

Pop Sociology: An Explanation of Batman v Superman’s “Rotten” 29%
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These have been interesting and confusing weeks for popular culture. Whatever you may think of “Batman v Superman” (BvS) it is hard to argue that it is not a controversial film. Critics, or at least the bulk of these, hold a very negative view of the film to say the least. If box office success and social media metrics are to be trusted, the evidence suggests that fans do not share this opinion, or do not do so at the same extent. Indeed, whilst the Rotten Tomatoes (RT) rating of this film is three points below of “Paul Blart: Mall Cop”, the conversation volume it has generated in social media trumps the likes of “Avengers: Age of Ultron”, “Furious 7” and “Jurassic World”. In response, various “narratives” have circulated explaining this unprecedented “disconnect” between fan and critic reception. Whilst some claim a “critic conspiracy” of different sorts, others account this success to marketing and even “poor taste” in fans.

I have spent the last six years of my life researching matters that are particularly pertinent to the explanation of these developments. I am also a long time fan of both Superman and Batman. As such, I find it impossible not to contribute to the ongoing discussion and provide a point of view that might be useful in explaining what is going on. In what follows, I will try to argue that whilst both explanatory narratives claim things that do not seem to be supported by the evidence, both also proceed under sound intuition. In other words, both camps—the “pro-critic” and the “anti-critic”—are right, to an extent, but also both are wrong. The key to understanding the events of the past week resides in emphasizing on a very uncontroversial (and empirically supported claim). A claim, further, that is at many times ignored in discussions pertaining to matters such as these: and that is that aesthetic values and standards are “subjective” or “contextual”. Which is to say that the way humans understand and “appreciate” matters such as beauty, storytelling, music and art changes from society to society, from culture to culture, from time to time, and ultimately, from person to person. As it will shown, this is not to imply that professional endeavors like film critique, which revolve around the evaluation of material upon established aesthetic standards are futile; indeed there are as many similarities in the way people perceive “beauty” as there are differences, and within a determined group, or culture or society, you will find sets of traits collectively recognized as valid. These however are under constant change. A circumstance, finally that has accelerated dramatically with the advent of social media.

Once all of these matters are taken into account, it is then easier to detangle what are the social, cultural, economic and political forces that drive the practice of film critique. And, again, as it will shown, once these matters are unfolded, it becomes clear how the critical reaction to this film was determined, to an important extent, by the threat that social media presents to the practice of professional film critique, by the impatience of Warner

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Brothers to compete with Disney's Marvel Cinematic Universe, and by the almost aggressively varied reception to Zach Snyder's work depending on audience demographics. I will argue, that under different circumstances, "BvS" would have gotten a higher RT score.

Interestingly, what I have understood as "Batman v Superman's" main theme—namely the rejection of an ultimate Truth—is particularly pertinent to the explanation of the matter at hand. In this regard, and to make things more entertaining, I will begin by explaining my take on this underlying theme and how it is treated in the movie. And then I will use this insight to explain the developments at hand. In short, in what follows I will try to explain Batman v Superman as a movie, and then illustrate how its themes can also be (interestingly) used to explain the cultural developments that have ensued as a result of its release.

Truth and Power

To try to discern the "aesthetic" or the "cinematographic" quality of Batman v Superman is completely missing the point. It has been two weeks since it was "dismissed" as "bad" or, in the language of Rotten Tomatoes, as "rotten" by the great majority of RT's registered critics. At this point time, however, I find it easier to label this movie as anything but dismissible. If the reaction from those who have seen it is to have any consequence in its description, "Batman v Superman" finds itself more adequately located below labels such as moving, offensive, emotional, nihilist, postmodern, capitalist, baroque, boring, exiting, human, fascist, awesome, horrible, thrilling, boring or masterpiece.

Unlike many others I would have a lot trouble trying to be honest, if I claimed that I find "Batman v Superman" to be an intellectually vacuous affair. In fact, I find it to be anything but. "Batman v Superman" is an unapologetically postmodern deconstruction of the characters that most powerfully symbolize the "virtuous" relationship between "Truth" and "Power" in the collective psyche. By pitting Batman against Superman the film illustrates how Truth is also colored. This is, the traditional depiction of Batman and Superman in both comics and other media is that of two individuals who, using different resources and for different reasons, fight (violently if needed) against a clear and crisp "evil" for the sake of a clear and crisp "good". In this traditional portrayal, even though they operate in absolute arbitrariness, their pursuits are never questioned. This is, neither Superman nor Batman require (or presume to require) the assent or approval of anybody else in order to conduct their affairs. Batman pursues his campaign regardless of public sanction, and Superman is simply impossible to contain.

The depiction of these superheroes in BvS is not that dissimilar; Batman is still crusading for a determined understanding of justice (and even perhaps "rule of law") without regard for its publicly sanctioned equivalent. And Superman, on the other hand, is also an agent of "good", with the same intentions, the same motivations, but also with the same powers, and therefore the same irrepressibility. The difference, is that unlike the world in which these heroes are traditionally portrayed, in the world of "BvS" notions like "good",

“truth” and “justice” are not “clear and crisp”, and not unlike our world the exact meaning of these very important values is a matter of debate and contention. In this regard, Superman’s understanding of “justice” is not necessarily equal to Batman’s, or to that of the aggregate opinion of the United States public or, for that matter, to that of the United States Congress. In this regard, in the very way in which the actions of powerful agents in our world are always questioned by some and applauded by others, in “BvS’s” universe the justifications of Batman’s or of Superman’s actions (depending on perspective) may be heroic, virtuous or dangerous.

At the beginning of the film, each of these heroes has a different, but “strict” understanding of virtue (Truth) and power. Although the world challenges (or has challenged) their worldview, they hold to it in such way that it makes it impossible to open-up to the perspective of their counterpart. Not being able to vent their differences (on account of Luthor’s schemes) Batman and Superman gravitate violently towards each other. As a result of their battle, however, they realize that they are not all different, and finally open themselves to the viewpoint of their perceived “adversary”. By doing so, their perspectives change, and they realize that power only ceases to be dangerous when it comes to terms with fragility and the vulnerability of its source. Or in other words, when it stops trying to ground itself in a rigid understanding of Truth. This newfound openness and humility allows for both their worldviews to coexist, to move forward upon the reflection of one another and more importantly it becomes the source of their newfound heroism (and the basis for the possible construction of the Justice League).

“BvS’s” underlying theme, then, could be roughly captured as “postmodern”, or better yet as “constructivist dialectics”. The moral of the story being:

“To hold tight to rigid ideals, or to a rigid understanding of Truth is equal to dismissing the truth of others”.

Aesthetic Truth and Conversational Power

As commented above these themes are particularly pertinent to explain the unprecedented variance of reception of this film by critics *vis a vis* fans or social media. They are because, as I will try to demonstrate, the evidence so far both supports the “pro-critic” and the “anti-critic” narratives that currently circulate the Internet. As I will clearly show, this results because both narratives, as well as any other explanation for this circumstance which I have as of yet encountered, assumes that cinematographic value, quality storytelling, and other related matters such as “aesthetic taste” can be determined or evaluated in “objective” terms. In other words, most of the explanations that are currently circulating the Internet suppose a rather strict or rigid understanding of “aesthetic Truth” or “taste and beauty”; not unlike our heroes’ understanding of truth at the beginning of the film.

So, for example, the average fan went into this movie in full knowledge that it has been ranked by critics below other reviled films such as *Dumb and Dumber To* (29%), *Freddy vs Jason* (41%), *Herbie Fully Reloaded* (41%), *Paul Blart Mall Cop* (33%) and

Transformers Dark of the Moon (56%). At many times, however, the fan's experience of the movie does not correlate to this diagnosis. She may understand many of the points made by critics but their overall assessment simply is not close to her overall experience. She may wonder what it is about this movie that she is not getting. Where is this awfulness? As she scouts the Internet for answers, however, she finds that only about 10% of comments in social media are negative. Rotten Tomatoes audience score, further, reads 71%, IMDB score is 7.4 and Fandango reports 30% repeat viewings. Finally, the movie seems to be doing more than well in the box-office, making \$422.6M globally in its first weekend—the biggest opening weekend for a Superhero movie to date, and the fourth biggest opening movie of any kind—and \$588M on its first week. Ten days after, the general attitude towards the film by mainstream media is negative.

In social media, on the other hand, 57% percent of all comments are positive. Further, the film has made more the \$700M worldwide by this time. Unless critics saw something different that she did, something seems to be “off”. It is no wonder that fans suppose that there is some sort of conspiracy going on. The most common claim being that Disney/Marvel is paying critics off, a highly implausible circumstance to say the least.

Or could it be the case, that critics *did* see something different?

Now, I am certain that at a conversational level, the average film critic will readily acknowledge that she is aware that aesthetic standards are contextually determined or in other words, that she knows “beauty is in the eye of the beholder”. This is, I am sure most film critics are keenly aware that research in disciplines such as history of art, social and cultural anthropology (as well as sociology of culture, sociology of knowledge, etc.) strongly suggest that aesthetic standards and collective understandings of beauty (and/or storytelling) change, sometimes drastically, from place to place, from culture to culture and from time to time. And, thereby, that film critics will also readily acknowledge that any aesthetic experience is as valid as their own, and that, therefore, there is no “objective” manner in which to define “taste”. Denying this, in fact, would not only constitute a dismissal of the bulk of empirical evidence offered by said disciplines, but it would also amount (if followed to its ultimate logical consequence) to affirming that there are ways to judge the art, or the overall aesthetics of a determined culture as “better” or “more beautiful” than that of other cultures.

Nevertheless, if the critics' replies to the accusations and/or their explanations for these developments are to be taken as an indication of the underlying assumptions that guide their professional activity it is not hard to argue that, just like the fans, they are also assuming that aesthetic standards are “objective” or “rigid”. This is, from their statements in the past weeks, it would to be the case that critics also share an “objectivist” as opposed to a “subjectivist” understanding of beauty or aesthetic truth.

For example, the critic (or the “pro-critic”) reply, in general terms, has revolved around the following points. The guiding argument is that there is no dissonance whatsoever between critics and fans. Basically, critics, contend that any movie premised upon a fight between Batman and Superman (pop culture's most recognizable heroes) that benefits

from such gargantuan efforts at marketing would have had a similar reception on the box-office independently of its aesthetic and/or narrative value. In short, critics claim that box-office success is ultimately determined by marketing and popularity and hardly influenced by “quality” (a seemingly constant assumption of the film critique trade). Critics, finally, have also made it clear that it is not their job, nor is it in their interest, to deter fans, or have influence over the box-office. Critics, they explain, are aware of their powerlessness in the film industry and are, therefore, unconcerned with predicting or influencing audience tastes.

The above, however, would make no sense whatsoever, unless critics thought of their work as an “objective” judgment of the “beauty” of film. Specifically, if it is the case that critics agree that aesthetic standards—or otherwise the standards upon which a film is judged as “good” or “bad”, “fresh” or “rotten”—change from time to time and from place to place, *the job of the film critic then consists precisely on both predicting and influencing audience taste.*

To wit, if one acknowledges that taste and beauty are determined by context, then the accumulate cinematographic tastes of a determined audience *is* the context. Films, at least their material components, are not “beautiful” by themselves; not at least, without someone that is able to find them and appreciate them as such. Films, then, are not only coordinated moving pictures. Films rather, like all other cultural produce, are composed by the relationship between material and audience. They do not constitute matter but rather experience. In this regard, *films are identical to their reception.* In short, the aesthetic standards of a determined time and place are identical to the emotional, intellectual (and spiritual?) relationship that a determined group of people have with a determined material.

This relationship, further, is dynamic. Which is to say that it is in constant change. And so every single film and every comment and reaction to it, participates in the “construction” of the collective understanding of “taste and beauty”. If one considers then, that the job and/or purpose of film critique (and of all cultural commentary in general) is to provide expert commentary on film (or other culturally relevant material), once the above is taken into account, it must be acknowledged that film “expertise” is identical to “expertise” on the aesthetic standards of the time, and therefore, identical to “expertise” on film reception, either in “general” or “select” audiences, but either way, “expertise” on film reception nonetheless. *Whether they realize it or not film critics are cultural anthropologists.* Finally, it is only by being able to influence film reception, that one is able to participate in the construction, or the “conversation”, upon which taste and beauty is constructed. Again, if one acknowledges the contextual nature of beauty and taste, the job of the film critic is precisely to predict and influence audience taste.

The above, further, seems to be completely intuitive in practical (or economic) terms. Basically, the livelihood of a determined film critic depends on her having readers, which in turn depends, of course, on her being able to attract enough interest in her reviews and texts. For example, in order for a critic to be registered in Rotten Tomatoes, she must be affiliated with a media outlet of a high national publication rank or with an online

publication that achieves and maintains a minimum of 500,000 unique monthly visitors. Now, in order to attract interest, her reviews (and in general all her output) must have an “effect” on readers. And since her output mostly concerns the “quality” of films—and this, in turn, is determined by the specific tastes of groups or individuals—she most then be able to have an “effect” on the cinematographic appreciation of her readership. In other words, she must be able to make readers feel as they have “taken something” from the digestion of her material. She must be able to make her readers reflect upon their appreciation of cinematographic material and allow them to better understand why it is that they enjoy or appreciate something and why it is that they don’t. She must also be able to help her readers understand the consequences that films will have upon the film industry and, thereby, upon their particular cultural context. In short, she must be able to have a “conversation” with her readers. This cannot be achieved if the critic and her reader are unable to understand each other. Again, film critics are anthropologists: they are experts in the cinematographic culture of their readers, and must maintain this capacity in order to maintain their readership (and thereby their livelihood as critics).

For example, it would inaccurate to label Michael Bay’s Transformers films as “bad” filmmaking in “objective” terms. This is, it would be more precise to contend that the “Transformers” franchise constitutes poor film making in the eyes of most critics *and* their readers. In this sense, either those who thoroughly enjoy watching “Transformers” disagree with their preferred critic when he states something like “[‘Transformers: Dark of the Moon’] is so spectacularly, breathtakingly dumb as to induce stupidity in anyone who watches”, but then agree with him on mostly everything else, or simply “Transformers” fans are not interested in film critique whatsoever. Either way, there seems to be no relationship at all between the experience of someone who enjoys watching this franchise and the descriptions of its aesthetic values (or the lack thereof) by the bulk of film critique. “Transformers” fans, at least in regards to their experience with this particular franchise, are not, in any way whatsoever in “conversation” with critics. And to a lesser extent the same could be said in relation to many other film franchises (i.e. Pirates of the Caribbean, Twilight). If this circumstance would extend to the majority of films released, film critics would then be having a conversation amongst themselves: only film critics would read other film critics.

Pro-Critics” v “Snyder-Fans”

It is easier to suppose that the practice of film critique consists in providing “objective” analysis of cinematographic aesthetics if it is assumed that aesthetics, or in other words, “taste and beauty”, have an “objective” nature. Once the notion of “Aesthetic Truth” is deconstructed (in ways not dissimilar to BvS’s deconstruction of our heroes), it is much easier to understand what it is that drives the practice of “film critique”. Basically, film critics, like any other economic agent, proceed in accordance to actions that will guarantee the continuation (or the betterment) of their livelihood. As explained, their livelihood depends on their capacity to interest readers, which is in turn, dependent on their knowledge of their readers’ understanding of beauty and taste.

In short, once the implications of the (arguably obvious) “subjectivity” of aesthetic taste

are broken down, it is clear to see how film critique is driven by the requirement of critics to have and maintain readership or “audience”, which is in turn determined by the capacity of critics to “understand” the (collective) taste of an audience. The main negative outcomes in this profession then, result from critics losing this capacity of “conversation” with their readership. A circumstance that is identical to losing their capacity to “understand” their audience’s tastes.

What this comes down to, is that a film critic will always act in ways that lead her to be “on top” of the conversation between her and her audience. This is the driving force behind film critique. The hardest professional circumstances of film critique (and all cultural commentary for that matter) result from episodes or periods of cultural change. This is, for critics their job is at its easiest when they can clearly identify the “value” of a determined film according to their audience’s taste. Obviously, things turn difficult when critics find themselves before material that is not as easily assessed. If they are unable to predict a reader’s particular taste in regards to a film, then their explanation of the reasons behind her decision could alleviate matters if it is able to influence taste. There are times, however, when a critic values a film in ways that are completely at odds with the opinion of some of his readers’ and in ways that have no chance of influencing their taste. In fact, there have been various occasions in which the bulk of film critique has completely dismissed films that are wholeheartedly received by their audiences (either historically or at the time). “Blade Runner”, for example, was critically panned back in 1982, and whilst many praised “Apocalypse Now”, it got an overall mixed reception. Other examples include “Fight Club”, “The Shinning” and “Predator”. Films that have been critically revalued to a lesser extend include “Citizen Kane”, “Psycho” and “The Empire Strikes Back”.

The reason why this occurs is fairly simple, and has little to do with anyone’s capacity to evaluate film or any sort of cultural produce for that matter. Film critics and all other cultural commentators are experts indeed, but they are only experts in precedent matters. This is, film critics are only experts on things that have already happened, to wit, films and other cultural produce that have already “made their mark”. Whenever something new arrives at the scene, something that creates and/or produces strong emotional and intellectual responses upon audiences with the use of unprecedented aesthetic resources or unprecedented aesthetic means, film critics and cultural commentators, in regards to their capacity of aesthetic valuation, may find themselves as un-resourceful as any other fan. In fact, because cultural commentators may be on the lookout for specific aesthetic resources, they may tend to be even less adept at identifying new aesthetic trends than fans who only rely on their cognitive-emotional responses and have, therefore, less rigidly defined aesthetic preconceptions. For example, as any professional in the music industry can attest, identifying new currents or locating “what is coming next” is extremely difficult. Powerful musical scenes that might turn out to be full-blown movements are sometimes only identified once they are well underway.

It starts to become evident that in what follows I will contend that such limitations on part of film critics play an important part in understanding the diverse reception that “BvS” has had with critics *vis a vis* social media (and quite possibly between critics and general

audiences). As explained above, once you take into account the subjective nature of taste and beauty it can hardly be argued that fans have a “worse” or a “less valid” appreciation of film than critics. In the case of Michael Bay’s “Transformers” franchise, I sustained that most fans who appreciate these are not, in anyway whatsoever, in conversation with critics, at least not in matters pertaining to these films. If the statistics provided by social media tracking services such as “Fizziology” is to be given any value, evidence suggests that fans of “Batman v Superman” (and of Zach Snyder’s work in general) are very much part of a cultural conversation that involves film critics, and are both confused and concerned with the developments at hand. I commented above that the average fan would only find that 10% of the comments in social media concerning “BvS” are negative. This is in line with quantitative data provided by Fizziology, a social media tracking service, which suggests that conversation on the film is more positive than negative by a considerable margin, specifically, 57% of Fizziology’s accounted mentions are “positive” and 33% “neutral”. According to ListenFirst Media, a data and analytics service, social media conversation concerning “BvS” reached a volume of 1.4M, trumping the likes of “Deadpool” (1M) and “Avengers: Age of Ultron” (981,231). The qualitative aspects of the cited data, further, suggest that most of the conversation in social media revolved around the “disconnect” between the audience’s experience of the film and its aggregate evaluation by film critics.

That a “generational disconnect” is partly to blame for “BvS rotten 29%” is further supported by the variance of “cinemascore” this film received in regards to age groups. To wit, whilst on average “BvS” received a B, audiences under the age of 25 gave the film a B+ and audiences under 18 valued this film with an A-.

Finally, it is interesting to note that if the content of critic reviews (both positive and negative) as well as that of fan comments are to be taken into account, it would seem to the case that both supporters and detractors of this film love and hate it for the exact same reasons. For example, as can be as can be evidenced from a glance at many of the reviews featured in [Metacritic](#), many objections to this film revolve around its seriousness (or humorlessness), its darkness and the “odd” or “off” interpretation of these characters by Zach Snyder. As can be gathered from supportive interventions by both fans and members of the press, these very same characteristics are rendered as an attempt at philosophical and emotional depth that distinguishes this franchise from its Marvel counterpart² and should not be dismissed as flaws.

Finally, on account of the film’s box-office success, the amount of conversation it has prompted and the amount of coverage these developments have received, it would seem difficult to label it as “inconsequential”. *It would seem to be the case that the amount of derision towards the film is at least partly motivated by attributes that its detractors do not find as dismissible as they find offensive or undesirable.* The main motivation to speak ill of the movie then, not being the need to describe its utter triviality, and thereby

² In addition to fan reviews, comments and videos which praise these characteristics (possibly one of the most circulated is “[Bret’s review](#)”), interventions in this line have been resolutely effectuated by [Kyle Smith](#) of the *New York Post*, [Mark Hughes](#) from *Forbes*, [Micheal Calia](#) of the *Wall Street Journal*, [Steve Deace](#) of the *Washington Times*, amongst others.

its incapacity to “make a mark”, but rather the desire to halt any consequence the film could have in pop culture and thereby stopping the film from “making any mark”. If this were the case, it would also reinforce the “disconnection” argument, as it would point out that detractors are not merely ignoring the movie on account of its undesirable characteristics, but rather actively working to deter its reception. As can be evidenced by a simple glance at the sort of stuff that is being published at the moment, almost two weeks after its release authors of all sorts are still trying to make fans understand why this film is so “bad”. If the above is plausible, it would then suggest that detractors of the film hold its characteristics to be more dangerous than dismissible, and therefore possibly able to sway audiences to change their aesthetic standards.

On the other hand, if I accounted “Batman v Superman’s” “rotten 29%” solely to a “disconnect” between critics and fans, I would be forced to turn a blind eye to the fact that BvS dropped 81.6% from Friday to Friday and 69.1% from its opening to its second weekend. These are numbers that offer very strong support to the “pro-critic” narrative, which as I already discussed above claims that the initial box-office success of this film can be attributed to the film’s subject matter (a battle between pop-culture’s most iconic superheroes) in aggregation to WB’s massive marketing efforts. And that, thereby, there is a very important number of the audience that was deeply disappointed by the film.

As promised above, once the full implications of the subjective or the contextual nature of taste and beauty (aesthetics) upon the practice of film critique are accounted for, it is not necessary to turn a blind eye to *any* of the available evidence. In this regard, in what follows I will try to argue for the following:

In regards to “Batman v Superman”, but most importantly, in regards to Zach Snyder’s work as whole, it is not inaccurate to claim that there is a “disconnect” between film critics and fans. This disagreement, however, is not as pronounced as the “pro-Snyder” narrative suggests, nor as inexistent as the “pro-critic” narrative might like. Also, when it comes to “Man of Steel”, “Batman v Superman” and the future of the DC Universe, this “disagreement” takes place as much between fans and other fans, as it does between most fans and most critics. In this regard, there are many members of the audience that have thoroughly enjoyed “Batman v Superman”, and are very much onboard with Snyder’s vision for the DC Extended Universe, and there are many members of the audience that disliked “BvS” and find themselves completely at odds with the current track of the DCEU. As I will explain, on account of two particular circumstances, film critics have found themselves disproportionately biased towards the “anti-Snyder” group.

These circumstances, further, are as follows:

The consequences that social media has had upon the practice of professional or established film critique (as opposed to social or casual film critique).

The impatience of Warner Brother's to launch a cinematic universe able to compete with Disney/Marvel.

To wit, social media has turned professional film critique into a much more difficult endeavor and has also rested considerable power from film critics. The reason behind both of these circumstances is the same: film critics are no longer the only people commenting on cinematographic culture that have access mass media outlets. This results in two problems for established film critics as a class.

On the first instance, culture moves faster. Before social media, the "conversation" between film critics and their readers/audiences took place by means of their reviews, their articles and word of mouth. Today, audiences themselves have the tools to provide film critique, to produce their own material and display it before the world. Culture is changing faster than ever, and being able to keep in touch the changing aesthetics, the different understandings of taste and beauty across generations is harder than ever before.

This leads to the second difficulty experienced by film critique, which is that social media is displacing (or rather reducing) the purpose of film critics as guides to consumption (as opposed to reflection, for example). This is, whilst film critics are still the most capable individuals to provide expert commentary on film, much of their audience is mainly interested in reading them for the sole purpose of informing their consumption choices (i.e. so that they do not waste money at the movies). Because culture is moving so fast, it may very well be the case that consumers find the suggestions of other members of the audience to be much accurate that those of film critics. Most of the power and the influence that critics sway over the film industry derive from their capacity to direct or deter consumers from certain films. In fact, it could be easily argued that one of the main justifications of why film critics publish in outlets that are not specialized in film, is precisely because they provide such advise to audiences mostly composed of people not necessarily interested in elaborate reflection on films. The capacity that social media provides to consumers to inform each other on their consumption choices without the need of intermediates, challenges both the power that critics have to influence film production as well as their space in media directed towards general audiences.

For example, in a very interesting [post](#), Zachary Crockett from Vox, shows that the last decade has been witness to an important increase of blockbuster hits with low Metacritic scores. Crockett affirms that his evidence "proves" that blockbusters are "getting worse", which from the perspective advanced in present text is unwarranted, as this claim would also imply the assumption of "objective" aesthetic standards, an "objective" view of beauty and taste. In the absence of these assumptions—which as already explained are incompatible with research in various disciplines—the data offered by Crockett supports rather the claim that critics have increasingly lost contact with audiences, and as result, have also lost sway over the ultimate outcomes of film industry. In other words, they have lost power in regards to what sorts of movies are made.

On the other hand of these precarious circumstances we find Warner Brother's insistence on developing a cinematographic universe as soon as possible, and the appointment of Zach Snyder at the helm. In this regard, it is safe to say that Snyder has a solid fan base. These fans are the guys who have a high regard of "300" and "Watchmen". If talk about a "disconnect" between critics and the public has any actuality, it does so in regards with this particular segment of the audience. It is precisely these fans, which could be argued to have responded to Snyder's innovative creative resources in unprecedented ways. Or in other words, it is precisely these core fans those who have responded to Snyder's material in ways that are not fully accounted for (or fully acknowledged as valid) by the bulk or the aggregate opinion of film critique. Now, if RT score, box-office, and audience ratings on "300" or "Watchmen" are to be taken as evidence of reception, it is clear that whilst a "disconnect" between audiences and critics is evident, it is not extremely far-reaching. This is, in regards to Snyder's earlier work, the evidence suggests audiences received this material in mostly positive terms, whilst critics' response was mixed for the most part. For example, it is easy to argue that amongst the audience it attracted, Snyder's "300" was very well received indeed. In its time it broke box-office records and maintained a healthy run of 19 weekends. Whilst critical reception was mixed, it does not hold a "rotten" score on RT (it holds a 60%). The same occurs with "Watchmen" (which holds 65%). In regards to this film the distance between the aggregate reception of critics and that of audiences changes dramatically depending on the spectator's familiarity with the source material. If we are to take all of "Watchmen's" audience as our sample, the reception of this material would seem to be almost identical on both sides of the fence: lukewarm. If, on the other, hand we are to take as our sample only those members of "Watchmen's" audience that were already familiar with the graphic novel the distance is much larger. Although I do not have much in way to support this, I can claim without fear of dishonesty that within this particular niche, "Watchmen" is a strong contender for the best comic book film ever.

"Man of Steel" (MoS) is a different animal altogether. Whilst Snyder's previous work (with the exception of Sucker Punch) attracted a particular audience whose base was formed by the fans of specific graphic novels, "Man of Steel" dealt with pop-culture's most iconic superhero. If the analysis of the drive and incentives behind film critique above-performed is to have any plausibility, then this is partly the reason why "MoS" received a lower score in RT than most of Snyder's previous work. This is, as discussed, film critics evaluate material upon the standards determined by a particular context, i.e. their readership. As such, and as "BvS's" reception has proven, film critics are keenly aware that the treatment of "Watchmen's" characters is not as sensitive as the treatment of Superman (or Batman). This is identical to saying that critics are taking into account in their evaluation of "MoS" that the concerned audience (and therefore the people likely to read their review) includes moviegoers of all possible demographics. "Man of Steel's" score in RT is 56%. Taking into account the film box-office performance as well as other (less reliable) measures such as RT audience and IMDB score it is not hard to argue that this film, again, had a better reception amongst audiences than critics. Nevertheless, as on this occasion the audience is composed by much larger segment of the public, many of which found themselves vehemently opposed to Snyder's interpretation of the "Man of Steel" and overall to his particular style of filmmaking. In this regard, it is not far-fetched

to claim again, that the “disconnect” between audience and critics is again evident, but not very pronounced. Fans as a whole seemed to receive this film in very different ways depending on their demographic. In fact, in the case of “MoS” it is more appropriate to talk about a “disconnect” *between* fans, rather than between fans and critics. “MoS” in other words, is divisive. In this case Snyder’s core base and the younger segment of the audience commonly find themselves being supportive of the film, whilst older members of the audience not as much. In other words, it is safe to say that “Man of Steel’s” critical reception is very similar to—and therefore in stronger connection or conversation with—the unsupportive section of the audience.

After Brian Singer’s failed attempt to revive Richard Donner’s “Superman”, however, Warner Brother’s “Man of Steel”, in spite of its divisive fan reception and mixed-to-negative reviews from critics, was the only plausible foundation for the development of a DC franchise focused in characters other than “Batman”. If there was any chance to compete with Marvel’s Cinematic Universe, Warner Brother’s had to proceed on what they had, and as such they appointed Zach Snyder at the helm of one of the three most ambitious projects in the history of film industry (the other two being Star Wars, and the already mentioned Marvel Universe).

Warner Brothers/DC was forced to rely on Snyder’s fan base and on his vision for a DC film universe at the expense of alienating anti-Snyder DC fans and the bulk of film critique. This development, however, constituted an extremely upsetting circumstance for the anti-Snyder camp. Snyder’s style has proven to be capable of having very strong reception, especially in younger fans. And, so, unless critics yielded and changed their (aggregate) stance in regards to Snyder’s work, his appointment at the helm of such an important cinematographic enterprise meant that they would find themselves at the (most possibly) losing side of an important cultural battle. As explained above, unlike their corollaries of the “Transformers” franchise, many DC comics fans are very much engaged in conversation with film critique. This implies two things. The first is that critics still have some sway over these fans—and as such over the films produced to cater them. But it also implies that Snyder’s style is fighting for cultural legitimacy in the very field upon which film critique holds sway. Again, unlike most “Transformers” fans, it is not unusual to find Snyder’s supporters (both critics and fans) arguing for the aesthetic and philosophical value of his work. In this regard, if a Snyder helmed DC Universe gained enough traction, his style could have an important impact upon filmmaking and pop-culture in general.

Even so, anti-Snyder critics could not yield even if they wanted to, as this would alienate them from the anti-Snyder fan camp: the component of their audience that, in particular regard to DC films, is in closest conversation with them.

In full knowledge that they had an uphill battle, WB produced a film that would satisfy Snyder’s core fan base as well as younger audiences (the niche they are relying on to build a new film fan base) and invested every cent they could on marketing to attract as much audience as possible and, if the worst came to worst, drown out the negative reception that might originate from anti-Snyder critics and fans.

Critics, I don't believe, went into "BvS's" screenings with the intention of panning the film. But if we consider, again, that in regards to DC films, critics are closer to the anti-Snyder fan camp, then it is not difficult to assume that they would not give "Batman v Superman" a "pass" unless they felt that the film they were presented could be appreciated by all of their readers, especially those that had been uncomfortable with Snyder's previous work. Upon other circumstances, critics would have probably been much more lenient with the film, as they are probably aware that there are large sections of the fan base, who have a much better relationship with Snyder's material than they do. On account of the amount hype that this film had gathered in the past months, and the uphill battle upon which film critique finds itself, any score above 60% in RT or 60 in Metacritic, would have knocked this film out of the park, and all objections would've had indeed drowned in the resulting frenzy. As such, critics were particularly harsh in their reviews. Possibly as harsh as was allowed by their parameters. This explains the "rotten 29%".

Average moviegoer experience, however, does not correlate with such numbers. And also, the marketing worked. As such, the movie had a great first week, as well as very good reception in social media. In fact, the distance between critical reception and movie experience is precisely one of the things that prompted such a large volume of conversation. Such a low score can also explain why the core group of fans, who most possibly enjoyed "BvS" thoroughly, returned to cinemas as much as they could. Basically, the atmosphere created by the "rotten 29%" makes it feel as Zach Snyder's DCEU is under threat.

On the other hand, many of those that were attracted to the film by marketing were not as receptive as young audiences and core fans. These, in addition to the critics and anti-Snyder camp have made word-of-mouth mixed, or rather conflicted.

In so many words, Batman v Superman's "rotten 29%" and the dissonance of many fans with this aggregate evaluation results because "BvS" sits at the centre of a tug-of-war between two camps for the future of the DC Extended Universe, and the particular circumstances of these developments have pushed the bulk of film critic to disproportionately support the "anti-Snyder" camp.

Bottom Line

Basically, Zach Snyder's work *does* have the capacity to be powerfully received by audiences. It does so, however, in ways perceived as problematic by many others, including the majority of professional film critique. Snyder's style achieves success by relying in ways that are perhaps uncomfortable for older audiences. Snyder's work, in this sense, is more "divisive" than "dismissible". If I was forced to guess, once taking into account the almost aggressively varied reception of Snyder's work and the demographic that finds it appealing, I find myself believing that his material has strong possibilities of being critically reevaluated in the future. Especially once the reasons of why it is appreciated in its most receptive context are better understood.

If I needed to summarize the reason why Snyder's "Batman v Superman" was critically received as such in a single sentence I would state the following: Basically, Warner Brothers, in order to compete with Marvel/Disney has been forced to sell the work of a somewhat "niche" director as mainstream with unprecedented force.

By placing Snyder at the helm of the DCEU, Warner Brothers sided disproportionately with fans that were receptive of "MoS" in detriment of those who were not happy with such direction. Because the aggregate opinion of film critique has, as of yet, fully accepted the reasons behind the appreciation of Snyder's work as culturally valid, they found themselves siding disproportionately with fans that were not receptive of "MoS" and "BvS" in detriment of those are happy with DCEU current avenue.

It remains to be seen, how much the "rotten" 29% will affect BvS's overall earnings, and expectations for future entries in the series, especially those directed by Snyder. WB/DC, however, is in quite a pickle. Because now that Snyder's universe has taken flight many have already committed themselves to ensuring its viability. Members of this camp are very excited with this road and will possible react negatively to any fundamental amendments. Whether we like it or not, Snyder's work has already made its mark and a change of direction towards a less complex, less ambitious and less serious take will possibly find as much, or even more, rejection.

The anti-Snyder camp, however, is not happy and it has proven to be a powerful force. Unless WB/DC finds a way to maintain what has worked, but amend this direction in such a way that those not happy are, at least, not as offended as they were by "BvS", these circumstances will continue to plague further instalments of the DC Extended Universe.

Finally, most of the media is currently treating these circumstances as a "wake up call" for Warner Brothers. Very few, however, are addressing the negative implications these developments have had upon professional film critique. In short, nobody benefits from days of high volume conversation in social media questioning their judgement, especially if said group of people make a living from judging things.

As suggested by the evidence presented in the above referenced blog [post](#), critics find themselves increasingly at odds with the filmmaking behind blockbusters. The stated post, claimed this was evidence that big budget films "were getting worse", a statement I imagine most film critics agree with. I offer another way to see this; one, further, consistent with the bulk of evidence that suggests that taste and beauty is determined by context. From this perspective, film critique is, indeed, losing touch with audiences, and by doing so failing in their job to help the public understand the intricacies of their own cinematographic taste. If film critique as a professional activity is to survive beyond specialist media, it must remember its role as cultural anthropology, and abstain from dismissing audience reaction to film at a particular time and at a particular moment, as "tasteless" in *a priori* terms. It is no wonder most film critics did not understand the underlying themes of "Batman v Superman". In this time and age, it is all to common to

hold to such a “firm” or a “static” version of “Truth” that it becomes almost impossible to consider the validity or the plausibility of the “truth” of others. Many critics wondered why was it the case that Batman found himself at the opposing side of Superman: “They are supposed to be in the same team”. Ironically, critics and fans also share this relationship. Supposedly, there should be no reason why critics and fans find themselves at odds. Ironically, however, it seems to be the case that the answer to both these questions, this is, the reason behind “Batman v Superman” and “critics v fans” is the same:

“To hold tight to rigid ideals, or to a rigid understanding of Truth is equal to dismissing the truth of others”.

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