***Children of Men – close analysis of scenes***

**Opening scene** – starts with sound only, establishes the use of news broadcasts & TV as a plot device.

Opening shot of people watching TV – note that they are seen almost from the p.o.v. of the screen they are watching. (The camera is slightly to one side). Theo pushes into the scene, characterised by people staring, grief-struck, at the screen in the coffee shop.

The shot cuts to the screen itself, showing realistic-looking film footage of “Baby Diego,” – note “grief music” in background, which will occur again in the scene at Theo’s work – then to Theo leaving the shop with his coffee. The camera, which has been looking down on the crowd in the shop, drops to eye level to follow him out. This is quite a drawn-out shot, the first of its kind in the movie, as the camera becomes like a person following Theo, and exploits the contrast between the crowded, slightly dingy and cramped atmosphere of the shop and the harsh bright openness of the street outside. The camera takes in the streetscape as the subtitle tells us what city, day and date it is, then it pans around and finds Theo again as he walks up to a pavement cabinet and parks his coffee on it while he spikes it with whiskey. The camera approaches him and moves right around him, panning to keep him in frame so that it ends up facing back towards the coffee shop while Theo pockets his bottle of whiskey. When the bomb goes off in the coffee shop it is brutally realistic – it’s not enhanced and slowed down, like so many Hollywood explosions, but is a very short, sharp crack. Still in the same shot, the camera leaves Theo, who has backed out of the frame, and runs towards the bombed cafe, where from the smoke – reminiscent of doco footage of 9/11 - a woman emerges holding her own severed arm and screaming, her voice blending into the sound of sirens in the background, and to the sound of the ringing in Theo’s ears. Then the shot cuts to the title – white on plain black.

In these three opening shots a number of hallmarks of this film have already been established:

1. The use of news footage to provide what little background information we need to understand the plot – note the name of the broadcaster – the BCC, an obvious reference to (and dig at) the BBC;
2. The use of a moving camera that follows the action and cuts from shot to shot only when necessary. The camera in this film is a mobile, active witness to events;
3. The use of a very cold, dull film stock that emphasises greys, blues and greens and dulls back brighter, warmer colours – this becomes more obvious when the camera moves outside;
4. The attention to detail to create a sense of realism – the street is recognisable, St Paul’s cathedral can be seen at the end of it, the police officers only look slightly different from the actual British copper, the motorised trishaws seem to blend in to the London traffic along with the familiar red double decker bus, and the only slightly unusual notes are the huge heap of uncollected garbage bags on the footpath, and the use of screens with moving images on the sides of buses, vans and buildings.

What else does the opening tell us? That the film is set in a time of social unrest elsewhere in the world – the reference to the “siege of Seattle” and mosques being occupied by the US army; that Britain has become a closed society, with all immigration rendered illegal under the “Homeland Security Bill” – Homeland Security is a direct reference to laws passed in the US post-9/11; and that no one has been born in the world since the year 2009. It also shows Theo as an outsider – he is not affected by the news of Baby Diego’s death like everyone else seems to be. He is also shown as somewhat dependant on alcohol. Finally, the bombing itself suggests social instability and the vulnerability of the ordinary person to acts of violence.