Essay 01 – Scene Analysis

Children of Men

*Children of Men* is an action thriller film directed by Alfonso Cuarón (*Gravity, Roma*) released in 2006. Set in England, portraying a dystopian world in which humans have been infertile since 2009, Cuarón and his team opted to showcase this world not through explicit imagery or exposition dumps, but by guilding the viewer through everyday life in this world, using cinematic techniques to highlight important details without detaching the audience from the precise narrative being told.

This technique, or rather, the use of various techniques, is highlighted in the first sequence of the film after its infamous introduction and cut to title card. Centered directly in the frame is nothing directly related to the event that just look place. It is a government sponsored propaganda poster advocating for citizens to report illegal workers to ensure they do not take on “JOBS FOR THE BRITS”. This framing lasts for several seconds before slightly panning to emphasize our protagonist, Theo Faron. Theo, after having witnessed the attack on the coffee shop, is shown to be quite stoic and unconcerned. In the background, we hear more news broadcasts concerning the death of the youngest person, Baby Diego, as Faron looks at his coworkers weeping his death with cynicism.

After a quick shot of Theo insincerely asking his boss to work from home on account of trauma from Diego’s death, there is a jump cut to Theo’s travel from work. Again, the choice is made to start to start the shot on a piece of propaganda, a video montage showcasing Britain’s relative stability compared to the collapsing world at large, shown through footage of violence and despair. The camera pans to Theo on a train, entirely unconcerned with footage we would fine alarming to say the least. This propaganda is his world, he sees it several times each day. There is no reason for him to direct his attention to it.

As the camera pans and zooms in to Theo in his window seat, there is suddenly a rock thrown at his face behind the window. Initially shocked at the loud noise, he directs his attention to several people throwing objects at this train for no appearant reason. As his head moved to look at these people, the camera does too, and Theo is moved out of frame. Now shown in greater detail is more government propaganda, lining the railroad tracks but covered in graffiti, highlighting opposition to these messages. No music is played in this shot, only the muted diagetic noises created by the train and outside scuffle muffled by the window.

Just as we might expect further escalation in this vandalism, the shot yet again jumpcuts to Theo leaving the train at the station. To audiences, a gang of people attempting to smash the train they’re riding would be incredibly dramatic if not tramautic. But in the world of *Children of Men,* it is not even worth a follow-up.

The aforementioned cut shows Theo Faron exit his graffiti riddled train into the “station”, sharing more visual similarities to a military checkpoint than any train station. The camera then trails him, his body directly centered. In this station are literal cages full of people, guarded by armed guards. Despite this powerful image, the camera initially remains centered on Theo. As he walks past these cages, the camera only slightly pans towards these cages, as if to guide the audience’s eyes toward this. A woman in a cage starts speaking aloud, and the camera again pans to focus on her and the guard she is unsuccessfully trying to gain the attention of. Theo exists the frame, devoting no attention this woman, again highlighting his apathy.

The focus on the woman acts as a shot transition to Theo leaving this “station”, where we see him display real emotion for the first time in the film. Happiness at seeing an old acquaintance.

This two minute sequence works to almost perfectly illustrate the world Theo lives in, and the apathy he holds towards it, laying the groundwork for the entire movie’s plot moving forward, and its commentary on our real world’s indifference to the injustices we’re apathetic to each day. As Faron passes by immigrants in cages, he pays it no attention. It’s not that he supports this practice, or even finds it acceptable. He has just learned to live with it. He knows there is no benefit in protest or outrage at it, he just needs to hold his head down and go about his business. The world has gone to shit and there is nothing he can do about it.

Despite the immensely shocking world we’re shown, we do not doubt Theo’s apathy, as it is a behavior we are all accustomed to doing ourselves. 2006 was a year of cascading turmoil globally, all highlighted within the film itself: The escalating but seemingly endless War on Terror, immigration crises, energy crises, geopolitical tension. Alfonso Cuarón taps into this resonance to therefore, through Theo Farron’s growth, highlight a call to action for the viewers. Wake up from your disillusionment. Help those in need. Help to convince those like you to wake up too.