

Children of men – long takes



Children of Men is a 2006 British dystopian science fiction film co-written and directed by Alfonso Cuarón. The film was based on future; 2027, and how no child had been born in any part of the world for eighteen years. The world had descended in disorder, with most of the governments in the world being collapsed (From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). That left United Kingdom as one of the only remaining organized society. As a result millions of refugees entered United Kingdom to seek asylum but Britain had become a militarized police state. Due to which the army forcefully detained all illegal immigrants and suspected supporters.

A long take is known as plan- séquence or sequence shot in French. It is basically a shot that is not interrupted with any cuts. It lasts longer than the conventional time of a shot or editing pace and is a strong creative tool in the world of movie making. The camera keeps on moving, rotates, goes over the shoulders, change its position but without stopping the camera or shooting for even a second. It is usually used to create a dramatic and narrative effect or emphasize on a particular scene to capture attention.

It is not possible to shoot a feature- length movie in one take because a 35mm camera reel typically runs for only eleven minutes whereas an extended 16mm reels of the tape can run up to thirty minutes. Although with digital video, it is possible to shoot for over two hours on a single tape (Bordwell, Thompson, Film Art- an Introduction); for example in the movie Russian Ark by Alexander Sokurov. He was able to manage a ninety- six minutes film in a long take.

It is obvious that a long take requires much more hard work compared to short takes or cuts because while shooting a long take, there are no rooms for mistakes. If anything goes wrong, the entire scene would have to be shot all over again from the beginning and so on. So the scenes have to be perfectly choreographed and performed by the characters. Luckily, the director of the movie; Alfonso Cuarón is highly known for carrying out long takes and manipulating the footage into smooth long takes. Before *Children of men*, he had performed successful long takes in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and *Y tu mamá también*.

Even though the movie *Children of Men* consists of heavy editing and short shots but some highlighting scenes are done in extraordinary long takes. This allowed the director to carry out certain aspects of narrative or non-narrative form with the different stylistic options. Mixing long and short shots also creates parallels and contrasts among scenes (Bordwell, Thompson, Film Art- an Introduction). Making the viewers visualize the state of the world and condition they were living in due to lack of peace and infertility amongst women.

The film *Children of Men* features numerous long takes but with four striking major ones. In the first one which was at the very beginning of the movie, a bomb blast happened right after Theo came out of a café. In that long take the director was able to achieve in showing the viewer pretty much what the movie was going to be about. For instance beginning from the bomb blast and then slowly drifting the attention towards the streets. The cars were old and damaged; regardless of being the future technology had reversed, instead of moving forward it had either stopped or was being extinct. In that

long take the director was able to capture many events that made perfect sense to the viewer. For example the cars passing by, suddenly a bomb blast happens, everything near the blast gets destroyed, screams of the wounded and the people nearby could be heard.

In the second long take scene it was shown that five people which included the refugees who were a part of an underground resistance group advocating equal rights for all immigrants in Great Britain called *Fishes* were in a car, heading towards their hideaways along with their leader Julian and her separated husband Theo; an activist turned apathetic bureaucrat.

That car scene recaptures one's concentration and makes it almost impossible to figure out the camera's position. It is astonishing how skillfully the camera angles and positions have been choreographed without the scene seeming formless. Some shots are being taken from where Julian is sitting and then from the back, from the side, from the top, front etc. It looked as though the actors were making the video themselves.

It is almost unbelievable with the camera moving to all sorts of radical perspectives; the actors are giving out marvelous performances along with the chaos. For example the ping pong ball scene seemed too good to be real, that how can two people actually do that so accurately without a cut? After which, out of the corner of an eye, a flaming car appeared, as soon as the driver hits reverse refugees and other madmen come out of the woods with sticks and start attacking the car. In all the confusion a motorbike appears with a gun and shoots Julian. Without a cut maintaining continuity, suddenly

Julian was covered with blood all over, which gave the viewer a jaw dropping outcome.

The car that they were driving was completely modified in reality; the seats were able to tilt and lower the actors out of the way of the camera. The windshield was designed to tilt to support the camera movement in and out through the windscreen (From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). Whereas in Alfred Hitchcock's movie *Rope*, to shoot the long takes, furniture was continuously being moved and modified and then put back to where it was by the spot boys so that the cameras and camera men could move easily.

Though similar to *Children of Men*, instead of the car windshield, the walls in *Rope* were able to glide and were mobile also to accommodate the camera movements.

After experiencing the first two long takes, the viewer holds their breath as soon as the next long take comes, expecting something terrible or thrilling to happen. The director didn't let the viewers down and performed a truly heart wrecking scene. It was the scene in which Kee gives birth to a child. One can swear that the girl gave birth in real life, exposing a bit of her flesh in between her legs, a real crying new born baby with its cord still attached, covered in blood escapes the mother's womb into the hands of Theo. It was truly a beautiful scene, beautifully conducted and accomplished.

However the last major long take scene felt as though a nightmare had been ripped out of your own head and put on the screen. And what made it more unbearable and tear-jerking was the way it had been shot in a long take of about six minutes. The way camera followed Theo and Kee in the scene in

which a major war was happening. Continuous bomb blasts and open fires in between the UK's army and the refugees were going on, people kept on falling and dying, without any cut in the shot the blood sprang from the wounded bodies. In just one scene so much was going on without narration. The director was able to capture more than one outstanding performance. We could see Luke taking away Kee on a wheel chair and at the same moment the other members of fishes were about to kill Theo and his helpers.

Due to the long takes used, it was impossible for the viewer to lose interest in the film as something extraordinary, unexpected or shocking always happened. Throughout the long takes the fluidity of the camera movement from one camera angle to the next enabled the viewer to get a closer look, perhaps an inside look, into the world the characters were living in and really felt the threats and dangers that they were in at that moment.

WORKS CITED

1. ¹ (Bordwell, Thompson, Film Art- An Introduction, 209)
2. ² (Bordwell, Thompson, Film Art- An Introduction, 209)