

SUPA English

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### Scarface

The movie Scarface is a dramatized representation of the crime-filled streets of Miami, Florida in the early 1980's. It follows the fictional character, Tony Montana, who comes to Miami during the Mariel Boatlift in 1980. The movie outlines how Montana quickly succumbs to the tempting lifestyle of drug dealing and how it led him to the top of the underground drug world of Miami. Scarface employs many different ideas of control and power throughout the movie. It also makes use of the ideas of surveillance, socioeconomic class issues, and a main governing force of the drug world. Because of these concepts, a Marxist, Althusser, and Foucault reading of the film provides a further understanding of these issues of power and control.

The film starts off with an "actual footage" clip of the Mariel Boatlift and explains how over 125,000 refugees were sent from Cuba to the shores of Florida as an apparent "benevolent act" on Fidel Castro's part. However, it is explained that this act was more of a ploy to rid Cuba of all of her criminals, drug addicts, and mentally insane. Although many were not of this dreadful status, the film uses this dark fact to foreshadow the crimes that were to unfold on the streets of Miami.

In Karl Marx's essay, *Alienated Labor*, he states "a direct consequence of man's alienation from the product of his work, from his life activity, and from his species-existence, is the alienation of man from man." Marx was saying that when men engage in highly monotonous labor, they become separated from their work as well as their fellow man. In the film, Montana gets a job washing dishes at a little roadside restaurant called Little Havana as he waits to become an American. Along with the other Cuban refugees, Montana lives his day to day life growing increasingly detached from his surroundings. When they are not working their dead-end jobs, Montana and his fellow campmates take part in only the basic life supporting activities such as eating and sleeping. This bare existence lends itself to the detached feeling that Montana, as well as many of the refugees, experience; as they work more and more, their labor makes them more and more alienated until they are almost completely isolated from the world as well as each other. Eventually, Marx realized that man becomes "aware" when he is completely objective as stated in his essay, "the practical creation of an objective world, the treatment of inorganic nature, is proof that man is a conscious species-being..." The manipulation of the inorganic world (the labor) gives rise to said subjugated laborer, and when they have this knowledge, they rebel. This occurs when Montana, along with the refugees, realize they are being subjugated by the Americans who were forcing them into the tedious labor. Because of this, there is a social upheaval in the refugee camp which causes a change in the social order and the Americans begin allotting long promised green cards. Once Montana is "freed" from the grasp of the alienated labor that was subjugating him, he is again subjugated, but this time by the rich and powerful. Marx stated, "To be sure, labor produces marvels for the wealthy but it produces deprivation for the worker." He was saying that those in power gain all the benefits of the production whilst the worker loses due to this labor. Montana was employed by a rich Cuban who had a personal

vendetta with a communist political refugee. He got Montana to murder this refugee before he left the camp. This exemplifies how those in power [the rich Cuban] can gain from labor [the murder] whilst the subjugated laborer [Montana] loses something (in this case Montana loses some of his humanity due to the murder).

Once Montana was freed from the confines of the camp, he was quickly swept up in the drug dealing world of the Miami underground. He soon finds himself working for the prominent drug dealer of Miami. An Althusser reading of the film provides a clearer understanding as to how the drug world maintains a sense of control and obedience over its drug mules and workers. Althusser proposed that there were two ideas that made subjects [drug mules] follow the rules of the state [the drug cartel]. The first idea is called Repressive State Apparatuses, such as prisons or police, which physically force subjects to follow the rules of the State; the second idea is called Ideological State Apparatuses, such as religion and schools, which engrain ideas to subjects so that they “unknowingly” follow the rules. In Scarface, the RSA is applied to the physical violence of the drug cartel to keep its laborers loyal. In one scene, Montana travels to Columbia with a fellow employee to negotiate a massive cocaine deal for his boss with the head of the Columbian Drug Cartel. As Montana and his confidante are sitting and discussing the deal with the Drug Lord, a bodyguard comes up to Montana’s partner and asks him to come check the drugs to make sure they were up to par. A couple minutes later, a helicopter swoops overhead and that same partner is thrown out and hanged in front of Montana and the Drug Lord. The Drug Lord reveals to Montana that the partner could not be trusted because of his past. He then tells Montana that if he betrays his trust, then he will succumb to the same fate. This scene clearly shows how the drug world uses intense violence and the threat of death to physically keep its subjects following the rules. The film also employs the concept of ISA, but in a different

manner than Althusser proposed; instead of a religion or school that keeps the workers following the rules of the drug dealers, it is the manipulative prospects they engrain in the workers' minds that keeps them loyal. As Montana gains standing in the eyes of the drug dealers of Miami, as well as the Drug Cartel, there is one thing they tell him over and over again; "be loyal and you will go so far in this business"; "if you keep working hard, then you can have anything you want"; or "you can have all the power and money if you maintain a good name in this business." Basically, the drug dealers are using the idea of power and fortune to keep Montana loyal to them and coerce him into doing life threatening drug deals; they manipulate him so that he will unconsciously be obedient. This obedience raises the thought as to how these workers become subjects in the first place? In Althusser's *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, he states, "Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects." The structural ideology of the drug world works in a manner to give individualization to all the laborers who are employed by it. This allows for a sense of "self" which leads to self-empowerment which then leads to submission to an ideology or structured idea. This is the case in Scarface where Montana and the other workers of the drug dealers are told that they personally can make anything of themselves in the drug business as well as being told that they are personally "extremely important" to the organization; they are under the impression that they are working for "themselves" and they have the illusion that they have the power to make their own decisions, which leads them to be subjects of the drug dealers.

With the death of the main drug dealer of Miami, Montana steps in to take on the dead man's role. His power begins to grow exponentially and those dreams of money, fortune, and social standing begin to unfold in front of him. Unfortunately, this new height of power that is at his fingertips, along with an indulgent cocaine habit, leads him to be extremely paranoid and he begins exercising an immense amount of control. He fulfills this control by using surveillance as

well as having a highly structured and regimented schedule for everyone in his life. A Foucault reading of the film lends itself to how Montana maintains this control. "In which each individual is constantly located, examined, and distributed among the living beings, the sick, and the dead- all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism." Foucault stated about the exercise of control employing a highly visible model. In the movie, Montana buys a mansion in the highly exclusive Ocean Drive. Then he fixes his abode with a highly secure perimeter, the house being centrally located on the land, and a highly complex system of security cameras that adorn every room of the house as well as the area of the property. In his office, which is also centrally located in the house, Montana exercises his power and control by watching every monitor that displays the events ensuing around his home. This highly visible model that Montana creates in the film allows him to exercise the utmost control because everything is clearly seen and it is impossible for something to happen without his knowledge. In one scene, Montana sees an unmarked white van pull up alongside his property. He becomes uneasy by the sight and immediately acts by sending someone to deal with the matter; this shows the immediate and total control that Montana has over his subjects. Also, Montana maintains control over his subjects by demanding to know exactly what they are doing and when they are doing it. This extends to his business partner, his sister, and his wife. Even if it is something as small as going on a date, Montana has to know about it, which creates a sense of constant "visibility" and control. The position of Montana, whenever he goes out to clubs, is linked to Bentham's Panopticon. "It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power." Foucault stated about the Panopticon. Whenever Montana went out to clubs, he sat in the VIP section which was centralized and in a position where he had constant visibility of the crowd, but they could not see him. This allows for Montana to gain control because he can see each person

individually and what they are doing and they cannot see him; and if he needs to, he can react immediately. In one scene, he watches his kid sister dancing with a guy he does not like and once they leave to go to the bathroom, he acts instantly. He storms into the bathroom and beats the guy up and slaps his sister; showing how Montana can maintain constant control over his subjects [his sister and her friend] and how it takes away their power whilst making them highly individualized (he is watching each one of them individually).

The prevalence of the ideas of control in Scarface are linked together by all three ideologies of Marx, Althusser, and Foucault. These ideas work together in a manner to illustrate how Tony Montana grew in power and wealth and how that had an effect on his own exercise of control and power of others. When Montana arrives in Florida, a Marxist interpretation reveals that he is a subjugated laborer that eventually rebels due to the oppression of the labor. However, once he is swept up into the underground drug world of Miami, he is further oppressed by Althusser's ideas of ISAs and RSAs and interpellation that physically and unconsciously force Montana to be obedient and follow the rules of the drug cartel. It was not until Montana took over for the fallen drug dealer that he became the center of power; however, once he did, he began exercising a massive amount of centralized control over his own subjects by the means of the "Panoptic VIP seating area" as well as a complete surveillance system around his home. This movie shows the transition of an "alienated laborer" to one who is a centralized governing force of others. Despite this transition of power, Tony Montana is eventually consumed by the dark sides of the drug world and those dreams he dreamt so fondly of subsequently lead to his demise.

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### A Pleasant View of Marxism

Pleasantville is a town that exemplifies a utopian society. Every citizen in Pleasantville follows a script or routine throughout the day. There are no fires, or rain. Sex has not been introduced to the people of Pleasantville. And most importantly there is no color, just a black and white world. The movie Pleasantville gives many hints of Marxist ideals. Under the perfect society that two outsiders are thrown into, they learn that a perfect society is one of limits and boundaries.

On numerous accounts a few issues have risen in Pleasantville. There are issues of status in the school system such as David not being as hip and popular as his sister. He knows that he does not have the status to do much therefore he is unable to confront a girl that he has interest. Being placed in the lower part of the social status limits his interactions with the majority of the students. There are also race issues embedded in the town Pleasantville. Not necessarily race as in ethnicity but race as in the color of one's skin. When color starts spreading all over Pleasantville signs were put in certain shops that read, "No Coloreds". In combination with another sign that referenced "all true citizens" of Pleasantville, it is obvious that those with colored skin are looked down upon on and not accepted in this society. Issues of gender roles are lightly addressed for instance when George explains to his friends at the bowling alley that there was no dinner when he got home, everybody gasps in amazement. It is expected that the wives are to have dinner ready when their spouse gets home and that they must iron their shirts. This is explained when one of the people at the bowling alley reveal that his wife has burned an imprint

of an iron into his shirt. Women are expected to maintain the household, raise the children, and cook for the family while the men are to go to work and earn money to pay for the families expenses. It follows the notion that the husband makes the choices in the relationship. When George tells Betty that she is to put on make up to cover up the color she refuses to comply and George is rendered in a state of confusion.

When one has been reading the same script and following the same routine, they start to get adjusted to it and label it as the norm. This way of life becomes what people refer to as the “real world”. Expressed in Louis Althusser’s “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” by Mary Klages, “So the “real world” becomes, not something that is objectively out there, but something that is the product of our relations to it, and of the ideological representations we make of it—the stories we tell ourselves about what is real become what is real”, reveals that as every day passes the citizens of Pleasantville grow attached to their world. When color was introduced to the people of Pleasantville, they were baffled. They did not know what this foreign thing originated from. A few citizens embraced it while the majority of them rejected it and grew to hate it. When Betty first was inflicted with this colorful ailment, she was scared to face her husband and the mayor fearing that they would look at her differently. When presented with change, people are naturally hesitant in general. Since the original scheme of things was working, why would somebody want to change it? When color started spreading to a good majority of the people, signs were erected that said, “No Coloreds”, signifying that what is not normal is not welcomed in this society.

The populace follows a routine that they carry out on a day-to-day basis. Everyday George, Betty’s husband, comes home he says, “Honey, I’m home!” and is greeted with a, “Hello Darling” from Betty. But one day when George returns from his job and says his line but



there is no one to greet him. The setting is darker than normal and there is thunder (something that has also been introduced) roaring in the background. He is left confused as he repeats his line, "Honey, I'm home!", again in hopes that he would be answered. But no one is there. Things have changed and what he thought pleasant life was is not so pleasant any more. Someone who was not as resistant to change but rather embraced it was Bill Johnson. When Bud was late to his job Bill states, "I didn't know what to do". Bud explains to him that he can do the morning routine by himself without him and he complies. When Bud is not there to close the shop with him he decides to close the shop by himself. He tells Bud that since, he "wasn't around this time, so I did the thing by myself." The optimistic music begins to play signally a positive change has occurred. He goes on say, "Not only that but I didn't even do it in the same order." He has accepted the change and he welcomes it with open arms.

Althusser's two major mechanisms for control are what he calls RSA's and ISA's. An example of a RSA would be the prison and court system. An RSA is defined as something that "has the power to force you physically to behave". When Bill and Bud are thrown in jail for painting the mural they are forced to sit in solitude. Big Bob, the mayor of Pleasantville, wants to punish them for promoting radical change to his town. In contrast ISA's are "institutions which generate ideologies which we as individuals (and groups) then internalize, and act in accordance with." An example of an ISA would be the school of Pleasantville. The school teaches the student's that the "geography of Main Street is different than the geography of Elm Street" and that the "end of Main Street is just the beginning again". Families can also be classified as an ISA because they teach their children how to behave and pass on their family values to them.

There is one good example of surveillance in the movie, Pleasantville. The old TV repair man in the beginning of the movie magically appears on the doorstep of the David and Jennifer's

house as soon as the shattering of the TV remote is heard. It is not coincidence that he just happened to show up without any prior warning. He was watching them. In Michael Foucault's Panopticism, it states "...whether the inhabitants have anything to complain of; they "observe their actions"". When the remote breaks David says the following, "No I can't, it's a new TV it doesn't work without a remote", and as soon as he finished his sentence, the door bell rings and in comes the TV repairman. Before the two siblings, David and Jennifer, are put into Pleasantville, the mysterious TV repairman is seated in his van. So how does he know the two of them are causing so much commotion in Pleasantville? He says, "I'll be honest with you Bud, I'm getting a little concerned about all some of these reruns. Like when Margret Henderson makes her cookies for Whitey, those are not your cookies Bud." In a van there is no imaginable way that he could've seen the events that happened in Pleasantville. It is a total mystery of how he knows the disorder that is happening in Pleasantville. As an aside from Foucault's ideas of surveillance, The TV repairman's van read's the following, "We'll fix you for good". This is a prime example of what Althusser calls interpellation. Mary Klages from the University of Colorado explains Althusser's notion of Interpellation in terms of advertisements seen today, "Each instance of "you" in that as was an interpellation –the ad seeming to address me personally." The van states that it will fix "you" which makes "you" the subject. An important thing to note in Pleasantville is the Chamber of Commerce. The idea of hierarchy is subtly expressed throughout this organization. Lead by the mayor, the Chamber of Commerce is the higher power of Pleasantville and the citizens become the inmates while the actual town becomes the penitentiary. The physical boundaries of Pleasantville never end nor begin. As expressed by one of the school teachers that the, "end of Main Street is just the beginning again". If there is no

beginning now end that must mean it follows a cyclical structure which is essential for a panoptic design.

The more a person works the more he becomes detached to himself. Such ideas are expressed in Karl Marx's Alienated Labor. In contrast to the teachers in Pleasantville, the teachers in David's world are uninspiring and unenthusiastic. They lecture on how the life of the students will be hard and how "good grades are your only ticket through". They teach the students about death, famine, and other depressing matters. When the camera turns towards the students, all you see is the same boring stare. Their facial expressions express that they are indeed alienated from themselves. "Society must divide into the two classes of proprietors and propertyless workers" in Alienated Labor follows the same notion of the separation between teacher and student. Another exemplar of alienated labor resides in Bill Johnson and his new found dislike for his job. Bill says, "What's the point Bud?" "It's all the same ... it never changes, it never gets any better or worse." He is tired of the same old routine from day to day and when he closed down the shop by himself he said that he, "really liked it though". In response to all of this, Bud expresses the key statement that explains the ideas of Marx's thoughts on alienated labor, "You can't always like what you do. Sometimes you just gotta do it because it's your job and even if you don't like it you just gotta do it anyway". Bill working at his job everyday is an example of, "The more the worker appropriates the external world and sensuous nature through his labor, the more he deprives himself of the means of life" as written in Alienated Labor. It is only when Bud and Mary Sue (also known as David and Jennifer) introduce color into his world that he breaks free from his depressing work and starts creating, in Marx's words, "according to the laws of beauty."

It seems as though Pleasantville is embedded with the thoughts of Althusseur, Foucault, and Marx subtly planted in this movie. It also addresses issues of race, gender, and social status. When watching this movie the thought comes into our minds, "Is a true utopian society really obtainable?" In the movie, Pleasantville was our model of a utopia but with the introduction of the two foreigners its structure seemed to crumble. In order for a utopian society to be prevalent there must be some type of control for without control there would be chaos and disorder.