This dissertation has been submitted in partial fulfilment of the BA (Hons) Film degree awarded by Dublin Business School. I confirm that all work included in this thesis is my own unless indicated otherwise.

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INTRODUCTION

The onset of the new *Justice League* films, beginning with *Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice* in 2016 gives me great pause due to my opinions of their director, Zack Snyder. He is a director that certainly seems to inspire controversy over his adaptations of sacred geek properties and a garish visual style that could be considered off-putting. Yet while others could point to both good and bad attributes, my main reservations stem from the underlying ways that he tells his stories and their effect on audiences.

But why does Snyder’s storytelling matter more than any other director? Because he is one of Hollywood’s most sought-after blockbuster directors when it comes to comic book adaptations. His *300* film had a huge cultural influence at the time and even inspired a successful sequel eight years later. These adaptations are themselves culturally relevant (at least in the geek world) because they are based off of beloved and historically impactful graphic novels like *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*. The upcoming *Justice League* series is Warner Bros’ big franchise to rival *Marvel’s* sprawling shared universe. With dozens of films already in development for the next few years, this franchise will consume and likely define much of Hollywood’s blockbuster output for the next decade, and they will all be overseen by Zack Snyder. Having directed *Man of Steel, Batman V Superman*, and the two-part *Justice League* film, the entire style and modus operandi of the series will have been defined by how he establishes them. These heroes will be based on how he cast them, how he wrote them and how he shot them, just like how Marvel have essentially built off of the basic comedic style of Jon Favreau’s *Iron Man*. All of this gives him an enormous responsibility as, essentially, one of the arbiters of geek-movie culture, which
means that the way he tells his stories matter great deal.

So how does Zack Snyder tell his stories? And what makes his narratives so different and worthy of concern compared to his contemporaries? The purpose of this dissertation is to answer those questions by analysing three of his most notable films: the swords and sandals epic *300* (2007), superhero satire *Watchmen* (2009) and Superman blockbuster *Man of Steel* (2013), and comparing them to the traditional rules of the typical Hollywood narrative.

But what is the typical Hollywood narrative? Such a general wording implies that Hollywood currently follows a repetitive formula that has become so standard, as to render most films the same. Yet there are hundreds of thousands of films with a variety of different plots, styles and ways of telling their stories. So what constitutes ‘typical’ or ‘traditional’? What are the principles or rules that seemingly combine the vast majority of cinema under the banner of Hollywood storytelling? In order to answer these questions, we must look to how Hollywood used to tell their stories by going back to the infancy of the medium, where these principles formed through years of trial and error.

At first, cinema was viewed as a frivolous attraction, statically recording mundane events, physical skits or exotic locations in single, locked-down shots for a few minutes at a time. Pioneers would quickly learn how to develop the medium by using editing to create basic narratives. A static scene of someone walking through a door could be followed by a completely separate scene of them entering the room and suddenly space and time had been sculpted to create a seamless bridge of continuity. Tom Gunning wrote in his seminal work, *The Cinema of*
Attraction, that “the devices of cinema are transformed from playful ‘‘tricks’’ - cinematic attractions – to elements of dramatic expression, entries into the psychology of character and the world of fiction.”

The plots themselves, such as George Melies’ A Trip to the Moon (1902) and Edwin S. Porter’s The Great Train Robbery (1903), were short, linear progressions of fictional events, using identifiable protagonists and goals opposed by villains and obstacles. Tension and conflict escalates into an exciting climax with a happy resolution meant to instil a simple moral code. These basic principles of plotting formed a basis with which to base the film narrative upon, which only became more sophisticated as film lengths grew to feature length.

In David Bordwell’s formative study of the subject, The Classical Hollywood cinema, he listed some of these principles of plotting as “causality, consequence, psychological motivations; the drive toward overcoming obstacles and achieving goals.” He further notes vital elements of plot construction as “planting and payoff, rising action and recurrent motifs” in his follow-up, THE WAY HOLLYWOOD TELLS IT.

By the 1910s, D.W. Griffith further developed and experimented with the prospect of continuity editing in order to tell a story in a more dynamic and effective way. He discovered that if you cut within a scene to get a closer view or a different perspective, you could still maintain spatial continuity and coherence. When we cut from a shot of a screaming woman to a completely different shot of a man breaking down a door, audiences could understand that they were connected as part of a continuous event. Cuts could punctuate a moment or create impact. They could add intensity or display new information. Filmmaking became not just about where to
point the camera but also where to splice different shots together.

As the decades led to a further evolution of editing, audiences required less and less orientation into new scenes. If characters are travelling from one location to the other, the filmmaker no longer needs to have a shot of their journey and can instead immediately cut to the location without confusing the audience as to where or when we are. Space and time in film has become much more of a fluid stream of consciousness while still maintaining logical coherence.

This cemented Hollywood’s mode of streamlined, coherent plotting as the most popular and digestible throughout the world, setting a basic template that became expected by theatre-goers. As Bordwell writes: “The classical tradition has become a default framework for international cinematic expression, a point of departure for nearly every filmmaker.”

Yet not all of cinema has followed this approach. Cinematic history has been as equally defined by Europe and the avant-garde’s struggle with its own mode of storytelling in the face of Hollywood dominance. Experimental cinema favours artistic expression through the juxtaposition of random visuals to form a stream of consciousness and abstract meaning, rather than a logical, cause-and-effect progression of storytelling.

Yet mainstream audiences find these films esoteric and incomprehensible, failing to grasp the deeper meanings and ignoring them in favour of the pleasing nature of Hollywood narrative. While simple, they proved extremely effective amongst audiences because they offered something far more pleasing than thought-provoking ideas: they offered an escape from the
everyday difficulties of their real lives and transported them into a world where anything could happen. *Broken Blossoms* (1919) tells the tale of a Chinese immigrant who develops a romance with a woman who is regularly abused by her father. There is little time for nuance in the story; it is designed to play on our emotions with characters we love and hate and goals we can get behind. The complicated struggles of the real world are not as escapist or exciting as melodramatic situations of life and death; good and evil.

From the beginning, these films and their narratives often favoured spectacle and melodrama, another one of Hollywood’s staples that put them ahead of the world. Directors like Griffith or Cecil B. DeMille spent millions creating massive set-pieces and sets in order to impress audiences with the sheer scale of the (likely very thin) narrative. From Roman chariot races in *Ben-Hur* (1925) to a recreated city of Babylon in *Intolerance* (1916) to armies of cavalry charging across a field in *Birth of a Nation* (1915), this practise of Hollywood cinema has only become more prominent with the age of the blockbusters from the late 70s to today.

In comparison, it would seem that contemporary cinema has evolved far beyond the comparably old-fashioned, stagey, theatrical romanticism of the studio era. They are told with more rapid editing, propulsive story momentum and more sophisticated methods of relaying information. They are likely more overtly stylised and take minor cues from experimental cinema, advancing basic techniques in new ways, like montage, cross-cutting or speed ramping. Many critics cry that the age of the blockbuster heralds the death of cinema. Thomas Schatz said that they became “increasingly reliant on special effects, increasingly ‘fantastic’ (and thus apolitical), and increasingly targeted at younger audiences.” ⁶ Bordwell further states:
“They have become sexier, more profane, and more violent; fart jokes and kung fu are everywhere. The industry has metamorphosed into a corporate behemoth, while new technologies have transformed production and exhibition… over the decades some novel strategies of plot and style have risen to prominence.”

Yet he very importantly adds that “Behind these strategies however, stand principles that are further rooted in the history of studio moviemaking.” While technology advances, cinematic trends change and societal norms evolve over the decades, the basic ‘rules’ of Hollywood storytelling (continuity editing, the 3-act plot structure, protagonists, internal and external obstacles etc.) have remained intact because they have proven the most effective at appeasing audiences. While they differ on the surface, contemporary cinema still appeals to certain base pleasures, indulgences and spectacles. What is so different between the epic scale of Griffith’s *Intolerance* versus Jackson’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy? Audiences fell for the tragic romance in *Gone with the Wind* just like they did with *Titanic*. They can create a dark re-imagining of a children’s fantasy but it will likely use the same storytelling techniques and events of the original; all that changes is the coat of paint.

Often the pulpier works of Hollywood attempt to subvert or reconcile the baser core of their genre by applying a more moral text to the narrative, yet they still retain the pleasurable storytelling devices because they are what work for maintaining audience interests. You can have our action hero attempt to do the right thing, but we are still in the theatre because we want to see him kill the bad guys. Regardless of their evolution of narrative sophistication and even moral
reconciliation, the majority of Hollywood filmmaking has always been designed to, deep down, please and entertain.

So now that we have defined what constitutes a traditional Hollywood narrative, both contemporary and classical, the question now must come back to Zack Snyder and what makes his method of filmmaking particularly unique. He clearly follows the same principles of continuity editing, archetypes, plot construction etc. They look like and feel like traditional films. They tell their stories coherently with heroes and villains, action-packed set-pieces and a progression and escalation of information, tension and emotions. So is it his particular style? While he has a notable visual aesthetic in comparison to other filmmakers, it is not so experimental or ground-breaking as to affect the basic principles of his narratives. The underlying problem is best exemplified by looking at his recurring stylistic elements and analysing his (arguably) signature film, 300.
THE STYLE OF ZACK SNYDER IN 300

As established in the previous chapter, the basic principles of narrative filmmaking have remained the same except for the development of more stylish and dynamic techniques, best summed up by David Bordwell as intensified continuity: “Four strategies of camerawork and editing seem central to the new style: rapid editing, bipolar extremes of lens lengths, reliance on close shots, and wide-ranging camera movements.”

While he focuses on the fact that “Today’s films are on average cut more rapidly than at any other time in U.S. studio filmmaking.”, and that action sequences in particular are “cut so fast (and staged so gracelessly) as to be incomprehensible.”, there are also a number of narrative and technological trends currently in use that are relevant to the discussion. Some of these narrative or stylistic trends include an overuse of Computer Generated special effects in order to recreate almost everything on screen; a shaky-camera aesthetic to make the scene feel more intense and realistic; slow-motion to make us marvel at the displays on screen; big-budget adaptations of geeky source material, particularly superheroes; updating pulpy stories for kids by making them dark and gritty; emphasising city-wide destruction and in-universe lore with exposition; and combining stand-alone films into a shared-universe franchise.

Many of these tropes and techniques are frequently used (or were even discovered) by some of Hollywood’s biggest filmmakers today, like Christopher Nolan, Quentin Tarantino, Peter Jackson, Edgar Wright, Michael Bay and J.J. Abrams. These directors commonly use rapid and even incomprehensible editing and camera movement, a dark or meta approach to pulpy blockbusters or have a love of special effects spectacle. Yet another one of their big
contemporaries, Zack Snyder, uses many of these same narrative tropes and techniques but to a notably different result.

Snyder originally studied paintings at the Heatherly School of Fine Art in England and the Art College of Design in California. He started out in the 90s by working as a director and cinematographer on music videos and commercials for companies like Nike, Budweiser and BMW. He had wanted to adapt Frank Miller’s graphic novel, 300, since 2002 but studios were hesitant about a bloody, R-rated, hyper-stylised fantasy action film based on a comic book, especially when more subdued and traditional swords and sandals epics like Troy and Alexander were already in production. He was given the Dawn of the Dead remake as his first feature film debut and after making that a box-office hit, was given the chance to make his 300 adaptation in 2004. Susan Wloszczyna adds that “The popularity of 300's like-minded, blue-screen-heavy predecessor, Sin City, Robert Rodriguez's 2005 digital noir rendering of another Miller graphic novel, didn't hurt.” After 300 became a pop-culture phenomenon and massive financial success, earning $456 million from a $65 million budget, he had the clout to work on a number of personal projects with Warner Bros, including Watchmen (2009), Sucker Punch (2011) and Man of Steel (2013), and appears to have become their go-to filmmaker for comic-book adaptations.

Snyder’s 300 tells the story of King Leonidas and his army of 300 Spartans warriors bravely laying down their lives against a massive army of Persian invaders, led by god-king Xerxes, in the name of preserving their country’s ideals of Freedom and Democracy. Snyder tells the story in the style of a surreal, gory action spectacle. Part mythological storytelling, swords-and-sandals, B-movie schlock, and heavy metal music video; this film was ground-breaking for
introducing Snyder’s recurring use of CGI backdrops, artful slow-motion and iconic imagery that highlights power and violence.

At first glance, it seems easy to dismiss it as similar to the works of Michael Bay; a harmlessly vapid, testosterone-fuelled blockbuster for 13 year old boys. Filled with gratuitous slow motion, fetishized violence and sexualised women, it represents the epitome of a teenage boy's idea of 'cool'. In a head-to-head comparison, Dave Davis summarises that:

“While they're both determined to deliver colossal big-screen entertainment, their filmmaking sensibilities both align and deviate -- Snyder is technically competent but seems interested in engaging with slightly more mature material, and Bay continues a singular focus on spectacle and shameless exorbitance… Bay consistently and reliably abandons intelligent narrative for mass-market appeal and thunderous showmanship.”

Snyder never indulges in silly distractions or childish humour. He tells his stories with a serious and dignified approach towards character and plotting and is reverential towards the source material he adepts, as he is himself a fan. He tries to fill his films with symbolism and give his narratives more weight than Bay’s flippant bravado.

The tone of his films tends to be very dour and grandiose, almost to the point of po-faced humourlessness. He treats his characters with a kind of grim, operatic reverence that would seem contradictory to the pulpy nature of the subject matter. The inherent silliness and fantastical elements of his stories are not played off with humour, light-heartedness or a sense adventure, as would be the case with other blockbusters like the *Marvel Cinematic Universe* or *Star Wars*. 
Instead, he looks at the exploits of heroes as something brooding, awe-inspiring and legendary, as if straight out of historical myth.

This is reflected by his images, which are both gorgeous and carefully designed for the storytelling and style of his films. In comparison, Bay’s composition is also visually pleasing but in a much more garish and gratuitous way and with less artistic import, bleaching the colours in the same kind of orange hues and filling the screen with objects on a diagonal plane to make it more attractive. Snyder is notorious for making constant use of CGI and slow-motion, yet G.S. Perno believes that “Slow-motion action has become an action-cliché in the last ten or so years, but Snyder’s technique is an evolution. The results are films that often seem to showcase violence as a form of art.”

He is creating these heightened worlds of myth, obscene gore and fantasy monsters straight from a graphic, so the CGI landscape and speed ramping appropriately reflects that. A shot-for-shot adaptation of the graphic novel, Snyder recreates 300 as a heightened, stylised action-spectacle with surreal, impressionistic visuals, deliberately recreating the inky colours of a comic panel. (Fig. 1, p 39)

Along with Snyder’s other films, 300 is immediately recognisable for its hyper-stylised aesthetic and iconic, evocative imagery. He loves to showcase feats of power and code them in a language of classical symbolism and iconography. His stories usually deal with superheroes or historical characters and so he frames them as mighty, larger-than-life sculptures of myth and legend. His movement of characters within the frame further highlights this and stands out from most other filmmakers. Instead of fast-paced or frenetic action scenes, with multiple cuts and intense close-ups, they often looks akin to a music video with shots smoothly ramping down speed to
slow-motion at impactful moments for an incredibly slick, stylish effect. Often they are done in slow, single wide-shots that luxuriate in the moment like a piece of violent artwork, rather than attempting to play up dramatic intensity; physics are airless as Spartans gracefully leap several feet through the air to strike their opponents. (Fig. 2, p 39)

Snyder is trying to make his characters look powerful and awesome rather than in danger.

The famous tracking shot of Leonidas single-handedly battling his way through Persian warriors exemplifies how Snyder loves to luxuriate in displays of masculinity, power and violence in a visually iconic and pleasurable fashion. Leonidas is framed like a bronzed god of Greek Antiquity, towering over the Persians with spear, shield and helmet. The shot of his swift, disciplined fighting style smoothly zooms forward and slows down at certain swings and thrusts to create moments of impact, before quickly ramping up the speed again. Snyder fetishizes his body and movement to the point of homo-eroticism. (Fig. 3, p 40)

So much is filmed on a green-screen that his films blur the boundaries of live-action and animation, similar to Robert Rodriguez’s comic-book adaptation, Sin City (2005). The colours are digitally tinted in de-saturated golds and browns to create an otherworldly appearance, heavily contrasted by the vibrantly-crimson Spartan capes. The entire film seems to take place during a never-ending sunset, in the style of renaissance artwork. (Fig. 4, p 41)

Every image seems designed to stick with you. The demonic wolf with glowing orange eyes, silhouetted against a frosty wilderness (Fig. 5, p 41); the wall of Spartans pushing the Persians off of the cliff as the sun glints on their armour (Fig. 6, p 41); even the most standard shot of
someone’s face during a scene is striking (Fig. 7, p 42). Snyder does not get enough credit for being such an excellent craftsman of images and movement.

All of his cinematography: his framing, blocking and CGI aesthetic, evoke and capture the style of renaissance paintings, propaganda posters and the panels of a graphic novel. (Fig. 8, p 42) This is fitting, as the subject matter of these images typically revolve around mythical or historical figures and symbols of spirituality and power. This, along with his frequent use of slow-motion, is designed to create a heightened style in order to reflect the mythical or comic-book source material. He’s clearly done his homework and understands the style which best reflect these stories and images. Bold Leonidas and his Spartans marching in their gold helms and crimson capes; Superman majestically floating above the ocean against the striking sunset, surveying a gargantuan, bronze machine drilling a hole in the earth in Man of Steel; two superheroes kissing in a desert as a nuclear blast in the background hurtles towards them in Watchmen. (Fig. 9, p 42)

Images typically evoke iconography like the crucifixion, cold-war era America, the Vietnam War or masked ninjas versus Greek warriors of the classical era. The action scenes in another one of his films, Sucker Punch (2011) are based on nothing but iconography, as ninja-clad young women, armed with swords and assault rifles, battle hordes of Nazis, dragons and machine-gun-wielding samurai monsters in medieval castles, bombed-out trenches and futuristic freight trains.

The ultimate effect of these various stylistic elements comes down to stylish, iconic and ‘cool’. This is important in understanding how 300 is written and what makes it appealing to audiences.
Snyder is so adept at creating pleasurable popcorn entertainment because he is making a spectacular power-fantasy.

While most blockbusters are escapist and indulgent to the baser interests of the audience, highlighting eroticism, toilet humour or the thrill of violence, they also require a level of empathy for the characters and drama from their struggles in order for us to be engaged by the film on a level that’s more than superficial. Unlike the traditional Hollywood narrative, the plotting and characterisation within 300 almost never tries to make us care about the Spartan heroes as people. Instead, the film entertains by gratifying the audience’s baser desires to the point of outright pornography, which both masks and exacerbates the troublingly fascist undertones of Miller’s source material.

None of the feelings we are meant to have towards Leonidas and the Spartans heroes is based on empathy; we admire their abilities and wish to vicariously live through them as they continuously overpower the weaker Persians.

Naturally, every blockbuster hero, be they a superhero, spy, cop or space marine is going to be incredibly strong, intelligent or charismatic and we enjoy watching them overcome obstacles and beat the bad guys. But our investment in them is rooted in some kind of empathy for their flaws; their hopes; and their struggles. They are always the underdog or at the very least face extreme difficulty in accomplishing their goal. No matter how cool they are, Bond and Indiana Jones will always face off against a henchman who is bigger than them, or Luke Skywalker against an empire more powerful, or Aragorn a foe more numerous. We empathise because, despite the
skillset that allows them to ultimately save the day, they are always beating the odds by the skin of their teeth, covered in their own blood, sweat and tears. That’s what makes it so exciting and dramatic.

Yet the Spartans almost never face those human emotions that make us relate and empathise. As Leonidas states: ‘‘Spartans never retreat! Never surrender!’’ These are words that are associated with many heroes but the Spartans really show no fear when faced with the prospect of death. They laugh at it. They never show doubt or weakness. Snyder instead prefers for us to admire their honour and valiance, like a hero of old, but those concepts do not appeal to our emotions anymore. We bond with characters because of their flaws and desires to do better. We are supposed to view them as underdogs because they have fewer numbers but they have no difficulty constantly overpowering the Persians. It’s hardly dramatic when the villains keep running away from our heroes in fear.

In fact, the only time that Leonidas is in any danger (apart from the scene where they all die, of course) is when he faces against the giant, where he is the underdog. Suddenly Snyder’s framing and editing lose that stylistically heightened quality. Instead of iconic, weightless slow-motion images of skill, he relies on traditionally fast-paced fight choreography. Their fight uses simple cause and effect shots of the giant swinging and Leonidas desperately blocking; it suddenly feels like a tense and thrilling action movie. It’s startling to feel for Leonidas in this weaker position, as the rest of the film places him in the giant’s role.

Another rare moment of empathy comes when the cripple, Ephialtes is swayed to Xerxes’ side. As he pledges his service, he asks for a uniform, referring to his desperate desire to fight for a
side. A small, subtle character moment like that, where we understand and become invested in their wants, stands out as profoundly moving and is almost never seen anywhere else in the film, despite that this is supposedly the basis of drama.

The Spartans fight for an abstract concept of freedom but have no inner thoughts or feelings of their own. They think of glory and combat with a gleeful insanity that makes charismatic and entertaining to watch but completely inhuman and un-relatable. There is a clear distinction between how we feel about them in response to their clever one-liners (“They’re so badass!”) versus how we feel about Leonidas’ wife being forced to sleep with the corrupt politician (“Oh my god, that poor woman!”). They were frequently criticised as by critics like Roger Ebert as “one-dimensional caricatures who talk like professional wrestlers plugging their next feud” and A.O. Scott remarked that “They also hew to a warrior ethic of valor and freedom that makes them, despite their gleeful appetite for killing, the good guys in this tale.”

What’s so bizarre about Snyder’s attempts to make us merely admire the Spartans is that the plot frequently shows them as behaving like outright villains. In the first battle scene, the Spartans yell “No prisoners!”, “no mercy!” as they slaughter wave after wave of Persians; lines usually reserved for the bloodthirsty villains of a film. When Leonidas’ grief-stricken lieutenant says that he has filled his heart with hate, Leonidas whispers “good”, as if he were recruiting him to the dark side of the force.

Michael Fassbender’s entire behaviour during the scene where he cuts off the messenger’s arm and says that, “we will fight in the shade”, is psychotic and, strangely, told from the perspective of the Persian. We discover the horrific display of the wall of Persian bodies at the same time as
him. He is righteous and at a disadvantage while Fassbender sadistically mocks him. Even Fassbender’s performance is modulated like a psychotic henchman throughout the film, staring with a grin at everything related to death and combat.

Traditionally, scenes like the wall would be told in reverse, and would inspire us to hate the villains and fear for our heroes’ safety. Yet the Persians we cut to are always portrayed through an empathetic lens of fear towards the Spartans, which we are meant to revel in. While a typical writing rule would be to make your villains cruel and your heroes admirable (or at the very least relatable), the villains of 300 are despised for their weakness and cowardice. They always need to be carried by slaves and must shoot arrows from afar rather than facing their enemies like men.

Even as we are introduced to the Spartans, we are shown them doing horrible things. The film opens with the fact that our “freedom!”-yelling heroes murder babies that are too weak or disfigured, followed by their brutal and cruel training regime. This is of course glamorously justified as harsh but necessary in creating the best fighting force in the world. Another example is the fact that the iconic “this is Sparta!” scene is our protagonist angrily murdering a messenger. What’s strange is that Snyder never tries to shy away from these things; the horror of the moment is always played up from the perspective of the villainous Persians. Yet that horror is something we crave to have instilled on the Persians. The discovery of the wall of corpses is meant to inspire sadistic satisfaction in the audience, as the arrogant villains realise they got more than they bargained for, which somewhat sums up the emotional arc of the film. Yet on the surface, the film claims to be about heroic sacrifice in the name of freedom.
These examples show the extreme power of indulging the audience: no matter how many times we are shown just how hypocritical and evil the Spartans are, we still take their side because they are so powerful, skilled and clever and it’s enjoyable to vicariously experience this victory and domination against our protagonist’s enemies. Even Snyder doesn’t think they reflect our modern morality, calling Leonidas a “psycho” and clarifying that “You are on their side because that’s the point of the movie… I could have also made this movie from Xerxes’ point of view…”

While these points sound like extreme complaints, it’s important to consider that 300, due to Snyder’s extremely heightened style, is an over-the-top action spectacle that is hard to take too seriously. Its pro-war propaganda message is very visible and seems almost harmless in such a borderline camp movie about machoism. Gene Seymour asserts that:

“If "300" carried any intellectual heft (if, in other words, it was scrupulous with historic details), one could see the point of thrashing these provocative notions to their metaphoric nubs. But this movie in no way pretends to be a replication of historical events. It is, instead, a willed hallucination of ancient history goosed with mutant warriors, rhinos outfitted like Sherman tanks and a King Xerxes who’s dolled up with enough glittering threads and glossy makeup to make every David Bowie wanna-be from the mid-1970s chew his knuckles in fuming envy.”

These points are merely to show how the storytelling of 300 is indicative of how Snyder seems to value and approach empathy and emotion in his films. They only become morally problematic
when placed in more traditional films that audiences are meant to take more seriously at face value.

Ultimately, when analysing the film’s storytelling, it’s important to note that his films are often incredible faithful adaptations of graphic novels by artists known for their distinctive artistic voice. In this case, it’s Frank Miller: a controversial figure known for his extreme right-wing beliefs and stories that seem to be heavily fascist in theme. This is fairly evident in a story about masculine warriors defending their homeland in the name of freedom, justice, democracy and reason, as is often proclaimed by the Spartans. The story is simply too ideological and righteous to be viewed as a simple action film about a battle.

The values exhibited throughout the film are most problematically in the scenes with Xerxes, whose androgyny and liberal sexuality is played as something alien, decadent and threatening, compared to the pious Spartans. The depiction of his pleasure tent of concubines frames homosexuality and transgenderism through a puritanical lens of sexual deviancy. Every mention of Leonidas surrendering is phrased as submitting “to the will of Xerxes”. Snyder himself said that it was intentionally inciting homophobia: “What’s more scary to a 20-year-old boy than a giant god-king who wants to have his way with you?”

Combine these beliefs with a filmmaker who specialises in powerful, awe-inspiring iconography designed to indulge and you essentially get an effective propaganda piece. Even Snyder has said that the film’s depiction of violence as something “beautiful” and many of the Persians as exotic monsters is meant to reflect the Spartan’s point of view of these events and is not meant to be an
actual endorsement of their behaviour, though I would add that it’s at least a glorification of them. 20

Adaptation requires a careful balancing in order to maintain the themes of the story whilst also making necessary changes to suit the medium of film and applying one’s own artistic interpretation. Yet Snyder is a devoted fan to these properties he adapts, and very strictly follows the exact same beats as the source material, to the point where most of his storyboards are taken straight from the comic panels. There doesn’t feel like much of his own artistic point of view within the text; everything seems to come from the existing themes of the source material.

But the one thing that Snyder does introduce into his adaptations is his specific fetishizing of violence and iconography. This works perfectly with a story equally interested in fascist power, like Miller’s 300, but what happens when it’s a very different piece of work? When Snyder very rigidly adapts a piece of art with very satirical and liberal politics but his only artistic import is a visual style that reflects a certain fascist depiction of power, it can lead to a morally confused thematic message and impact his storytelling.
WATCHMEN

Alan Moore’s 1986-87 comic series turned graphic novel, Watchmen, is oft-considered the most ground-breaking in the medium, reaching the heights of 20th century literature. It has been widely praised from critics such as at Entertainment Weekly as “The greatest superhero story ever told”, 21 to Time’s Lev Grossman, saying that “It’s way beyond cliché at this point to call Watchmen the greatest superhero comic ever written-slash-drawn. But it’s true.” 22

The story is a dark, existentialist deconstruction of the superhero genre in the context of a realistic, alternate-history cold war, where crime-fighters have existed for decades. As the threat of nuclear annihilation between the U.S. and Russia draws nearer, a group of retired superheroes investigate the murder of one of their own while trying to find a way to prevent the apocalypse; their very notions of heroism thrown into question.

Apart from its nuanced, thematic storytelling, it was notable for its kinetic pacing using a unique, nine-panel style for each page. In his book, Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History, Robert Harvey wrote that Moore “had demonstrated as never before the capacity of the [comic book] medium to tell a sophisticated story that could be engineered only in comics”. 23 So it’s a wonder how a story about the legacy of comic-book heroes using a uniquely comic-book method of storytelling could be adapted to the big screen.

Plans for a film circulated throughout Hollywood for decades but fans believed that such an ambitious work could never be done justice. Finally in 2006, impressed with early 300 footage, Warner Bros asked Zack Snyder to direct a penned script. Once again he helped adapt the script and based storyboards directly from the comic panels.
Upon release in 2009, carrying much hype and anticipation, it received a very polarised critical reception and was a box-office flop, earning £185 million from a £130 million budget. Apart from a minority of defenders, Audiences and critics were disappointed with Snyder’s adaptation. The common criticism was that it was slavishly faithful to plot points of the comic without a clear understanding its meaning. Owen Gleiberman felt that Snyder “treats each image with the same stuffy hermetic reverence [as 300]. He doesn’t move the camera or let the scenes breathe. He crams the film with bits and pieces, trapping his actors like bugs wriggling in the frame.” 24

Noah Berlatsky had a similarly wrote that Snyder “races through the story, faithfully reproducing this bit of dialogue from Moore and that bit of imagery from Gibbons but never pausing to develop a vision of his own. The result is oddly hollow and disjointed…”. 25 With such a supposedly slavish recreation of the comic, Phillip Kennicott asks: “And yet as this continues, for 162 minutes, the usual question arises: Has the film added anything?” 26

It’s telling that the most unanimously praised scene was one of Snyder’s own creation. In order to convey the complicated alternate history to the audience, he created a slow-motion montage set to Bob Dylan’s ‘The Times They Are A Changing’ (Fig. 10, p 43). It is arguably the most visually iconic and it tells the story with a clear artistic voice as to the message of the film. Yet as Devin Faraci states in defence of Snyder: “Watchmen is a comic book about comic books that uses comic books as the main vehicle of its self-critique. Lifting the story out of that medium removes much of the meaning of the story.” 27

While he once again recreates the panels and events of the graphic novel with the same faithful reverence and attention to detail as 300, Snyder does make some controversial changes that
potentially affect the nature of the story. Most significant is that he frequently alters how violence is depicted, compared to the comic, to suit his particular style. Jason Haggstrom analysed this problematic stylistic approach in his article ‘Violence as Fetish in Zack Snyder’s Watchmen’. As Haggstrom writes:

“In an interview with Empire Magazine, Snyder defended his use of graphic violence in the film by noting, "In some ways Alan's punishing us for liking violence, for accepting that kind of violence. So unless it's completely over the top it doesn't really send that right message of 'Oh really, you're enjoying this 'cause you shouldn't be.'" The most literal extension of this concept in the book occurs when the Comedian, beaten and bloodied by a fellow costumed hero, looks directly at the reader and states, "This is what you like, huh? This is what gets you hot." But Snyder's film never allows for a moment of such self-reflexivity. The audience is never asked how they feel about graphic violence; instead, they are simply forced to participate in the director's own personal cinematic fetish for showing it. Snyder's overemphasis on graphic violence only serves to appease the gore-seeking audience—those who enjoyed the same tactics in Snyder's previous, gore-heavy films, Dawn of the Dead and 300—while turning off the average viewer and alienating the book's thematic use of violence as a method of superhero deconstruction. Instead, Zach Snyder's adaptation of Watchmen simply revels in violent images for their own sake.”

When Night Owl and Silk Spectre get into a street brawl, their violent actions leave the thugs mildly injured. Yet in the film, the violence is far more graphic, with our heroes snapping arms in half and viciously murdering the thugs and they don’t seem to care. An important aspect of this scene in the comic is that the fight immediately sparks sexual arousal in the two, highlighting what really drives them to fighting crime. This does not happen at this point in the
film, so the scene becomes Snyder rigidly adapting something from the comic, only to revel in graphic violence.

Similarly, the scene where Ozymandias kills the gunman is flipped in terms of focus. In the comic, the emphasis is placed on our hero’s brutally killing him to make us question the morality of what we are witnessing, whereas in the film, the focus is heavily placed on the violent deaths of the gunman’s victims. The aiming, loading and firing of the gun is shown in close-up and slow motion to a fetishizing degree. The gunman’s murders are borderline comical, with the secretary’s fingers blown off in over-the-top fashion and the unlikeable businessman getting shot between the eyes (breaking his glasses in two). The whole attack plays out in slow-motion up until the sudden release of Ozymandias killing him. All of this undoes the troubling implication of the scene and once again takes away its thematic purpose by making the violence pleasurable in the way that Snyder does best.

The themes of the story are fittingly the same that Snyder has explored throughout his career: notions of masculinity, myth, history (both this and 300 explore an alternate version of history), power and the moral angst of those who are deemed greater than others. While Snyder loves to portray his characters as mythical archetypes, Watchmen serves as a deconstruction of this image of superheroes, frequently questioning their actions and values, which occasionally creates a strange dichotomy on-screen. The events of the plot are a commentary on the history of the genre by subverting classical superhero tropes; heroes are murdered for being gay or sent to insane asylums; they become so dependent on the power that comes with vigilantism that they are sexually impotent outside the costume; without megalomaniacal supervillains, they find themselves facing complicated political quandaries that force them to compromise; superheroes
being used by the American government as soldiers etc. In many ways, the superheroes are an “admonition to those who trusted in 'heroes' and leaders to guard the world's fate”, according to Bradford Wright. 29

While the comic portrays the main characters as damaged and misguided but well-meaning people with pathos, Snyder chooses to view them as amoral satires of existing heroes. The events during the prison riot are so violent (a prisoner getting his arms slowly sawed off while he screams and gushes blood in agony), and the reactions of our heroes so sociopathically care-free, that it forces us to question the morals of what we are watching.

For someone so strict about adapting the seemingly superficial elements of the comic, it seems odd to make such drastic thematic ones. His fetishistic approach to violence undercuts the anti-violent message of the film and veers into the realm of exploitation, which worked perfectly for the gloriously fascist 300. When he frames these characters in the same mythical, iconic and powerful imagery that he is known for, it goes against Moore’s very statement about these deeply troubled individuals trying to be heroes. (Fig.11, p 43)

Throughout the film, the superhero characters appear to display actual superhuman strength, as shown during the Comedian’s opening fight in his apartment. Each hit punches a hole in the wall but doesn’t seem to damage him. Moore’s idea of the brutal cost of real people attempting to do these things feels slightly lost when they, in fact, are capable of taking such abuse to their bodies. The scene once again displays Snyder’s stylish speed ramping from intensely fast choreography to fluid slow-motion in order to create exciting action, but it’s possible that it becomes inappropriate in a scene meant to be the brutal, ugly and swift death of a man at his lowest point.
Perhaps Snyder’s style plays up the attractiveness of a moment to the most fetishized degree which makes for a viscerally effective scene but damages the satirical tone of the film and that singular event’s purpose within that whole. The sex scene between Night Owl and Silk Spectre was designed to be shocking and show that these people need to be vigilantes in order to feel any sexual urges but Snyder plays it as triumphant, intimate and erotic which makes for a compelling scene on its own but doesn’t suit the themes of the story. At the same time, he tries to emphasis the sociopathic amorality of the hero protagonists, yet frames them and their powers or skills as attractive and awe-inspiring. Perhaps that is Snyder’s intention: to make us attracted yet repelled to what we are viewing.

Yet for all of its violence, grittiness and moral ambiguity, the film lacks a moment from the comic that is vital to contextualising all of that darkness in a thematic statement. A minor, everyday character appears near the end of the story to break up a street fight and states that "It's all we can do, try to help each other. It's all that means anything... It's the world. I can't run from it." It’s the type of mundane, everyday humanity that seems to be absent from Snyder’s storytelling. Yet without that final thematic upholding of heroism and moralism, the story becomes a dark exploration of cruelty without an ultimate point. This kind of thematic muddling, caused by a filmmaker with cinematic interests that conflict with a source materials’ philosophy, is likely why it is seen as “oddly hollow and disjointed” by critics such as Noah Berlatsky. 30

Much like 300, while Snyder tells his story using traditional storytelling principles and continuity editing (albeit with his unique style), so far his narratives do not rely on the empathy of following a protagonist who wants something, and watching them struggle to attain that thing.
300 was a schlocky power fantasy while Watchmen is a satire. Both portray their main characters in very distant, dehumanising ways, either admiring them as above average people or having their struggles and flaws be abstract angst over concepts of freedom and morality, rather than relatable wants and needs. While Watchmen has Night Owl and Silk Spectre fret over their personal happiness, they are still portrayed with a certain satirical distance. They callously murder street thugs and require violence in order to become sexually aroused. We may sympathise or understand, but Snyder does not want us to relate.

The point is that Snyder makes mainstream films but with a certain lack of emotion in favour of heightened visceral power (either attractive or ugly). They are the same as traditional contemporary narratives yet remain distinct in more than just style. So what happens when Snyder is approached to tell an incredibly traditional, story that requires more that basic emotional humanism that Snyder seems to lack? It leads to the most controversial film in an already controversial filmography.
MAN OF STEEL

The superman reboot, *Man of Steel*, is a modern re-telling of the classic Superman mythos; chronicling Clark Kent’s upbringing and his moral soul-searching, as invaders from his home planet, Krypton, threaten to destroy the Earth.

Unlike his previous endeavours, involving stylish but emotionally empty spectacle or nihilistic satire, *Man of Steel* is Snyder’s first real attempt at a traditional, mainstream narrative. Superman has wants, needs and a character arc; he has relationships with other characters that are explored for emotional depth and catharsis; he must face off against a detestable villain; and these dramatic developments and conflicts build to an action-packed climax that serves as a resolution to Clark’s own inner turmoil. With its touching piano chords, serene visual compositions of Clark in a beautiful environment, or its focus on personal, human drama, this film is attempting to be more grounded, human and relatable than Snyder’s more heightened, gleeful pictures.

Not only is it a more traditional story, but Snyder shows more restraint with his visual style, using a shaky-camera aesthetic, lens flares, Terrence Malick-inspired close-ups of scenery for mood, and more typical camera framing, rather than his painterly, slow-motion wide-shots. The colours are de-saturated to give it a gritty, realistic palette and tone. All of this is to establish this version of superman as realistic (Fig. 12, p 44). Snyder stated that “From the beginning, I had a philosophical approach to what I would do with Superman. And I always sum it up by saying that the most realistic movie I’ve made is a movie about Superman --because that's what I felt like the movie needed.” 31
In keeping with Snyder’s themes of myth, history and power, *Man of Steel* ultimately becomes about how he is tied to his planet’s past and what that means for Earth’s future. He is haunted by memories of his foster father over how he should be a hero; his real father entrusts him with a destiny to inspire Earth to not make the same mistakes Krypton did; and he is faced with a horrible choice by survivors of his species to continue their race by wiping out Earth. We even begin with an extended prologue depicting the fall of Krypton and how these events will shape and define the events in the future. Superman becomes the legacy of his fathers and their designs for him. Snyder also incorporates the history of the character through his familiar iconography: the classic depictions of him soaring through the air, the Kent farm in Smallville, Lois Lane, the Daily Planet and a be-speckled Clark Kent.

Once again, Snyder visually explores the myth and power of his main character, often framing him as Christ-like figure (Fig. 13, p 45). More than any other Superman film, Snyder’s depiction highlights Superman as a god-like being, whose powers are majestic and awe-inspiring. (Fig. 14, p 45) His battle against the villain, Zod, shows what would actually happen if two mighty gods fought on earth and it is epic in its sweep, scope and spectacle. Superman soaring through the air, the inspiring, bombastic soundtrack building to a crescendo as superman slams into Zod, the air around them rippling in a titanic wave that destroys all around them; to many, it’s the superman film they have always been waiting for. (Fig. 15, p 46)

The film was released in 2013 to moderate success (low compared to its contemporaries) and polarising reviews from critics and audiences. Many tended to accuse the film of being “dreary”, with “supercharged fight scenes that drag on” and little “sense of lightness, of pop joy”. On the other hand, positive reviews felt that it was “the best superhero action ever put to
film”; “blending spectacle with a profound human element”. While *Watchmen* received the same divide, that was based on a beloved and supposedly un-filmable property and the disagreement was based around faithfulness. Whereas here, the split in opinion was much more contentious, all over a fairly by-the-numbers superhero film that does not come with the passionate expectations of a specific source-material.

One of the main criticisms and points of argument was the massive destruction in the movie’s third act, where most of metropolis and its citizens are destroyed by Zod and his battle with Superman, which results in our hero being forced to snap his neck. Superman throws Zod through inhabited buildings and seems to show no care for protecting innocents. He even brings Zod to his hometown and is hugely responsible for the following mayhem. During a calm between the chaos, Superman and Lois Lane kiss and joke amidst the rubble, as if they weren’t standing on the ashes of thousands.

Jen Yamato calls the battle “9/11-esque assault” and that Superman has “blood on his hands”. On twitter, comedian, Kumail Nanjiani joked that “Man of Steel is the only superhero movie where if the good guy didn't exist thousands of people wouldn't have died.” Even Buzzfeed ends a summary of the financial damage by asking “In the end, Superman wins the day. But at what cost?” The climax reveals in this titanic battle between gods, with supporting characters praising Superman for saving them, but its continued ignorance of the massive death toll (occasionally exacerbated by our hero) feels extremely callous.

The problem seems to stem from the fact that despite making a much more grounded and traditional blockbuster, Snyder’s continuous portrayal of power and his difficulty or lack of
interest in empathetic drama proves to create an insidious morality under the seemingly-cathartic and heroic surface. That final battle allows Snyder to unleash, seemingly forgetting the moral necessity of the character’s arc. Most other superhero films seem focused on having our heroes care about saving people and the sense of loss at having failed. Instead of that optimistic, do-gooder spirit, Snyder continues to portray the grandeur of a superhero.

Superman has always represented the moral ideal, upholding old-fashioned values like truth, justice and basic decency. Despite his enormous power, he always chooses the path of non-violence, and is more focused on saving people. Yet Snyder chooses to emphasise the god, the man who can destroy building with a flick of his wrist. He is displayed in the same manner as Leonidas or Dr. Manhattan. Despite the film’s attempt to talk about inspiring people and the right thing to do, superman remains a fascist superhero who saves the day purely through might.

The majority of superhero films (and Hollywood films in general) throw obstacles in their hero’s way in order to create conflict and drama for the story. We empathise with their human struggles and want to see them overcome these internal and external challenges. Spiderman 2 is filled with this kind of human conflict, with less focus on spectacle than its contemporaries. Peter Parker has girl troubles, can barely keep a job, pay his rent or be on time while also juggling his responsibilities as a superhero. His lifestyle is not easy, he creates internal dilemmas for himself and we wonder how he will get himself out of this. Yet this basis of empathetic drama has never been an element of Snyder’s films. Throughout Man of Steel, superman ponders these abstract moral dilemmas of whether or not he should hide from the world or try to help it. But it’s all expressed through vague, grandiose speeches about hope and not dramatized through situations
in the plot. Snyder is much more interested in admiring the mythical being, rather than caring about him, much like the propaganda storytelling of 300.

The internet writer, Film Crit Hulk, believes that this style of storytelling in the vein of a traditional blockbuster only ends up gratifying the base instincts of the audience. He writes:

“For the Superman in *Man of Steel* is not a character in any sense that we define them... he is merely a familiar form that we can project onto.

Think about it: on the surface, this Superman is a ridiculously handsome invincible being who is crazy jacked, is thought of as hot by every other character, seems on the surface to be thoughtful, pensive and broody, but always does the right thing (because we can never make the conflict unflattering), and even when he does "the wrong thing" the film still totally treats it as the justifiable right thing for indulgence, he doesn't learn anything, he beats the crap out of bad people, he gets the girl without even trying or caring, he saves people when convenient, and he even gets a badass gruesome kill in the name of righteousness...

Still don't see it? How about another pertinent question...

*What is hard about being Superman in this movie?*

Really. When do we feel like it was truly hard for him to be Superman at any point?

He just gets to be awesome the entire movie, even when he's being "dark." And you can't count the various tough guy enemies thrown at him because of his invulnerability, so when does the character ever seem in true conflict? When are we not just waiting for him to "unleash" and bask in that unadulterated joy?

In *Man of Steel* specifically, we are attracted to what Superman can do. We are attracted to his power. We are attracted to either being him or fucking him or maybe both at once. We want that supremacy.” 40
Snyder doesn’t seem to have much interest in emotional drama; his skill lying in how he favourably displays his subjects; which is a problem when the traditional film narrative is about putting flawed characters into situations that they must crawl out. If a filmmaker seems to only use a pleasurable style that emphasises a powerful character for us to admire, rather than a flawed one for us to relate to, then a story supposedly upholding the value of heroism using classical narrative tropes is only going to manifest as pornographic art.

Strangely, it’s an internet comment that potentially gets at the heart of Snyder’s strengths as a filmmaker and this problem that he keeps finding himself in: “If Snyder had stripped away all the dialogue, cut an hour forty-five, and reworked the order and soundtrack, we’d have a fantastic, visceral avant-garde masterpiece. If he could distance himself with whatever he's trying to do within mainstream filmmaking, dude could be the bro-Kenneth Anger.” 41

*Man of steel* is an exercise in selling you the iconography, texture and grand spectacle of Superman. None of these ideas are thoroughly explored through the plot but Snyder so instinctively captures the feeling of superman on a visceral (albeit superficial) level. It’s an advertisement in the style of a music video; telling given his background in those two sectors (much like *300* is not a narrative involving growth or change, it’s an essay on who the Spartans are and what they can do). As his background indicates, he’s an artist with a rich understanding of visual symbolism and how images can tell a story but not necessarily how to tell a story through empathy, emotion and drama.
CONCLUSION

It’s evident that Snyder has certainly grown and changed as a director over the course of these three films. More to do with what he happens to be adapting, but he has relied less and less on the original source material. His hyperactive style has toned down and become a little more grounded within the story. Yet despite all of this, I would say he is making a regression as a filmmaker. He is trying to tone himself down and deal with more ambitious or traditional material but I believe 300 remains his best film because the material suited his thematic and visual style perfectly. It’s his most unique honest expression of the fascist power that he is so skilled at portraying.

It’s been examined that while he uses a basic level of narrative storytelling that is common among contemporary Hollywood (continuity editing, intensified continuity etc.), Snyder has developed a unique visual aesthetic and style that separates his films from most others but becomes problematic when attempting to tell more traditional stories that require empathy and emotion. He is an auteur who applies the same particular style onto stories and moments, regardless of its thematic whole. Some stories are not suitable for his unique style of storytelling: displaying the grandeur and power of mythical beings in a heightened, painterly world of iconography, CGI and slow-motion.

Ultimately this is a major concern facing his upcoming Justice League films, beginning with Batman V Superman: Dawn of Justice. Following Man of Steel’s tone and style, they will likely capture the grandeur and spectacle of these iconic superheroes, as if ripped straight out of a comic panel, but fail to successfully capture them as relatable human beings with struggles and
wants. Not only that, but his approach in the context of a heroic superhero adventure will likely only create an indulgent experience where the audience only vicariously lives through the experiences of the powerful heroes and fails to empathise.

Is it not troubling to have a series of superhero movies for children directed by someone who fetishizes violence, has more interest in vicarious power fantasies than human empathy or morality, and who potentially misunderstands how moments can impact the overall tone and theme of a story? If his interpretation of one of the most moral, compassionate and non-violent heroes of all time is to highlight his god-like perfection and otherworldliness, inherently making him an indulgent power fantasy to the audience, then how is he going to handle batman, arguably the most gratifyingly attractive superhero? He’s strong, he’s smart, he’s mysterious, he has all these cool gadgets, he doesn’t seem to care about anything, he has little to no personal responsibilities and he does what he has to in order to get results, including breaking bones. Snyder will no doubt make this character incredibly powerful and cool to the audience but when matched with a (theoretically) compassionate character that now needs to be taken down a peg, it leads to a story that is supposedly about upholding heroic values but has deeply insidious, pornographic morals under the surface. It turns family-friendly adventures of heroism into fascist propaganda, and that will be blockbuster cinema for the next decade.

In many ways, Snyder is reminiscent of early Hollywood filmmakers of the early 20th century, particularly D.W. Griffith. His films are somewhat a cinema of attractions, scale, spectacle, theatricality and mythical or romantic notions of heroism and masculinity. Like them, he doesn’t have a textual focus on humanism and morality that define more sophisticated Hollywood
narratives of later decades. He seems only interested in emotional depth when it refers to the angsty posturing of vague ideals of freedom, justice or hope. The emotions and ideas never come into conflict; they are something for the characters to verbalise about themselves before the next action scene. The emotional and thematic mind-set of his films are much more primitive and sophomoric (or perhaps classical) in that regard. He likes to explore these larger ideas of myth, man and history in the imagery and symbolism but stumbles when they are in the dialogue and never knows how to dramatise them within the actions of the story.

His problem is not as simple as style and spectacle over substance. It’s evident that he is a more unique and skilled filmmaker than given credit for, but perhaps traditional narrative is a weakness that he should try to avoid. Maybe experimental filmmaking really is where his visual skills, thematic ambitions and heightened passions would be better suited. While he is certainly a director who is due more credit and admiration for his scale, unique vision, and impeccable visual abilities, being the primary storytelling architect for a franchise that will soon dominate Hollywood is alarming given his recurring weaknesses with human emotion. Classical storytelling requires us to learn to care about characters as they grow and change in the face of conflict; that’s the basis of most Hollywood narrative storytelling. Yet from these examples of his filmography, it’s clear that Snyder has secretly been doing something quite different all of these years.
Fig. 3 (p 14)
Fig. 7 (p 15)

Fig. 8 (p 15)

Fig. 9 (p 15)
Fig. 12 (p 30)
Fig. 13 (p 31)

Fig. 14 (p 31)
Fig. 15 (p 31)
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