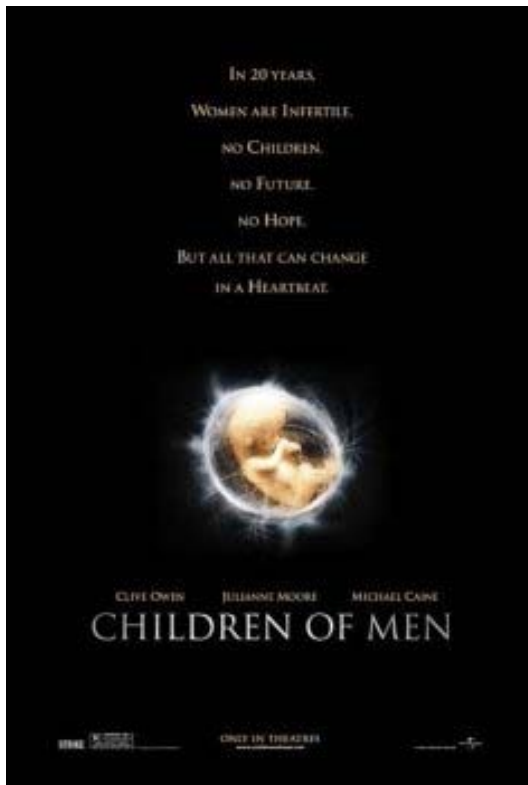


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***Children of Men* (2006)**



Slavoj Zizek Responds to *Children of Men*

On the DVD edition of the film, philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Zizek provides commentary and observations about Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men*. According to the interview, the filmmaker recently spent time with Mr. Zizek after identifying him as an important element in his research because of the unique philosophical view he offers on both the implementation of governmental power, and the damaged emotional state of a refugee.

In this excerpt from the transcript, Zizek discusses issues including the foreground/background dynamics of the film, infertility and politics. Zizek brings a complex and informative view on *Children of Men's* portrayal of London, the emotional state of the characters and overall vision of the film.

“For me, *Children of Men* is a model of a kind of materialist subversion of a reactionary classic, because the novel is obviously a spiritualist Christian parable of resuscitation, bringing new life and so on. The novel ends with baptizing. It's a clear Christian parable. The film is a model of how you can take a reactionary text, change some details here and

there and you get a totally different story. I would say that it's a realist film, but in what sense? Hegel in his aesthetics says that a good portrayal looks more like the person who is portrayed than the person itself. A good portrayal is more you than you are yourself. And I think this is what the film does with our reality. The changes that the film introduces do not point toward alternate reality, they simply make reality more what it already is. I think this is the true vocation of science fiction. Science fiction realism introduces a change that makes us see better. The nightmare that we are expecting is here.

So this I think is the true despair of the film. It's not so much about infertility. I think it's problematic to focus on infertility and then do the obvious spiritualist trick and say 'oh but you know this biological infertility is really a metaphor for spiritual infertility' or whatever. I think that we should avoid this cheap direct spiritualist reading of the film. I think that the true infertility is the very lack of meaningful historical experience. It's a society of pure meaningless historical experience. Today, ideology is no longer big causes such as socialism, equality, justice, democracy. The basic injunction is 'have a good time' or to put it in more spiritualist terms 'realize yourself. This is why I think Dalai Lama is such a big hit. He preaches enlightened egoism; be happy, realize your potentials and so on. And this is our despair today.

I think that this film gives the best diagnosis of the ideological despair of late capitalism. Of a society without history, or to use another political term, biopolitics. And my god, this film literally is about biopolitics. The basic problem in this society as depicted in the film is literally biopolitics: how to generate, regulate life. But again, I think the crucial point is that this obvious fact shouldn't deceive us. The true despair is precisely that; all historical acts disappear. Like all those classical statues are there, but they are deprived of a world. They are totally meaningless, because what does it mean to have a statue of Michaelangelo? It only works if it signals a certain world. And when this world is lacking, it's nothing. It all depends on whether we have a world. Do we have some horizon that makes it meaningful? It's against this background that I think the film approaches the topic of immigration and so on.”



“Julian and Theo met because of what they believed in. They wanted to change the world, and their faith brought them together.” - Jasper



Discussing *Children of Men*

Critics have described the film being centered about social disintegration, dystopia, birth, and reluctant heroism. How would you describe the main themes of the film?

How do you interpret the varied responses of characters to the death of “baby” Diego? Is it valid for whole cultures to claim that “infertility is God’s punishment”?

Considering the premise of human infertility in the film, what social institutions would go away after 18 such years? How would jobs and daily routines evolve? What would our relationships be like?

During an early sequence of the film, a television reports that major cities around the world have fallen, that only Britain remains strong. What do you think happened to the other 7 billion people who didn’t “soldier on”?

Considering the context of the film, and the appearance of large cities, what advantage is there to maintaining things that are broken or collapsed?

What do you think about the drug *Quietus*?

Jasper speaks of “faith in praxis” when discussing Theo and Julian. What are the roles of faith and chance in the film?

What does it mean that dogs and cats take to Theo?

What is the cinematic significance of orchestrating and choreographing long, elaborately fluid camera work, often times (according the director) using one take with limited cuts? Consider the 12 minute ambush sequence and the climax sequence (complete with blood spatters on the camera lens).

Why did Theo and Julian drift apart? Why did Julian’s gang turn on Theo and Kee (both by attacking Jasper, and in the shantytown climax)? Why does Syd turn on Theo and Kee?

What is the root cause of the dystopian reality of this film? How do you explain the violence?

Do you believe that “everything happens for a reason,” as Miriam asserts?

Critics have claimed that this film represents the expressionistic doom that haunts our imaginations that the vision presented in this film is a truth our collective consciousness already understands and fears as a potential future reality. What does the future look like to you? Do you envision something like this film? Why or why not?

What is “civilization”? Can your vision of “civilization” survive the challenges posed by this film?

What constitutes being a “terrorist”?

Considering the opening and closing credits, and the backgrounds to each sequence. What role do music and sound play in the film?

How do you interpret the sequence depicted in the image to the left? What causes the violence to cease just as fast as it erupts?

Some critics have argued that the real story of this film is happening entirely in the background. How do you interpret this position, considering the infinite layers of detail, thought and planning that would have brought the story world to this cinematic space we take for granted as reality?

What is the significance of the film’s title?

What is the “message” of the film?

“I liked *Children of Men*. What do I view next?”

- The Time Machine* (1960, George Pal)
- Alphaville* (1965, Jean-Luc Godard)
- Fahrenheit 451* (1966, François Truffaut)
- The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976, Nicolas Roeg)
- Brave New World* (1980, Burt Brinckerhoff)
- 1984* (1984, Michael Radford)
- Brazil* (1985, Terry Gilliam)
- The Handmaid’s Tale* (1990, Volker Schlöndorff)
- The Stand* (1994, Mick Garris)
- 12 Monkeys* (1995, Terry Gilliam)
- The City of Lost Children* (1995, Jean-Pierre Jeunet)

