

Hume's Hogshead vs Spotify Wrapped. The "Test of Time" in the "Big Flat Now."

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ABSTRACT This paper critically examines David Hume's "Standard of Taste" from the perspective of contemporary cultural consumption. It argues that the epistemic viability of Hume's standard is undermined by the algorithmic and fragmented nature of modern media platforms. Using Rolling Stone's evolving "500 Greatest Songs of All Time" list as a standard of taste, I explore how digital platforms flatten temporal hierarchies, rendering cultural artefacts simultaneously accessible yet contextually devalued in "The Big Flat Now". With the advent of streaming culture where engagement metrics replace traditional gatekeeping and critical consensus as the dominant measure of value, I argue that Hume's standard fails to account for the technological mediation of taste. While Hume's ideal of cultivated, disinterested criticism remains a somewhat valuable aspiration, it is increasingly challenged by the immediacy and ephemerality of digital consumption. Furthermore, in privileging longevity, Hume's standard risks becoming a comforting fantasy that overlooks the aesthetic labour of the present.

1. Tasting According to the Standards of the Dead

"The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living." (Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852).

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David Hume's attempt to "seek a Standard of Taste" stems from a dual recognition of two premises. Taste is subjective yet there appears to be some consensus. In other words, you may not like The Beatles, but the jury is in. Hume's ingenious approach to the seemingly contradictory possibility of objective taste is to find a certain objectivity in the joint "approbation" of qualified reviewers over time. This test of time is the "joint verdict" of "true and virtuous critics."

Despite scepticism regarding aesthetic properties of objects (Hume, 1987, p. 230), Hume is not sceptical about the idea of aesthetic judgements. After all, we generally agree that in matters of art some people are better judges than others and accordingly some works are more critically recognised than others:

The same Homer, who pleased at Athens and Rome two thousand years ago, is still admired at Paris and at London. All the changes of climate, government, religion, and language, have not been able to obscure his glory. Authority or prejudice may give a temporary vogue to a bad poet or orator; but his reputation will never be durable or general. When his compositions are examined by posterity or by foreigners, the enchantment is dissipated, and his faults appear in their true colours. On the contrary, a real genius, the longer his works endure, and the more wide they are spread, the more sincere is the admiration which he meets with. (Hume, 1987, p. 233)

Hume's approach is a reflection on the nature of the standard. For him it is not elegance, coherence, pleasure, utility, or genius per se that are the mark of quality but rather durability in the judgement of qualified critics. Put otherwise, time stands for the wisdom of the informed and ideal crowd. For Hume taste is a delicate organ to be trained and it is only judges with a refined taste developed over time with significant practice that can appreciate the "universal" and moral appeal of quality art. Taste thus is a metaphor for good judgement. The appeal of a standard of taste is that you can confirm or condemn (Hume, 1987, p. 229) your individual taste according to the consensus taste of ideal critics.

Hume consequently details five criteria of the ideal critic: "Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice [...]" (Hume, 1987, p. 241) The standard of taste is in fact a standard of the disinterested ideal critic, for "he must preserve his mind free from all prejudice, and allow nothing to enter into his consideration but the very object which is submitted to his examination." (Hume, 1987, p. 237)

In short, this amounts to a moralising practice of comparative analysis as the training for aesthetic judgement.

Hume's vivid example to illustrate this is his retelling of a story from *Don Quixote*.² In this scene:

Two of [Sancho's] kinsmen were once called to give their opinion of a hogshead, which was supposed to be excellent, being old and of a good vintage. One of them tastes it; considers it; and, after mature reflection, pronounces the wine to be good, were it not for a small taste of leather, which he perceived in it. The other, after using the same precautions, gives also his verdict in favour of the wine; but with the reserve of a taste of iron, which he could easily distinguish. You cannot imagine how much they were both ridiculed for their judgment. But who laughed in the end? On emptying the hogshead, there was found at the bottom an old key with a leathern thong tied to it. (Hume, 1987, p. 235)

Here we can see how Hume makes a distinction between mental (aesthetic judgements) and bodily taste (appeals to features in the object). In the faculty of taste, we appeal to features in the work to make a good / delicate aesthetic judgement. In other words, we appeal to the standards of wine to justify our taste and in this case the tincture of iron and leather are enough to pass negative judgement. Appealing here for Hume in this example is the fact that beyond all the bad critics, in time, we inevitably get to the end of the hogshead and the virtuous critic.

Philosophers and artists alike have been attracted to Hume's "Test of Time" argument. A virtue of Hume's emphasis on time is the liberty it affords art from immediate appraisal. One could not accuse Hume of being myopic insofar as his approach achieves the dual recognition that some art may transcend the worldview it was made under and other work that was once a breath of fresh air might rightly now be rank.

As such, Levinson (2002) appreciates the indicative power that the collective judgment of ideal critics affords. The virtue of the test is foremost as a guide and not doctrine. Or as Levinson memorably puts it: "Ideal critics, in short, are our best "truffle pigs" as regards artistic worth."

² Cervantes 1605/1615 *Don Quixote* part II, chapter 13.

(2002, p. 234) Elsewhere, Savile (1982) while acknowledging the role played by luck in the survival of works, appreciates the potential “convergence” of critical judgements over time.

Likewise, artists are perhaps understandably drawn to longevity as the measure of quality. Take for example Dermot Bolger’s vision for the reception of poetry:

[...] writing a poem is like dropping a pebble down a well, uncertain if you will hear a splash. Maybe in fifty years’ time someone will find a poem written now by a poet on a solitary walk. It won't tell them the statistics of what hit Ireland in 2020. But maybe it will tell them what it felt like to be alive now, because poetry is news that stays news and people don't change. (Bolger, 2020)

Similarly, the late poet Eavan Boland (2014) distinguishes what she calls the durable “vertical” audience across history from the (con)temporary “horizontal” audience enhanced by communication technology. For poetry she privileges the former over the latter. The impossible standard of more hierarchical vertical longevity, however, can be both the arrogant privilege of the survivor and the refuge of the resentful failure.

Avoiding the so-called “McNamara fallacy,” whereby the decision maker relies on the quantitative metrics at the expense of qualitative factors, Hume does not simply say that standards are about raw numbers or how long something has simply lasted but how long it has lasted in the minds of the best critics. A key virtue of Hume’s position thus is the recognition that taste is both subjective and a communal value grounded in a negotiated activity and that collective intelligence that requires a critical distance.

There have, naturally, been many criticisms of this argument. One approach is to focus on the shape of the argument, and another is to focus on the nature of critics and the resulting canon.

A longstanding philosophical debate has concerned the potential regressive circularity of Hume’s idea (see Kivy, 1967, Carroll 1984, Baceski, 2013, Windsor, 2023), i.e., great artworks are those endorsed by refined critics, refined critics are those who endorse great artworks etc. Accordingly, Costelloe (2019) argues that the standard is an impractical abstraction. For the purposes of this paper, I am not interested in this debate.

A second, more recent and powerful criticism has come from the increasing politicising of the critic and their credentials as a reaction to the ossified pale, male and stale canons of art (hooks, 1995) that privileges certain pasts at the expense of the contemporary.³ In other words, who counts as a valid critic? Phillipa K. Chong (2020) points out that works by famous authors are more likely to get reviewed and there is much opacity about key issues such as which texts get selected for review, how critics get selected, how they decide their ratings etc.⁴ There is in short, a politics to criticism itself and it is worth noting that the critical faculty of reason was not a quality that Hume extended to all.⁵ The danger of the standard is that even if new generations get to decide what is in the canon, they may be overwhelmed by the power of the canon and contrive to uncritically schlep the past into the future.

In this paper, informed, in part, by this second objection I am interested in the technological developments of testing taste over time and what this means for Hume's test. Accordingly, I propose a third type of criticism concerning the *epistemic viability* of Hume's standard in the current consumption of popular culture. In short, I argue that the test of time is undermined by the current nature of cultural consumption. I do this by focusing on the pop music charts and one list that purports to stand as a standard as Hume may have envisioned.

Any standard necessarily runs the risk of groupthink. Hence, we can legitimately question the figure of the critic and the canons of art that have developed over time as products of power and not only thoughtful consideration. In short, it is important that the dead remain silent, and their standards go unconsulted. This is even more critical in a cultural domain obsessed with its past (Reynolds, 2011) and at a time when "old music" is increasingly outselling "new music" (Gioia, 2023).

2. Will You Still Love Me In "The Big Flat Now"?

³ Guggelberger (1991), for example, drawing on thinkers like Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Paulo Freire, and Amílcar Cabral explains how the Western literary canon has systematically excluded and marginalized literature from the so-called "Third World."

⁴ Elsewhere, Weinstein (1993), for example, distinguishes between epistemic and performative experts. The same distinction can be critically applied to critics.

⁵ For details on Hume's racism see Garrett and Sebastiani (2017) and Dabhoiwala (2024).

In December 2004, *Rolling Stone* published a list “based on weighted votes from selected musicians, critics, and industry figures” of “The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time.” This is a list that the magazine would revise in 2010, 2021 and 2024. While each edition is necessarily a snapshot in time, as a collection they amount to a Humean ideal of collective assessment over time. In this way the notorious omissions of annual awards⁶ are less likely.

One of the songs to appear on all four editions so far⁷ is The Shirelles’ 1960’s version⁸ of “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” composed by Gerry Goffin (lyrics) and Carole King (music).

Tonight you're mine completely
You give your love so sweetly
Tonight the light of love is in your eyes
But will you love me tomorrow? (The Shirelles, 1960)

When “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” became the first US number one from an all-black female group it was revolutionary in portraying women in pop music as more than mere objects of male desire. The lyrics detail a girl contemplating if the one-night stand might be more than just that, and in so doing it positioned female adolescence as a period replete with romantic and sexual longing.⁹ Like Hume almost two centuries before, the song’s protagonist wonders whether the love she is enjoying now will last the test of time.

The song clearly ‘struck a chord with millions.’ However, does it matter when these millions had their chord struck? For something to have its place in history doesn’t mean it necessarily stands the test of time. It has been noted that “Because [The Shirelles] had their greatest success in that period between 1958 and 1964 which most rock historians treat as having nothing of

⁶ Famous examples include *Citizen Kane* losing to *How Green Was My Valley* at the Academy Awards in 1941 and the overlooking of Lise Meitner for a Nobel Prize in Chemistry or Physics.

⁷ 125th in 2004, 126th in 2010, 151st in 2021, 151st in 2024.

⁸ There are many versions of this apparently timeless standard, from Dusty Springfield (1964) to Kamasi Washington (2018). The songs success would even lead King and Goffin to write a self-explanatory answer song entitled “Not Now Tomorrow, But Always” recorded by Bertell Dache in 1960.

⁹ The song echoes the sentiment of “Tomorrow Night” by Coslow and Grosz (1939): “Tomorrow night, will you remember what you said to night? / Tomorrow night, will all the thrill be gone? / Tomorrow night, will it be just another memory/ Or just another song, that’s in my heart to linger on?” This earlier song would later be covered by Bob Dylan (1993). In contrast, Nick Lowe in “Only a fool breaks his own heart” (2001) offers a mature reflection, informed by painful experience, on the dangers of such longing: “There is no sense in holding on to an old love that is gone”. Crucially however, in the Shirelles version these are black and female “teenage dreams.”

interest in, they're almost ignored despite their huge influence on the musicians who followed them.” (Hickey, 1989) Who knows, with new critical attention (or viral TikTok trend), perhaps they may climb the charts once again.

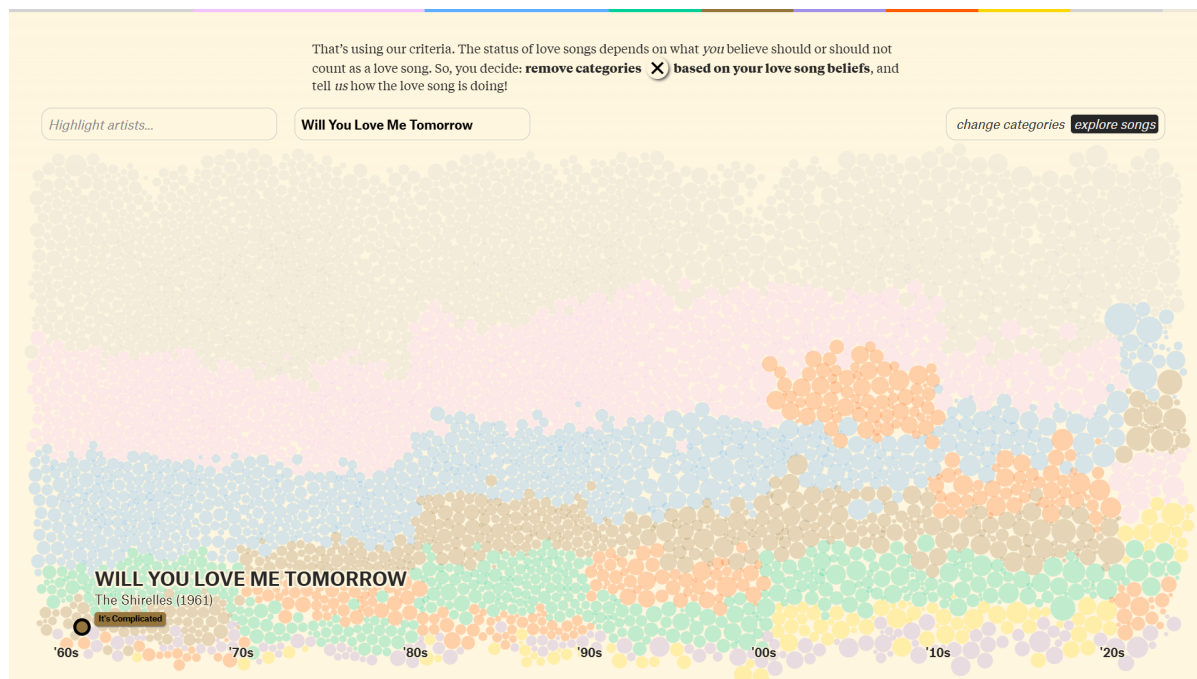


Figure 1, Mora and Jia “Is the love song dying” (Screengrab), 2024.

In Mora and Jia’s recent visual essay we can see the Shirelles in their place in the history of pop love songs, namely as early pioneers of the “It’s complicated” category (Mora and Jia, 2024). Their other categories are serenades, heartache, pursuit, good riddance, sexual confidence, and love song for the self. Here a bubble represents each of the 5,100 Billboard Top 10 hits from 1958 to September 2023. Almost like Wordsworthian “spots of time”, the bigger the bubble, the longer it spent in the Top 10. The reinforcing homogenised impact of streaming since the turn of the century has contributed to bigger and fewer hits. However, not visible in this visualisation is whether streaming platforms foster what Hume calls “temporary vogues” (Hume, 1987, 233) and a greater dissipation of enchantment. That would require a more detailed account of the verticality and horizontality of the “bubbles”.

Where the Shirelles can be seen to echo Hume’s wondering about what will last, Hume’s affirmation of the standards was echoed in a hit song from over a decade later. Stevie Wonder’s “Sir Duke” is somewhat ironically an R&B ode to jazz, albeit with some jazz flourishes (VOX, 2019). Replete with monarchist tendencies and racial potency, this homage is an expression of

pure “unadulterated joy” (Lavezzoli, 2001) that successfully mixes instrumental complexity with embodied accessibility:

Music knows that it is and always will be one of the things that life just won't quit.
But here are some of music's pioneers that time will not allow us to forget:
There's Basie, Miller, Satchmo and the king of all, Sir Duke!
And with a voice like Ella's ringing out there's no way the band could lose!
You can feel it all over! [...] (Wonder, 1976)

While this song went to number one in 1977 it has yet to grace *Rolling Stone's* top 500 list of songs.¹⁰ From the perspective of nearly half a century we can see both the strengths and weaknesses of the argument in Wonder's posthumous tribute to Ellington. The universality of “Sir Duke” and the other jazz pioneers is clearly time dependent, and Wonder chooses to honour them through a fusion of jazz, pop and rock. Respecting with gratitude the past, the trends of Wonder's generation ultimately must be privileged. Furthermore, the mere fact of Wonder's pleading yet upbeat tribute is *prima facie* testament to a certain forgetting of the classics. This nostalgia is compounded when listening to the album's next tracks, “I Wish”, which yearns for an unrecoverable, more innocent youth past and “Pastime Paradise” which criticises regressive escapism that hinders progress (particularly in terms of race relations). But within this verse there is a greater argument about the (post-racial) universality of beat and swing based music that still seems irrefutable.

Post-Hume, and particularly in the 21st century, the digital mediation of cultural artefacts such as songs presents certain challenges to the “test of time”. Put otherwise Wonder's homage could almost be heard as a melancholic premonition of what has come in the 21st century to be understood as the “Big Flat Now.” Cast adrift after the so-called “end of history,” (Fukuyama, 1992) cultural production and consumption is increasingly recognised as not timeless but rather ‘without time’ in the sense of chronological order. In part this is a result of the apparently endless accumulation of recorded texts, images and sounds. Coined by the media platform 032c to describe the temporal flatness of contemporary cultural production and consumption, in the words of Bettridge and Mascatello:

¹⁰ That said Stevie Wonder has been a consistent presence with four entries in each edition. These songs are respectively “Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I'm Yours”, “You Are the Sunshine of My Life”, “Higher Ground” and “Superstition”. The latter was placed as high as 12 in the most recent version.

The Big Flat Now is the infinite space on which our culture operates today. Its frictionless surface is composed of the obsolete hierarchies that have been melted by the Internet. (2018)

In short, all music is here now and it's increasingly distributed on a flat digital platform. The accompanying historical alienation produced by the apparent collapse of traditional cultural hierarchies, genre distinctions and spatial boundaries must surely stand as a challenge to any test of time. A further suspicion here is that when all music is playing simultaneously and everywhere, music today has become little more than a sonic wallpaper. No longer an event, music is an unimportant and ubiquitous soundtrack decoration in the background. They continue, "Film, music, fashion, visual art and the marketing machines that support them have been compressed into a unified slime called "content."" (Bettridge and Mascatello, 2018) In this model, all media is equally accessible and hence decontextualized. This idea is necessarily presented as total for rhetorical effect; in practice it assumes a Eurocentric global uniformity that may not yet match reality¹¹.

Another way of putting this temporal dislocation is to simply say that in an age when people are literally on different social media timelines: we no longer know what is even popular now. In the words of Broderick and Bumas:

Before streaming, you could pull up records' sales data and easily figure out which pop girlie (or guy) had the biggest summer, but things are much more complicated now. There are Billboard charts, Spotify charts, social platforms like Instagram and TikTok, and, somewhere in there, a few people are even still buying albums. What's interesting, though, is how these leaderboards do — and do not — line up. (2024)

Spotify, the premier music subscription platform of our time, for example, presents music shorn not only of critical standards but devoid of historical and material order. In "The Big Flat Now," the traditional gatekeepers have lost full control of the canon or have closed (for example Pitchfork), and their copyright, and archivists are but "legacy media". Today songs are data points, taste is algorithmically curated to be consumed as memes and snippets on social media as viral trends and not traditional release cycles and material formats. Lists like *Rolling Stone's* are increasingly condemned to siloed irrelevance.

¹¹ Recall William Gibson's dictum that: 'The Future Is Already Here – It's Just Not Evenly Distributed' 2003.

Today, instead, the intimate immaterial data of individual charts generated by digital platform capitalism are increasingly privileged, be it through Apps like Strava, Goodreads and Duolingo and most famously through the sharing of one's private Spotify Wrapped on social media to demonstrate one's virtuous taste in a form of evidence-based digital collage humblebragging without selfies.¹² As such, these platforms are changing what it means to consume culture and the standard of success is no longer critical acclaim or popularity but "completion rates."¹³

The test of time is determined by the technological form and its chart manipulation¹⁴ of the art, not only the judgement of experts. The *Rolling Stone* list, and indeed the canon, itself may proceed with an ever-increasing inclusive make up of critics¹⁵ and entries, but the nature of hypermodern cultural consumption through the algorithmic gatekeeping of digital platforms means that it is necessarily bound to decreasing relevance each time.

A slightly cryptic criticism of our misguided enthusiasm for the old in art and the inevitable depreciation facing us all can be read in the line from another song on *Rolling Stone's* list, Bob Dylan's "Visions Of Johanna"¹⁶.

Inside the museum, infinity goes up on trial
Voices echo this is what salvation must be like after a while
But Mona Lisa musta had the highway blues
You can tell by the way she smiles [...] (Dylan, 1966)

¹² See Dean and Sandeman (2024) and Parham (2025). This does not mean that individually non-algorithmically curated lists are dead. See for example Pat Finnerty's (2025) comedic distinction between durable "the fucking songs" and more standard transitory "hits".

¹³ Using extensive user data from Storytel, a Swedish audiobook platform, Berglund (2024) has shown how digital subscription models, and algorithmic personalization have changed the terms of reading. Completion rates, what Berglund calls Average finishing degree (AFD) measures the readers' devotion to the book (pp. 61-62).

¹⁴ For details on the listening and thus chart-manipulating tactics of Spotify see: Pelly 2025 who explains that though an encyclopaedia of music is available, it is not equally visible. This is but the latest stage in long tradition of chart manipulation in arts and cultures lists. *The New York Times* Best Seller list is famously subject to a variety of manipulations. For details of resistance to the algorithmic logic of Spotify see Ng (2024).

¹⁵ The *Rolling Stone's* updated list is revealing in this regard: "Where the 2004 version of the list was dominated by early rock and soul, the [2014] edition contains more hip-hop, modern country, indie rock, Latin pop, reggae, and R&B." (*Rolling Stone*, 2024) In film, an equivalent poll of quality is the *Sight and Sound* list of the top 100 films of all time. It occurs every 10 years, starting in 1952. In 2022 there were 1,639 participating critics, programmers, curators, archivists and academics. Echoing the evolution of *Rolling Stone's* lists, the increasing representation of female and black directors and certain themes on the "poll signals an amazing shift in critical taste." (Mulvey, 2022)

¹⁶ In an interesting contrast to *The Shirelles*, this song placed 404th in 2004, 413th in 2010, 317th in 2021 and 317th in 2024..

Here Dylan has taken the almost unanimously agreed image of beauty and recognised in it a certain road weariness. Maybe too, the Beatles will be outdated. It is too soon to tell. Longevity is for dinosaurs, and we know what happened to them. Instead, it is more productive perhaps to see, like Dylan, that each artwork entails its own horizon. If even “Mona Lisa’s smile” could be eventually dated and worn out, then all bets are off. No doubt this is why Hume is never clear about whether ideal critics would agree or disagree or how much time is enough to determine a standard. For that matter it is equally never particularly clear when time starts. For *Rolling Stone*’s list time starts not with recorded music but in the 1930’s!¹⁷

A troubling feature of digital cultural products in the 21st century is the absence of strong archiving procedures. The physical copy is no longer the locus of consumption and on streaming platforms digital data can easily be deleted. This is routinely happening and denying work the possibility of becoming a so-called “sleepers hit” (Schonfeld, 2024).¹⁸ A high-profile example is Sony’s recent decision to remove the game *Concord* from people’s PlayStation libraries (Cimaglio, 2024). If anything this reality demonstrates further the disconnection between critical judgement and work that lasts. However, this is not a new phenomenon. In one way this is but the most recent incarnation of what Savile called the “pressures of time”, namely “Disturbance by erosion [and...] disturbance by accretion.” (1982, p. 122) For Savile, survival was more meaningful when work resisted these pressures. In the corporate controlled immaterial digital consumption of music (etc.) it is less clear that such a position can be maintained. Old titles exist beside new titles, erosion and accretion are no longer possible, but deletion is!

3. Ending the Comforting Fantasy of the Test of Time

Hume understandably does not consider the institutions of the modern artworld, the great democratisation of knowledge, the commercial preference for the “new,” fluctuating distinctions/hierarchies between the prestige and the popular¹⁹, and the changing technological

¹⁷ The earliest song on any of the lists is Robert Johnson, “Cross Road Blues”, 1937.

¹⁸ See also, Robey (2024). While this may apply in film and TV, the power of social media, however, reveals that this is not the case in music.

¹⁹ The very status of pop music itself has been a focus for such misguided debates. See for example the jumbled mess that is the debate between the popular so-called ‘popism’ and authentic so-called ‘rockism.’

modes of aesthetic experience (from recording to streaming) that would follow. Crucially we can see how these trends in cultural consumption contribute to the very sense of time itself evaporating. Furthermore, the list, insofar as it operates as a live tracker, is a useful example of the limitations of holding that the longer works endure the stronger claim they can have on beauty. Lists are, as we know, self-perpetuating.

Hume's privileging of judgement across time thus overlooks phenomena such as the "Lindy Effect" which holds that the longer a non-perishable item has survived, the longer it's likely to persist into the future or "first-mover advantage" which describes the advantages of the first company or person to act (Sobchuk et al, 2024). Hume's writing also predates the major developments in the recording of still and moving images and sound. Since the development of the recording process, music, for example, lives in a sort of eternal present.

In part, we could somewhat ironically say that Hume's position fails the test of time due to his eighteenth-century assumptions about the nature of art such as the hierarchy of artistic forms. It is telling that his examples are from poetry and novels. These are perhaps the most durable forms to begin with and can be transferred across time in a way that is not fixed to any materiality. If we are to take a more eclectic approach to artistic form, we see that the test of time for music, fashion, food, sculpture, architecture, painting etc. is necessarily bound to the vagaries of historical events and not simply the judgements of critics. No matter how good an ice-cream is, it is at a major disadvantage compared to a poem in terms of its temporal potential and generating a cult following. The first lick is privileged in a way that the first reading is not. This is before we even consider the role of different mediums. For example, comedy tends to suffer from repeated consumption when compared to music.

Returning to Hume's key example of Sancho's kin we can see that it is limited when compared to the practically infinite volume of art available today. While one may complete the works of Shakespeare, like the hogshead of wine, the critic today could never hope to get to the end of Spotify, Netflix or YouTube etc.

Here we may be reminded of the following debunked, though oft repeated, anecdote. In response to Henry Kissinger's question "What do you think of the French Revolution?" Zhou

Enlai, Premier of the People's Republic of China, supposedly replied: "It is too early to tell."²⁰ Similarly, by pushing the ultimate test of taste into the future, Hume's theory rests on a comforting fantasy that all disputes will ultimately be resolved (and in our favour!). There is, in short, a deep epistemological ambiguity in Hume's argument due to the infinite nature of time itself. Hume's test privileges an impossible wisdom of hindsight over what could be called the wisdom of foresight or even the wisdom of insight. As such, works are valued for lasting, not for being prescient or even perceptive and of the moment.

In privileging the past and what will last, we push the question of taste beyond personal preference to an only somewhat reasonable zone of critical consensus over time. Time is a dangerous refuge, a shelter even,²¹ from the taste and aesthetic labour of here and now. Privileging aesthetic longevity means that my own sensory experience is discarded in the name of an imagined objectivity, replete with nostalgia and comforting fantasies of the future. Hume's standard perpetuates a myth of context free history.²²

Perhaps the question is not to follow Gerry Goffin and Carole King "Will you still love me tomorrow?" or Hume's implied "what will stand the test of time" but rather "what tastes good today?"

"The Big Flat Now" as revealed in cultural digital platforms, such as Spotify, challenge the idea that aesthetic value is revealed over time. Instead, today, value is increasingly defined by engagement metrics: streams, completion rates, skip rates and virality. Yes, like Hume's critics, algorithms "learn" from repeated exposure and comparison, but they explicitly optimize for engagement and attention within filtered epistemic bubbles, not aesthetic value grounded in durational standards. In Hume we see that the ideal of reflective, practiced, and impartial critics still stands as a counterweight to the ephemeral, individualised logic of streaming culture. In the face of decontextualised algorithmic taste and viral judgements, the test of time is a reminder that not all value is visible in the moment, and that some pleasures require cultivation and an appreciation for standards, even if any standard is a potential straitjacket.

²⁰ If Zhou made these comments, he was most likely referring to the 1968 student revolution in Paris, rather than the 1789 Revolution. For a detailed discussion of how this apocryphal anecdotal quip is itself a "globalised meme" with oriental overtones see Park (2023).

²¹ See, Gospodinov (2022).

²² There is perhaps much to be said here about a potential test of space/ geography. My suspicion is that Hume's racism is a factor precluding him from proposing such a standard as it may necessitate a greater confrontation with competing standards.

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