**Children of Men:**

**A complex story told through simple editing**

**NB: Literary Genre**

Alfonso Cuaron’s film *Children of Men* utilizes an unusual editing style to immerse the viewer in the world of the film and create a sense of reality that would ordinarily not exist in a traditional Hollywood movie. Long takes, and more specifically the absence of cuts, are used to achieve a documentary-like feel; action scenes which traditionally would have many fast paced shots and close ups are shown entirely through a single master shot. The use of a single shot advances the world of the film by maintaining an open frame throughout the movie. Where cuts are used they are carefully placed to create meaning between images that might not exist if the same scene were shown only through a master shot. All of the cinematic and editing choices in *Children of Men* come together to create a film about a world not too far off from our own in such a way that **the viewer can connect with the world in a believable way**.

The most noticeable editing style throughout *Children of Men* is **the lack of cuts as the camera follows Theo throughout the world of the film**. This documentary-like style gives the feeling that the world being shown is a world that actually exists on its own. In the opening scene Theo walks out of a coffee shop which is blown up only moments later. With traditional Hollywood style editing the film would cut to various wide shots to establish the location outside of the coffee shop, but with this single-shot style the camera pans around to show us different details of the world without forcing our attention on to specific shots with a cut. By eliminating cuts, the viewer is given a sense that the events taking place on screen are completely unscripted and the camera just happens to be there as they are happening

Traditional Hollywood editing limits what is shown to specific sections of a room or street; the camera cuts between a few set angles and rarely shows 360 degrees of an environment or location. Replacing cuts with a master shot that pans around creates a sense of openness; the world exists wherever the camera happens to turn and it is easy to believe that the world exists even beyond what is shown or what is just out of frame. One example of this is at the very start of the film where Theo walks out of a coffee shop. The handheld camera follows behind Theo and looks around the city just as someone stepping out for the first time would be distracted by the trivial details of the city. This free movement creates a sense that the world exists in its entirety and if the camera were to pan just a little bit more we wouldn’t see the edge of a movie set. Instead of cutting back to Theo the camera turns and catches up with the spot he has stopped at on the street. The lack of cutting in this scene **creates a sense of spontaneity;** we feel like we haven’t missed anything that has happened and we know exactly how much time has elapsed since Theo left the shop before it was blown to bits. We also don’t feel like we are being tricked or shown something that hasn’t actually happened because the camera moves as if someone is holding it and guiding it naturally in an un-scripted way (especially when the camera “runs” towards the explosion as if to see what happened).

*Children of Men* is edited and presented in a very linear fashion. Every scene leads into the scene following it and no time is omitted from the story. **Flashbacks are not used**. Each time the film cuts from one scene to the next it is not implied that events happened in between the scene that just finished and the scene that is starting. This style also adds to the sense that the audience is being shown a world that is real; the film shows a complete story from start to finish and nothing is left out. Because nothing is **omitted the viewer is also given a sense that everything is happening in real time** and that we follow Theo on every step of his journey throughout the film. The camera movement and editing also keep our attention on Theo; everything is presented in a very subjective (biased) manner by the end of the film. An example of this subjective camera movement is the scene where the car Theo is traveling in is attacked and the group has to escape by driving backwards. When the car finally comes to a stop the camera gets out with Theo as he exits the car. The camera then pans to the road and frames awkwardly on the dead officers before cutting, an edit that draws attention to the way the group murdered the officers and then fled.

Traditional Hollywood action scenes are edited to create a very fast pace and rhythm where close ups are ordered to draw attention to the action itself**. One of the most innovative scenes in *Children of Men* is close to the end of the film where Theo is fleeing through the streets of a raging battle and makes his way up the stairs of a building to find Kee with the baby.** The absence of cuts in this sequence ultimately makes the scene more effective because the viewer’s attention, and the camera movement, is focused entirely on Theo and his survival as he dodges heavy fire. Cutting to different shots of surrounding soldiers or explosions would draw attention away from Theo and focus it on the war itself which is unimportant to the story which is centred on Theo reaching his goal of getting Kee and the baby safely to The Tomorrow. The lack of cuts also allows the viewer to feel like they are traveling alongside Theo in real time. Immediately following this scene, which is the longest shot in the film, is a sequence where editing is used to create meaning between various images that wouldn’t exist in a single long take.

As Theo and Kee walk slowly through a battleground that has frozen for a moment in time near the end of the movie they pass by the soldiers that are discovering the baby for the first time. The story is told through a series of cuts between Theo, Kee, the baby, and the reaction of those they are passing by. **The use of cuts to move back and forth between the baby and those watching as it passes by draws attention to specific groups of people that are watching the baby.** As they are progressing down the stairs Theo and Kee reach a solider that sees the baby and orders his fellow soldiers to cease firing. Meaning is created by the order and timing of cuts in this sequence; we see Theo and Kee, then we see the soldier ordering for cease fire, then we see a close up of the baby as he is carried down the stairs. A long shot would not have achieved the same effect for this particular scene because by actively cutting back and forth between the baby and onlookers the viewer’s attention is focused on the relationship between these groups of people instead of the scene as a whole.

Cuaron uses many new and innovative techniques in *Children of Men* to successfully create a sense of reality where the viewer is able to see the world of the film as if it were their own world. Carefully implemented editing techniques keep the viewer focused on the important characters and emotions throughout the film and.  The stylistic choices made by Alfonso Cuaron ultimately allow the viewer to connect with the film on a more natural level instead of being overwhelmed by complex editing that would distract from the film.