of the traditional cinema.

This experimental and artistic studies meeting with the audience through video technology show a change based on the presentation form of the narration in terms of watching experience. Like in Edison's kinoscope, the audience watches the narration, images, and voices in the video as an individualistic experience. They think about the story and interact with the work of art. An effective watching process is experienced. Each study develops with another watching experience particular to the study. This watching experience is related to the unique structure of the work of art. Presentation form and environment are arranged according to the design of the artist. The audience focuses on the narration by wandering around or sitting in the hall. Narration is watched with an effective watching process by thinking and interpreting. Place, time, light and voice status in the environment are parts of



the presentation method of work of art. Video art studies are open to an effective watching experience with the opportunities provided by the creativity of the artist and digital technology.



**Picture-4: Video art- Museum of Modern Art** **Picture-5: Expanded cinema- Doug Aitken**  
(URL-4: Google) (URL-5: Google)

Experimental screening formats of the movie emerged with video art are accepted as a sample of expanded cinema. Gene Youngblood mentions that expanded cinema provides the audience's participation in cinema. To him, the audience wanders around image, voice and spatial structures and becomes a part of a creative mutual interaction ([www.artfulliving.com.tr](http://www.artfulliving.com.tr)). Movie's environment presented through video is a new situation in terms of positioning subject and object in the watching experience (Jameson, 1994: 117). Thus, limits of cinema are pushed, one-way relationship between audience and screen is refused and multimedia performance is experienced with different presentation forms of video. An art gallery or public sphere expands the physical space. When a movie is shot in these kinds of spaces, the narration of the story may become integrated with physical space narration. In some way, it integrates its story into the movie.

This interaction form in the expanded cinema created new tests such as Punchdrunk theatre where the real-life experiences were sustained in performing arts, as well.



**Picture-6: Secret Cinema**  
(URL-6: Google)

**Picture-7: Punchdrunk Theatre**  
(URL-7: Google)

The audience determines narration themselves by putting masks on and crossing from a room to another (Higgin,2017). Initiatives such as Secret Cinema include the audience into the story and create a new kind of interaction form by providing an atmosphere in which the audience takes place. The audience turns into a character with the costumes in the story of the movie. They experience the story as in theater stage or movie set by being part of it.

There are also books that readers create their own story by changing the story flow. For example, Choose Your Own Adventure book by Edward Packard presents two or more options for the reader. Readers continue to reading by picking one of the options such as "if you want women to enter her neighbor's home, go to page 10" or "if you do not want women to enter her neighbor's home, go to page 12". These books have different endings (Sezen, 2005:92).

The first example of the interactive cinema in which audience interfere with the story telling is Kinautomat system developed by Radúz Činečera. The audience vote one of the two options by pressing the red and green buttons on their seats. Before voting, movie stops in nodal points of the story and attendants in the hall explain the options to the audiences. Then, the option determined by electronic voting is presented from one of the devices working simultaneously (Sezen, 2005:85-86).

These experimental studies aiming efficient and effective participation of the audience to the storytelling are independent and leading movies apart from commercial concerns. Cinema getting out of the hall with experimental studies created a new cinema form out of its own ritual with marketing movies with videotapes and presenting them on the TV.

Digital technology has brought new opportunities to forms of communication and watching experiences in the cinema. The atmosphere of cinematic narration is flourished with digital effects. Cinema is within the competition of commercial existence towards television and in the search of supremacy by developing watching diversity in this competition. Three dimensional (3D) and four-dimensional (4D) projections are cinema's initiatives for increasing its attraction and gaining supremacy in watching. Three-dimensional projection experienced in the 1920s at first is the center of interest with rich effects in certain periods. However, reality feeling experienced by the audience does not change their position towards narration. This reality feeling and passive watching have also experienced in specially designed watching places. Reality creation experiences such as mobile seats, scent, smoke, wind and lightning effect are conducted in these specially designed halls. This collective watching experience including three-dimensional reality perception was created as a personal watching experience with Sensorama cinema movie projector and Sensorama 3D cinema movie camera in 1962. As in Edison's kinetoscope, individual watch three-dimensional movie supported with mobile seat, scent, wind effect and stereo voice in a machine. Sensorama is a pioneering device of virtual reality and augmented reality applications ([www.mortonheilig.com](http://www.mortonheilig.com)).



**Picture-8: Sensorama machine**  
(URL-8:Google)



**Picture-9: Semsorama 3D camera**  
(URL-9:Google)

People experience a reality with voice, image and touching sensation in virtual reality applications regarding science fiction cinema. Virtual reality applications present an interactive watching in the environments related to various fields particularly the field of the game with a joystick or remote control.



**Picture-10 VR applications**  
(URL-10 Google)



**Picture-11 VR watching experience**  
(URL-11 Google)

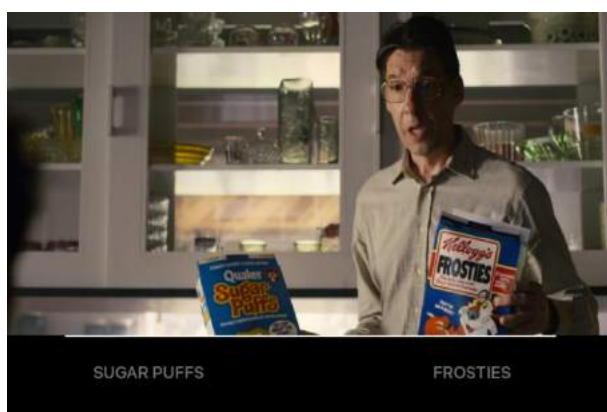
Digital technologies, developments in the world of internet and informatics bring innovation to the forms of television or cinema movie projection and watching. The notion of interactive television shaped with Internet Protocol television (IPTV), WEB TV (Internet Television) and other digital platforms change the forms of television watching. Now, the audience does not have to comply with the broadcast streaming. They can watch the program or movie they want whenever they want. TV audience has the opportunity to stop, take back, save the programs including live broadcasts (Kandemir, 2013:29). Digital platforms such as IPTV and OTT (Over the Top Tv) can carry the movie and series watching experience of the audience to an interaction form in which they can choose their own story. OTT technology is a technology used by digital movie projection platforms as well. OTT is transmitting the tv and video contents through devices that can connect to the internet on the web (Taşkın, 2017). One of the digital platforms using OTT technology is Netflix. Netflix is a new movie-watching platform including all watching experiences related to cinema, video-DVD, television and visual expressions on the computer. Netflix transforming into a production company and producing its own movies has become one of the most important actors of the cinema sector with its new watching forms. The first example of interaction movie of Netflix is the movie Black Mirror: Bandersnatch. Black Mirror: Bandersnatch includes a production and watching experience that the audience participates in the development of the story.

### **Black Mirror: Bandersnatch movie and Interactive Cinema**

Black Mirror is a science fiction movie broadcasting on Netflix. The fifth season of the production faced the audience with a cinema movie. The movie was uploaded on Netflix with the name of Black Mirror: Bandersnatch on December 28, 2018. The movie duration was explained as 90 minutes.

Black Mirror: Bandersnatch tells the story of a young person named Stefan Butler aiming to turn a book with the same name from the series of “choose your own story” into a computer game. The movie directed by David Slade has a flow making the audience to choose their own story like the book. With this characteristic, it may also be an example of algorithmic cinema in terms of scenario and production process. In line with the options presented to the audience, the scenario was written and shot according to different story flows. In the credits, the movie was asked to be watched as below: “Change your mind. Change your life. Choose wisely. You are not in control.” These words invite the audience into an interactive watching experience even at the beginning of the movie.

Two options were presented to the audience on decision moments throughout the movie. The audience makes a choice using their mouse or keyboards between two options in certain parts of the movie. The audience determines and directs the decision and behaviors of Stefan Butler, the main character of the movie and storyline. When the audience does not make a choice, the system chooses on its own and the movie continues. The audience changes the direction of the story when they make a choice. There are 5 different endings in the movie. If the audience wants to see all of these endings, they can turn to decision moments in the story and go to different endings. In this way, the movie duration can lengthen to 5 hours 12 minutes.



**Picture-12: Cereal option**  
(URL-12: Google)



**Picture-13: Doctor-Colin option**  
(URL-13: Netflix)

There are numerous moments in which the audience choose one of two options in the decision moments of the main character, Stefan Butler. Some of the choices done by audience include trivia

choices that do not affect the story flow. For example, cereal choice in picture 12 is that kind of option. These choices reinforce the feeling of changing the story flow with the choices of the audience. The choice between visiting Dr. Haynes and watching Colin in picture 13 is one of the options that change the direction of the movie. Story fictionalized on creating computer game wants the audience to take continuous decisions like Stefan. A certain part of these choices comprises of dead ends that turn the story into decision moment again. When the audience encounter with a dead-end, they turn to decision moment and continue to story by choosing the other option.

Black Mirror: Bandersnatch has different endings that reached by several choices directing the decisions of a movie hero. However, the audience cannot rewrite the movie with their choices. They make choices from an algorithmic flow presented to them. They turn into a watching subject moving on prewritten endings with their choices. Audience act in a story universe with options created by the movie production team. They cross from one room to another, watch different versions of the story as in Punchdrunk theater. This watching experience resembles kinoautomat system in terms of interaction form. Interaction is formed with the choices of the audience. There are movies such as *The Butterfly Effect* (2004) and *I Am Legend* (2007) that presents alternative endings to the audience in the cinema. However, the audience does not interfere with story flow in these movies. The audience watches the movie with alternative endings within the normal time of the movie. The main difference between Black Mirror: Bandersnatch and these movies is the interactive watching experience.

Black Mirror: Bandersnatch has a narration including the Brecht's alienation effect. Interactive watching experience prevents the audience from being lost in the story of the movie and passing into another reality level. Audience consumes the story by interfering it and with the awareness of its being just a movie like in Godard movies.

## Conclusion

Watching experience of cinema also changes in this digital era. Future of cinema is open to new experiences. In this sense Black Mirror: Bandersnatch is one of the most typical examples of interactive cinema. Black Mirror: Bandersnatch has a distinct characteristic in terms of its algorithmic fiction, it's being shot based on this fiction, projection environment, interactive watching experience and passing between reality layers. This characteristic gives an appearance including signs peculiar to the future of cinema.

Cinema movies got out of the halls and could be able to watch on different platforms thanks to digital platforms and common use of these platforms on a global scale. There are also movies produced only for digital platforms. These opportunities provided by digital technology will also affect the production and consumption forms of the movies. Scenarios including alternatives and directed with the choices of audience and shooting of these scenarios means more expensive and complex production process.

Black Mirror: Bandersnatch produced with the thought of a production and watching experience similar to the computer games provide a personal watching experience. This is similar to the experience of watching required Edison's kinoscope or sensorama machine which was used in later years. A person determines the options in the story of the movie, and it is watched with the form chosen by that person. A few people may be on the computer, but one person decides and apply the decision. Digital platforms broadcasting with OTT system through the web such as Netflix has made cinema movies watchable in every environment and time through mobile devices. Watching movies everywhere may bring the entertaining function of the cinema to the front. Cinema may turn into a dramatized art with watching type.

Virtual reality and augmented reality applications set into motion by digital technology can create new forms of interactive cinema. Artificial intelligence may also have a say in the future of the cinema and turn into the author of new stories. Movies having various versions changing according to brain signal may be shot as the British scientists in the Nottingham University tried. The question is: Will the audience be able to have the full control of the story in the forms of interactive cinema? Will the scenario be able to be rewritten while the movie continues?

All these development and interactive cinema experiences will carry the question of "who is in control?" placed in the subtext of the movie Black Mirror: Bandersnatch into the future of cinema.



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