

Unbearably Obnoxious, 5 Traits of a Modern Movie Snob

By Jamie Trapp

"Your mother's brother Ned is also a philistine." – Bernard Berkman



The Movie Snob

"There is no creature more unbearably obnoxious than a movie snob" – everyone else

In Noah Baumbach's 2005 movie, *The Squid and the Whale*, Jeff Daniels plays Bernard Berkman as a writer who has not achieved the level of success he had hoped and who is quick to put down anyone he deems to be intellectually and culturally inferior to him as a philistine. A philistine is defined as "a person who is hostile or indifferent to culture and the arts". It is a hilarious performance from Daniels whose character at times refers to certain works of authors as "minor", for example, upon learning his son Walt is reading *A Tale of Two Cities* in school he makes a point of regarding it as "minor Dickens" in compared to what he refers to as the "much richer *Great Expectations*." Real life movie snobs function in a similar way. They are quick to impose their own standards on others and regard their opinions not really as opinions at all but rather as objective truth. And thus, they believe that other people should defer to their opinions by default.

As a movie fan I enjoy talking about or debating over various movie related subjects. One of the few downsides to this is that every once in a while, I will run into an unbelievably annoying movie snob. As an intense fan of Cinema, especially foreign movies, many of which would be labeled as "arthouse cinema" I have to admit to a certain degree of understanding as to why movie snobs feel the way they do. When you expand your horizons with a wide range of movies from various countries and time periods it is only natural to be astonished by the goldmine of great movies that you never even knew existed before. I first watched Jean Luc Godard's *Breathless* (1960) on the basis of a strong recommendation in a Roger Ebert review of another movie. After viewing *Breathless* I watched nothing but French New Wave

Movies for my next 25-30 movies. It is only natural to want to share new interests with other people. I do not think there is anything wrong with this. So what is it that separates a passionate movie fan from an unbearable movie snob? Here are a few examples:

Obnoxious Trait # 1

Confuses opinions with objective truth



Similar to the mention of Jeff Daniels character Bernard in *The Squid and the Whale*, a movie snob speaks of opinions as unchallengeable truth. When Bernard says *A Tale of Two Cities* is “minor Dickens” that is not an opinion, it is a statement that is incontestable. In other words they do not view opinions as opinions at all. And if you do have the audacity to challenge these holy opinions then watch out because if there is one thing a movie snob hates even more than blockbuster movie franchises it is having their opinions challenged. This is especially the case if the movie snob perceives the person challenging them as a mere simpleton not worthy of their own opinion.

Now, there is certainly nothing wrong with having strong opinions and certainly everyone is welcome to back up their opinions with evidence. The problem comes from the fact that the movie snob has trouble realizing that people actually have different tastes in movies. In many cases a person may just not connect with a particular movie, even ones that are extremely well made and acted. I believe that movies are more objective than say music, but like music people will be instinctually drawn to certain types of movies, in many cases for reasons they may not even be able to explain themselves. This is because people have different backgrounds and histories and will relate better to certain movies than others independent of the movies quality.

Obnoxious Trait # 2

Using movie language to show off



There is nothing wrong with using the language of movie critics and movie makers. If you are truly interested in movie, it makes sense to learn and understand certain industry jargon. And really this probably applies to joining any type of sub-culture as it is only natural that you will end up using the lingo and terminology associated with that sub-culture. This is done not only as a way to bond over a mutual love of movies but also for more practical reasons. Within any sub-culture you will likely find that you can communicate more efficiently with other people by using certain language associated with that sub-culture.

However, with movie snobs it is more about the way they use certain language.

They will use terms like “mise-en-scene” or “auteur” not so much for the reasons stated above but rather to impress you. Again there is nothing wrong with using these terms, I do in certain situations I even wrote an entire article on the concept of what an Auteur is and why it matters. There is nothing wrong with using or understanding these terms it’s just obnoxious when people do it in a way where it is clear they are just trying to show off their impressive movie vocabulary or show up other people so they can seem smarter than they really are. Mise-en-scene for example is a French phrase that translates to arrangement of the scene which basically refers to the layout of actors and objects in a given scene. It is an important concept in movie analysis but that does not mean movie fans are required to use that term with a French sounding accent in a conversation about a movie you saw.

Obnoxious Trait # 3

Not liking a movie because of its budget or popularity



You see this in music sometimes, a person is a fan of a particular band but then will disown their fandom the moment the band has an album that goes platinum. These kinds of people will often use phrases like “sell out” or selling out”. In other words they loved Band XYZ when they were a bunch of nobodies playing in venues with only a few hundred people. But the second the band achieves any level of mainstream success; the band is instantly deemed as “a bunch of sellouts” all for the crime of getting “too popular” and selling “too many” albums.

I remember reading that some people took issue with all the critical acclaim given to Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight* (2008) due to its status as a “Superhero” movie. Now, I have to admit to finding some common ground here as I am generally not a huge fan of most Superhero movies myself. This is a clear-cut exception; *The Dark Knight* is a fascinating movie brimming with various intellectual musings on society, crime, anarchy, vigilante justice, etc. Just because a movie has a large budget or is part of a particular genre does not disqualify it from being a movie worthy of intellectual debate. Directors are usually very smart people, and they understand that a movie can be both entertaining and intelligent; these concepts are not mutually exclusive. Not liking a movie such as *The Dark Knight* for no other reason than it being popular and having a huge budget makes no sense to me. *The Dark Knight* contains more interesting ideas than 95 % of arthouse movies. In fact, there are numerous quality directors who are known to make big budget movies including but not limited to Christopher Nolan, Steven Spielberg, Ridley Scott, Martin Scorsese, Peter Jackson, and others.

It should also be noted that the inverse is true as well. An independent movie also known as an Indie Movie, or an Arthouse Movie are not necessarily great just because they have a small budget. Having a small budget does not necessarily mean it will be full of great and/or interesting ideas and concepts.

Obnoxious Trait # 4

Making obscure movie references...for the sake of making obscure movie references.



Similar to obnoxious trait # 2 there is nothing wrong with making an obscure movie reference in and of itself. But when you are making the reference for no other reason than to show off it rises to the same level of obnoxiousness. For some people they may truly just love movies that happen to not be seen by most mainstream movie fans. But when people intentionally make references to the most esoteric movies imaginable it is pretty clear why. And to make matters worse they will often follow it up with faux surprise that no one understood the reference. "C'mon guys, it is from Island of lost souls (a movie made in 1932), how on earth did no one pick up on the reference. Of course no one in the group has seen it, that was the entire purpose of why you choose the reference!

Obnoxious Trait # 5

Being negative all the time



This one may sound obvious, but I think the biggest issue with many movie snobs is their overwhelming negativity. People who gravitate toward particular sub-cultures/interests generally enjoy seeking out others who like a lot of the same things. It is exciting when you can find people who love the same movie as you, especially if the movie is less mainstream. The movie snob is often a natural contrarian which in and of itself is not necessarily a bad thing. The world certainly needs its fair share of contrarians but when it comes to movie snobs you get the sense that they are trying to make it known that they are smarter than everyone else by being the one person who can find fault in a popular movie or popular director, actor, actress, etc. In many situations it is probably hard to even believe their opinions since you know they may even just flat out refuse to admit that they actually enjoyed a popular movie as it would go against their image as a movie snob; an image that they revel in by the way. This goes back to the example of a person refusing to like a band once they achieve a certain level of popularity. They have this need to be different than everyone else to seem special. And really that sums up the movie snob in a single sentence.