



The Influence of Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses in Annie Baker's The Flick

تأثير الأيديولوجيا وأجهزة الدولة الأيديولوجية في رواية آني بيكر "ذا فليك"

Assistant lecturer: Najwa Dhea Mahmood

Affiliation: General Directorate of Diyala Education

Abstract

This research paper examines Annie Baker's play The Flick through the lens of ideology and the state's ideological apparatus. The study aims to elucidate how social norms, beliefs, and power structures operate in everyday life and influence individual behavior. It analyzes the characters, their actions, and their interrelationships to explain how culture and "everyday life" function as subtle forms of social control. The analysis reveals that The Flick offers a realistic portrayal of life in a small movie theater, illustrating how social norms and power dynamics shape decision-making, manifested through seemingly innocuous actions such as casual conversations and work rituals. The findings suggest that ideology operates not only through legal or political institutions but also within the social fabric of everyday interaction, in both work and personal relationships. The play combines realistic narrative with symbolism to reveal the power of social norms and cultural conventions in shaping behavior, often without the conscious awareness of individuals.

Email:

najwa.dhea.mahmood@ec.edu.iq

Published: 1- 9 -2026

Keywords: The Flick;
ideological state apparatus;
ideology; social power; everyday
life; culture

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المخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية مسرحية "ذا فليك" للكاتبة آني بيكر من منظور الأيديولوجيا وجهاز الدولة الأيديولوجي. تهدف الدراسة إلى توضيح كيفية عمل المعايير الاجتماعية والمعتقدات وبنى السلطة في الحياة اليومية وتأثيرها على سلوك الأفراد. تحلل الدراسة الشخصيات وأفعالها وعلاقاتها المتبادلة لشرح كيف تعمل الثقافة و"الحياة اليومية" كأشكال خفية من الضبط الاجتماعي. يكشف التحليل أن مسرحية "ذا فليك" تقدم تصويرًا واقعيًا للحياة في دار سينما صغيرة، موضحةً كيف تشكل المعايير الاجتماعية وديناميكيات السلطة عملية صنع القرار، والتي تتجلى من خلال أفعال تبدو بريئة، مثل المحادثات العابرة وطقوس العمل. تشير النتائج إلى أن الأيديولوجيا لا تعمل فقط من خلال المؤسسات القانونية أو السياسية، بل أيضًا ضمن النسيج الاجتماعي للتفاعل اليومي، في كل من علاقات العمل والعلاقات الشخصية. تجمع المسرحية بين السرد الواقعي والرمزية للكشف عن قوة المعايير الاجتماعية والأعراف الثقافية في تشكيل السلوك، غالبًا دون وعي الأفراد.

Introduction

The Flick by Annie Baker is a beautifully written piece set in an old, very small Massachusetts movie theater and concerns the day-to-day lives of those who work inside it with melodies of longing, sadness, and moments of joy. Baker uses the space of theatre to highlight the differences between live theatre and film. In addition, it offers a deeper exploration of how technology, including digital film and the availability of DVDs, reiterates or transforms audience perception as well as our understanding of what constitutes true art. *The Flick* highlights the exceptional aspects of live theater and how much each performance depends on the audience. It also raises a deeper question about life, labor, and the ways culture and technology shape human experience (Gardner, 2016).

The setting of the play takes place in a rundown movie theater, which is then iconic and seems to be the general main setting for each of those characters. This is where the majority of action takes place — tightening up to a claustrophobic stage for an entire universe. All the characters work on a daily routine, doing repetitious things like cleaning floors and selling tickets. They are ruled by the theater, over their bodies and lives. The characters feel trapped because they are in the same place. And though their exchanges are straightforward enough, all the anxiety and reflection lurking below the surface is very subtle.

The play unfolds as a series of vignettes, a meditation on what the silence is filled by and what is not through things as basic as an average mourning day. Instead of a big, dramatic event, the play simply depicts everyday life in detail. The play acknowledges this through setting, pacing, and repetitive nature of the actions of the characters living in constrained spaces searching for meaning from their lives (Ahmed, Shafi & Javaid 2025).

Althusser recognizes two types of state domination. The first, the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), includes civil institutions like government, police, army, courts, prisons and so on; where these systems function largely via

force or violence. ISAs — of which the second part incorporates schools, churches, media and cultural institutions. ISAs bring ideas and beliefs but not violence. These tools are used to shape the minds and behaviors of people in order to keep support for the state, which separates them from the RSA. Althusser reminds us that the list of ISAs is already on trial; its endorsement could lead to renewal or reorganization (1971).

As Althusser rightly suggests, no apparatus only functions through violence or ideology. The Repressive State Apparatus, as the army or the police, essentially works through violence but also transmits ideas and values. In comparison, Ideological State Apparatuses are things like schools, churches, families, and media, which traditionally work through the dissemination of ideas, although they could also threaten with punishment or discipline (1971).

The Flick is examined from an ideological posture, one that sees ideology as something subtle and operating on the populace through everyday life. The work itself examines a few hundred square feet of what might seem to be an ordinary workplace--a small cinema--but one that is largely governed by unspoken rules of civility concerning etiquette, speech, time and social interaction. Practicing life routines and regulating their working conditions, the characters assimilate to the demands of work, class, and culture not through direct coercion. Instead of the ideological furrows traced in public or formal political rhetoric, this work shows ideology operating through banal practices that seem natural and uncritical. This approach relates how social control is exercised through concrete activities such as washing the cinema, conforming to timetables, keeping discipline in terms of organization and work; all taken for granted as an unproblematic aspect of life.

Baker includes speech filled with pauses, "a happy pause," "a very long, uncomfortable pause," to reflect how people speak when they're not sure what to say. This approach invites the audience to pay attention to the nuances of emotion expressed in between words, as opposed to quick, cleaned bursts (Steppenwolf Theatre Company, n.d.). These silences are purposeful. The image of workers sweeping, mopping and waiting together reveals true relations, as is the case in real life for us humans, and sheds light on workplace norms such as politeness, routines and frustrations hidden from plain sight. It is by these quiet acts of defiance against types that Baker critiques the wider cultural narratives at play, reminding her audience of lives often rendered invisible in film and theatre (Jenkins, 2017: 3).

Accordingly, this paper asks: How does *The Flick* relocate the function of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses into the unremarked rituals of an ordinary workplace, and do the characters' pauses, hesitations, and small departures from routine constitute genuine resistance to that ideology, or do they merely reveal how completely it has been internalized? Through close reading of dialogue, repeated labor, and silence, this paper argues that the play's true site

of resistance lies not with its characters but with its audience, who are made newly aware of a mechanism of control too mundane to notice from within it

Theoretical Framework

This paper uses ideas from Louis Althusser. He wrote about ideology in 1971. Althusser was a Marxist thinker. He says that a government stays in power in two ways. The first way is the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA). This means the police, the army, the courts, and prisons. These groups use force. They can punish people. They keep order with power and fear. The second way is the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). This means schools, churches, family, and the media. Althusser says these two types are not always separate. Sometimes the army also teaches ideas. Sometimes a school can punish a student. He also says the list of ISAs can change. New places can become ISAs too. This paper uses two more ideas from Althusser. The first is interpellation. This means ideology calls a person into a role, like "worker" or "student." The person accepts this role. The second idea is reproduction of the relations of production. This means society teaches new workers the same habits and rules as old workers. This keeps the system the same over time. This paper says the movie theater in *The Flick* works like an ISA. It is small. It has no school or church. But it still teaches the workers how to behave. This paper asks: does this small, quiet place really work like Althusser's ISAs? ChatGPT (version 4) was used to help improve language and text editing, and to review certain grammatical and stylistic aspects. Claude.ai was also used to help organize ideas, review style, and improve the clarity of certain parts of the text. Artificial intelligence tools were not used to generate data or research results.

Literature Review

The Flick by Annie Baker is the basis of this study. Previous examinations of the play focus on various perspectives and themes. E.g., the article "'A very long time passes': Slowness and cinema in Annie Baker's *The Flick* (2013)" examines the theme of slowness in this play as well as slow cinema. Slow cinema is characterized by languid pacing and limited action.

Gina Felandri and Desvalini Anwar (2019) explore Annie Baker's *The Flick*, a play that follows three people working at a close-knit local movie theater as they strive to find their footing in life and to obtain success. The characters work at a small movie theater and hold low-paying jobs but yearn for more. Dealing with the issues of low pay, grueling hours, and personal problems. The tenacious nature of the characters is emphasized within the study.

Ana Fernández-Caparrós Turina (2021), study Intimations of Precarity in Twenty-First-Century U.S. Drama: Faltering Voices of the Precariat in Annie Baker's *The Flick*. My analysis focuses on Annie Baker's *The Flick*. The author compares the lack of scholarly attention regarding this subject in drama for U.S. theatre to European drama, in particular, referring to a previous publication that focuses on both cases.

In 2024, Yongliang Hong interprets three of Annie Baker's plays in his book titled *Annie Baker's Representation and Perception of Isolation* (2010): *The Aliens* (2013); *The Flick*; and (2015)— John. The study explores Baker's representation of the solitude and isolation of her characters. Hong reads psychological depth into the characters' sense of isolation and behavioral responses by building from Erich Fromm's psychological theories. The research concludes that Baker's plays use rapier moments, subtle gestures, and banal situations to draw the audience into some characters' present right from where they experience exclusion.

According to Charmarannon (2025), there is much use of silence and lengthy punctuations that characterize the play. That silence is intentional, conveying real experiences and feelings. The characters carry out simple actions like cleaning and sitting, often without speaking, which creates a naturalistic, verisimilar feel to the play. To summarize, the study adds that silence makes the audience think even deeper about the characters and what they are feeling.

The recent research presents that other studies of " *The Flick*" focus on the working poor, the death of cinema, and the play's slow, melancholic moments, without engaging with Althusser's ideas about ideology. It questions whether the characters are actually resisting this system or whether only the audience can perceive and experience the resistance. This paper fills this gap by using Althusser's ideas to analyze small scenes in the play and asking, "Who, if anyone, is truly resisting the system?"

Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses

Louis Althusser (1971) argues that the state maintains its power by two main means: the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), also known as direct "police" violence, and the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) [5]. The RSA is a single, unified apparatus that includes the army, police, courts, and prison system, and it enforces stability through force (or the threat of it) to maintain order in defense of the existing system by means of law, punishment, and coercion. Althusser recognizes that, in certain situations, repression might be necessary; however, he argues that modern societies rely primarily on ideology rather than direct violence to keep themselves stable.

On the other hand, the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) operate mainly through ideas, beliefs and values instead of raw coercive power. Unlike the RSA, which functions as one apparatus, the ISAs are a plurality of distinct, relatively autonomous institutions — schools, the family, churches, the media, cultural institutions and political parties among them. ISAs shape individual self-concept and the beliefs of society. Not only do schools teach knowledge, but they also instill discipline, obedience, competition, and acceptance of the existing social structure. The media spread cultural values and social norms. These are the mechanisms through which people are socialized to see the dominant socio-economic order as natural and destined (1970).

Althusser defines ideology as a set of representations that shape the relationship between people and the reality out there: ideas, images, beliefs and values. However, ideology is not just a series of false ideas, but rather the lived experience through which people make meaning of their lives: how they understand themselves as human beings, and who serves what function in society. As such, ideology is not abstract; it is materialized and expressed in the institutions we inhabit, the rituals we engage with, and our daily lived experiences (McDevitt, 2022).

Interpellation is the key concept in Althusser's theory. Ideology works by addressing people and assigning them social roles, through which they become subjects. One example is when a police officer says, "Hey, you!" — when someone responds, they identify as the "you" being addressed, and at that point become, as a matter of fact, a subject liable to the law. Interpellation immerses a person in the expectations of society and dissolves any notion that one has autonomy over who they are or what they do; rather, their identities and actions are constructed within these ideologies.

For Althusser, there is a difference between individuals and subjects. Humans are born as biological beings but become subjects through an ideological process. Subjects resist being seen as "subjected," and instead feel like autonomous beings who freely choose what they want — but this choice is mediated by ideological systems, which condition their beliefs and values, including through consumerism. This way of thinking about liberty questions conventional perspectives on autonomy, suggesting that social and institutional forces continuously shape it (McDevitt, 2022).

Althusser argued that society is composed of an economic base and a superstructure, the latter divided into political-legal and ideological levels. The state is much more than a series of government mechanisms; it is an entire apparatus for the reproduction of the dominant economic system, in particular capitalism. Capitalism is reproduced through the Ideological State Apparatuses (the ISAs), whereby people consent to and participate in their own domination without the necessity of continual violence.

Althusser's theory of ideology holds that ideology is embedded in institutions and, in doing so, creates subjects. He claimed that the state clings to power through ideology as much as through force, and while coercion still matters, he argues that ideology has taken on primary importance in modernity. Althusser retains Marx's Repressive State Apparatus — the single apparatus comprising the army, police, courts and prisons that manages the population through punishment and violence (1970) — but he also identifies the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), such as schools, churches, and the media, which spread the ideas of the ruling class and are just as indispensable for maintaining power, since capitalism cannot survive on force alone (Empty Hands, 2022).

He cites the example of Lenin, who, after the Russian Revolution, realized that merely exchanging governments alone would result in little tangible change — schools also had to change. However, for Althusser the ISAs are not only instruments of ruling ideology but also terrains where that ideology can be resisted from within. Historically, this can be seen in the shift of the *dominant* ISA from the Church to the school (Empty Hands, 2022). Finally, he emphasizes that ideology is material, not merely an abstract belief. It gives the appearance of real agency, so that going to church, obeying laws, or fulfilling one's social role feels like a free choice, when in reality it has been shaped by ideology (1970).

As Blakely states, both Ricoeur and Geertz assert that ideology is something people tend to recognize in others rather than in themselves (2024). According to Althusser, ideology functions through "interpellation" — society "calls out" to an individual until the individual responds and identifies as a subject, who feels free but has in fact been constructed by that call (1971). Also, according to Marx and Althusser, this process is a form of control: under capitalism, workers blame themselves for failing rather than blaming the system, and self-exploitation under low wages becomes an integral part of identity, so that employment produces its own victims. Marx calls this false consciousness and alienation, reinforced by distractions like cinema.

Marx claimed that the state was born of class struggle and functions as an instrument serving ruling-class interests (Althusser, 1971). Althusser adds that this occurs through both the Repressive State Apparatus — the army, police and courts — since no ruling class can sustain itself through force alone indefinitely, and the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) — such as schools, churches and the media. Foucault then builds on this view by asserting that power can act not only through the state but also constructs reality through everyday knowledge and social relations (Halperin, 2001).

According to Althusser, the state exerts control over society through two interlaced mechanisms: the Repressive State Apparatus — comprising the army, police and courts — which operates through force, and the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), which operate indirectly by spreading ideas about power through institutions such as schools, churches and the media. Both mechanisms are regarded as vital to the continued functioning of capitalism. As Lenin remarked after the Russian Revolution, changing the government while leaving the ideas taught in schools unchanged accomplishes nothing, since the old ideology still occupies the hearts and minds of citizens. Moreover, the ISAs are not merely tools of the ruling class; they also serve as sites of resistance, since it is within these institutions that workers can contest dominant ideologies. The Church served as the dominant ISA during feudalism, and under capitalism this role was taken up by the school (which teaches not only productive skills but also behaviors like discipline and obedience).

Ideology operates by converting individuals into "subjects" through interpellation: when they respond to the call "Hey, you there," they recognize themselves in that call and believe they are the ones being addressed. This process produces an illusion of freedom, even as people are conditioned to think and act by the very forces that construct these ideologies (Eagleton, 1991). This idea is developed further in literary theory by Lois Tyson (2006), who shows how different critical approaches — including Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytic, structuralist, and historicist criticism — each ask particular questions about power, voice and meaning in texts. This encourages a view of literature not merely as a vehicle for ideas, but as something inherently embedded in a wider political superstructure.

Cinema as an Ideological State Apparatus

Besides its economic function, cinema holds an ideological role. The concept of the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) — as opposed to constant force — as a means of maintaining the capitalist structure was introduced by Louis Althusser (1971/1972). Unlike the Repressive State Apparatus, which comprises state institutions such as the police, courts and military, the ISAs function through ideology rather than coercion. Media institutions, cinema above all, form a natural part of that ideological apparatus.

Cinema functions as an ISA: films cultivate a particular perspective on prestige, righteousness, allegiance, and domination. They promote capitalist ideas like competition, individual success, and consumer identity. Rather than compelling their audience through fear, cinema operates through desire and entertainment. Audiences willingly engage in a process that involves consuming narratives that serve the direction of ideology.

Althusser (1971/1972) argues that ideology works through interpellation — the idea that subjects are constituted by ideology. In cinema, audiences are encouraged to identify with and internalize particular social roles. Through this identification, the audience absorbs values about success, the legitimacy of power, and models for achieving it. In this way, cinema reproduces an established set of relations for each new generation, giving that reproduction its political significance.

Cinema operates as a cultural medium that constructs desire and identity. It shapes gender roles, national belonging, moral values, and work ethics. Michel Foucault (1978) extends this analysis of power, arguing that power is productive rather than merely repressive. Cultural institutions produce subjects (e.g., citizens, bodies), norms, and systems of knowledge. Cinema participates in this productive power by shaping the imaginary boundary between the normal and the deviant, success and failure.

Labor, Interpellation, and Internalized Ideology

The concept of ideological interpellation is well illustrated by labor in the film industry. Low wages and rote work are precisely the material conditions

under which workers take promotion as an individual moral victory: no one is promoted into equality, but is understood to fail through individual shortcomings (Althusser, 1971). Digital capitalism exacerbates this trend as films become data streams and audiences become consumer profiles. It places cultural creativity at the service of profitability metrics, framing cinema as an economic unit that, alongside its capacity to generate profit, also functions as an ideological apparatus producing subjectivities.

Annie Baker's *The Flick*

Annie Baker is an award-winning American playwright who writes about ordinary people going through the ordinary events of their lives and yet making a significant impact with her works. She has written a number of full-length plays, including *The Flick* and *Circle Mirror Transformation*, *The Aliens*, *Body Awareness*, *John*, and *The Antipodes Infinite Life*. Baker's plays have been staged in countless theatre productions throughout the U.S. and abroad. *The Flick* was awarded both the Pulitzer Prize for Drama and the Obie Award. *Circle Mirror Transformation* & *The Aliens* have won Tony Awards for Best New Play. Baker has received fellowships, critics' accolades, and other awards. She is currently a resident playwright at the Signature Theatre and a teacher of playwriting (Pulitzer Prize, n.d.).

The Flick is an observant, character-driven play about three workers in a Massachusetts art-house cinema. Our heroes are Sam, a longtime staffer; Rose, an eager projectionist in training; and Avery, a smart— but shy 20-something student. It chronicles their day-to-day activities, conversations regarding movies, and elements of their everyday lives. Stretching more than three hours, the play is dedicated to a portrayal of the daily life in all its tedious glory—a realistic use of silence, minute gestures, and banal conversation. The design of the stage with rows upon rows of seats, a projection booth, and other theater paraphernalia makes the audience feel as if they themselves were in a theater.

The play begins slowly, at a similar pace, but builds to powerful moments. Critics and fans raved about it. Some in the audience may take time to adjust to the slower dialogue and pacing. As the other landmark plays it echoes, it breaks with doorbell-realistic stage narrative, toeing lines that may spur resurgent American playwrights down new paths (Brantley, 2013).

Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) is simply the ways in which institutions and systems transmit dominant ideologies of society. These institutions can include schools, media, religion, family, and work environments. These forces subtly condition people to think and behave in a way that makes social norms and values seem natural as part of everyday life. Understanding the role of ISAs helps one to see how films and theater productions can embody, reinforce, and even challenge dominant social ideas (Fiveable, 2024).

Ideology operates in cinema by giving form to narrative structures, character development, and central themes. Films rarely exist outside the social

rules, values, and norms that characterize their production; audience members may consume them unquestioningly as normal. However, cinema as a medium itself can contradict traditional ideologies through alternate narratives and representation of oppressed classes. Using these methods, filmmakers can also explore social issues, expose different ways of life, or challenge conventions to get the audience thinking (Fiveable, 2024).

Representation is important because it encapsulates how a group of people, an individual, or a concern is perceived in society. Breaking stereotypes through fair and accurate representation can help to promote understanding. Many of them depict women inaccurately, thus fueling social injustice. Studying representation helps viewers recognize harmful representations and call for fair representations (Fiveable, 2024).

Movie theaters have a rigid schedule that employees must follow. Every day, staff do everything from checking and cleaning up areas, serving snacks, selling tickets, and operating machinery. The constant repetition of these tasks trains employees to follow the rules and to view routines as business as usual. The process illustrates Althusser with regard to Islamic Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs): institutions adjust and regulate behavior without the need for violence.

Working at the movies preserves social roles as well. Employees largely accept their lot as low-wage workers: politely engaging and helping customers despite bad working conditions, following directions from their managers to do so. Nitehawk Cinema employees, for example, continued to serve with the risk of wet floor tiles. Thus, violence in the theatrical environment encourages acceptance of hierarchy and complicity with obedience patterns (Cinefamily Accountability, 2017).

It is brutal, repetitive, and often not paid well, but it is normalized as part of life. Unionized workers at Cinema Village and AMC continued with their daily routines until they took action to fight for better wages. This incident demonstrates how the theater system invisibly molds workers' actions and expectations (Cinefamily Accountability, 2017).

Five minutes into *The Flick*, ideology arrives on the scene through the front door of a full-service cinema. Sam, Avery, and Rose learn to treat low pay, boredom, and job insecurity as normal parts of their jobs. To them, their boring tasks and following rules exemplify a system that makes it easy to replace workers with one of the girls, or another lower-skilled male laborer who will do what they say without objection. The films they screen reflect cultural dynamics and the shift away from film to digital formats. Such a technological paradigm threatens the job security of employees by placing profit and efficiency over their well-being. For instance, the characters tend to speak in simple language, and their daily exchange is marked by long stretches of silence that indicate how employees hold back on confidence and personal expression as a result of workplace

oppression. Even when employees are dissatisfied, politeness, restraint, and obedience in the workplace are socially reinforced (Gardner 2016).

In *The Flick*, the ISA is not the theater building. It is the daily rituals training, scheduling, silence—that teach workers to accept their roles without being told. The characters are doing things like sweeping and cleaning seats. Much of the action takes place in silence, and while not particularly spirited, labor promotes an acceptance. The characters enjoy movies, old movie reels, and long conversations, all of which carry with them cultural elements. Silence and pauses are tools that allow the audience to contemplate what cinema, life, and memory convey. Culture, through these components, instills appreciation for art, time, and the concept of memory (Steppenwolf Theatre Company, n.a.).

Social and Cultural Marginalization

Baker also shows that cinema in general, and even more so society itself, generally places Sam, Rose and Avery into marginal roles. Where a film would have women, Black men and Jewish men as stereotypes, Baker has them as regular working stiffs with unique hopes, fears and struggles. Their responsibility for cleaning the theater after audiences leave is emblematic of their place on the margins of cultural life. This representation is an example of the economic precondition: low-wage workers doing vital labour (often ‘the dirty work’) that goes unnoticed.

Characters in *The Flick*

Annie Baker's play *The Flick* is set in a small, old movie theater in Massachusetts and revolves around three employees : Sam (a white man in his 30s), Rose (a green-haired young woman), and Avery (a black student). The story is a portrait of their day-to-day lives and the way in which these relationships develop. The slow burn of the play gives the audience time not only to view but also to observe sheen around each character's emotion and personality. Talking points about pay, treats at the bottom of the barrel, racism vs classism dartboards, and questioning how much control over your life you have. Baker employs amusing punchlines and witty fine points that will draw in viewers. *The Flick* has won awards for its writing and is known for attempting to capture the in-between moments (Concord Theatricals, 2013). Summer rolls on, and she becomes the projectionist of the theatre, while the three enter a hesitantly penumbral romantic liaison. From meaningful conversations about films and games to debates that quickly turn into full-blown arguments, the charmingly silly nature of their banter highlights both comedic and emotionally noteworthy exchanges. The winner of a Pulitzer Prize (Pulitzer Prize, n.d.), the play represents movie lovers so poignantly that it becomes too long.

Characters and Ideological Control

Sam is 35 years old and has been working at the theater for years. He was unhappy, he was in a rut, pissed off, and envious. He is kind of a movie lover but doesn't like change, especially going to digital. This is why Sam is

ideologically formed (what feels natural are habits and routines). Unlike in Act 1, Scene 3, where he accepts the "Dinner Money" system as not theft. For him, it is tradition. He does not do it using violence but is relying on Avery to follow through with it because "that's how things are done." The ideology operates quietly through belief and social pressure (Stephany, 2017).

Act 1, Scene 5 Sam uses ideas of love, masculinity, and competition. Rose, thumbing through astrology literature, asks about "Leo and Leo" and wants it to mean they are compatible. He thinks that Rose will choose him because they both share common interests in film and intellect. He proves himself against Avery through words, intelligence, and minor emotional reactions. In this regard, it suggests that ideology, not offence, drives behaviour by means of ideas (Stephany, 2017).

The Flick shows ideology operating not through any single dramatic event but through the daily habits and relationships of three theater employees — Sam, Rose, and Avery. Each of the four scenes below demonstrates a different piece of how this ideology is transmitted, absorbed, and occasionally exposed.

When Sam trains Avery in the cleaning routine, he does not present the "Dinner Money" system — quietly taking a small amount from the till — as a rule at all. He frames it as simply "how things are done," which forecloses the possibility of Avery treating it as optional or questionable. The scene is analytically significant not because it shows a workplace habit, but because of *how* the habit is transmitted: through casual reassurance rather than instruction, so that compliance arrives disguised as belonging (Gardner, 2016). Sam's own comfort with the practice — he has stopped seeing it as theft — shows the same mechanism already completed in him; Avery is simply being brought into a belief Sam no longer experiences as a belief at all. The scene meets all three ISA criteria: it works through belief, not coercion; it reproduces the practical role of worker; and it repeats as an ongoing daily practice, not a single instruction.

Sam's discomfort when Avery later questions the Dinner Money system is equally telling. Ideology works best, Sam's reaction shows, precisely when its rules are never spoken aloud or challenged; his silence in that moment is not passivity but a defense of the belief system he depends on for stability and belonging (Stephany, 2017).

Scene 2: Projector access (Act 1) Sam's anger that Rose was taught the projector before him, despite his longer tenure, is not really about the machine. It exposes an unstated hierarchy of value in the workplace — one based on tenure, cultural fit, and perceived seriousness about film — that has never been written down anywhere, yet governs Sam's sense of his own worth. What makes this scene analytically useful is Sam's reaction itself: he does not challenge the *existence* of the hierarchy, only his position within it. This distinguishes ordinary workplace jealousy from ideological submission: Sam accepts the legitimacy of a system that has just disadvantaged him.

The uneven access to projector training, and Sam's resentment that Rose was taught before him despite his longer tenure, reveals ideology functioning as an informal hierarchy of worth. The projector is bound up with Sam's identity, since operating it has become an extension of who he believes himself to be (Stephany, 2017). Being taught to run it functions as a kind of promotion that no manager formally announces; status here is assigned through loyalty, familiarity with film, and cultural fit rather than official rule. Sam's distress when this unspoken order is disrupted shows how completely he depends on it to measure his own value — a clear case of a worker reproducing the system that constrains him (Stephany, 2017).

Baker's stage directions for pauses, "a happy pause," "a very long, uncomfortable pause," are where ideology becomes visible by not being spoken (Steppenwolf Theatre Company, n.d.). This pattern extends beyond Sam's workplace rules into his personal life: in Act 1, Scene 5, Sam uses ideas about masculinity, intelligence, and compatibility to compete with Avery for Rose's attention, without ever confronting Avery directly (Stephany, 2017). He does not use force; he uses cultural symbols and quiet self-positioning. These silences and evasions repeat throughout the play, showing that avoidance, not open conflict, is the theater's normal way of managing any threat to the beliefs holding its world together (Jenkins, 2017).

The hidden security camera and the eventual firing of a character mark a clear shift out of ISA logic into Althusser's Repressive State Apparatus. Compliance here is no longer secured through belief, habit, or social pressure; it is enforced through surveillance and the real threat of job loss (Althusser, 1971). This moment is analytically useful precisely because it is the exception in the play: it exposes what stands behind the theater's daily rituals of cleaning, tradition, and unspoken hierarchy. Its rarity confirms Althusser's (1971) own point that the RSA and ISAs are never fully separate — the same workplace can run on quiet ideological consent most of the time while keeping coercive power in reserve for when consent fails.

Second, workers reproduce capitalism through Sam. He is a low-paid employee, but he is instilled with the system. He is rule-oriented, hierarchical, and externally validated by management. Sam, for whom the projector has become an extension of himself, cannot unlearn the old ways once a digital projection does take over at his cinema. What he believes, what he so strongly desires to achieve; how much value does he feel that he has? Following Althusser, Sam is interpellated as a subject; he identifies through work and loyalty ideology (Stephany, 2017).

Third, Sam and Rose illustrate how ideology determines identity. He is espousing some ideas about masculinity, romance, and status. He impresses her with his film knowledge and by showing intellectual superiority. It illustrates

how personal identity and relationships are made within the cultural systems of cinema, education, and media.

The Flick operates on an ideological level that differs from the Repressive State Apparatus, which employs force. Behaviour is guided by the workplace, by cinema culture, and by social norms without visible coercion. In other words, SAM itself is a product of ideology, while also in its own way being an involuntary ideology carrier. He imposes norms not because he has power but because he believes in them. Sam helps perpetuate the system that constrains him through quotidian routines, rituals, and common understandings (Stephany 2017). Ideology in his character works quietly, not through direct force but through consent, habit, and values conveyed through socialization.

Annie Baker's *The Flick* depicts the lives of three employees in a cinema; Sam, Rose and Avery. It centers on their work, feelings and friendships day to day. Most of it is silent, slow moving moments for the audience to pick up on emotions and personalities. The play reflected issues such as; insecurity, unequal pay treatment, jealousy and resistance to the change. As the quote by Baker suggests, she blends in humor with serious moments to keep it real (Concord Theatricals, 2013; Pulitzer Prize, n.d.).

By Act 1, Scene 3, Sam has come to terms with the "Dinner Money" system. To him, it is not stealing. For him, this is a work tradition. This shows how ideology works. In his mind, the system becomes natural, and he does not question it. Sam does not use violence to compel Avery when he arrives. He expects him to conform to the tradition because, "that's how it's done." This is ideological control. The power is not physical. You are conditioned through common conditioning and social imprinting. Avery, who now belongs to the group (Stephany, 2017), would likely have acquiesced.

Sam also believes in loyalty to coworkers. He feels attached to *The Flick*, even though the job is meager and tedious. Screenshot from In My Country As Director, part one of two (October 2023) The cinema gives him identity and purpose. This is yet another form of ideology. His view of himself is formed by the workplace. Avery asks questions about Dinner Money, and in those moments Sam's uncomfortable because Avery is providing a challenge to the belief system. You teach people to not even question it — that is when ideology works most effectively. Sam not saying anything, or in some way believing this nonsense means he needs thoughts shared between friends for what they call stability. He is both captured by ideology and perpetuates it (Stephany, 2017).

Sam uses ideas about love, masculinity, and competition instead of physical force in Act 1, scene 5. While reading the astrology book, Rose asks "Leo and Leo" thinking that it would be affirmed. This implies he has a preference for symbol systems or is at least using them to justify his emotions. He wants to ensure that he and Rose belong together (Stephany, 2017).

Sam thinks he has a chance if Rose and he share interests, including film and intellectual stuff. This behavior is symptomatic of the manner in which cultural ideology affects behavior. He considers himself the “smart guy” and thus sees this as his worth. Instead of fighting with Avery, he fights with words, facts, and emotional undercurrents. His jealousy reveals his belief that he can “earn” Rose through intelligence and compatibility. Sam, the play represents an argument that ideology works on subtler channels: culture, belief, and values rather than force (Stephany, 2017).

Rose is free and confident. She works as a projectionist. She is bold, and she doesn't take life too seriously, but in her soul she is confused and unhappy. She desires a better life (Stephany, 2017).

(Act 1, Scene 3–5) The Dinner Money confrontation and its silence: When Avery later questions the Dinner Money practice, Sam's stage-directed pause — “a very long, uncomfortable pause” — does more analytical work than any line of dialogue could. The silence is not an absence of response; it is the response. By declining to defend, explain, or reconsider the practice, Sam closes off the one moment in the play where the norm might have been named and examined. The scene demonstrates a specific claim about ideology: that its stability depends on certain questions never being followed through to an answer (Steppenwolf Theatre Company, n.d.).

(Act 1, Scene 4) One further scene deserves attention for what it reveals about marginalization specifically: the nightly ritual of sweeping the theater after patrons leave. Baker stages this labor at length rather than compressing it, forcing the audience to sit through the same duration of unglamorous work that the characters experience nightly (Gardner, 2016). The scene does not need dialogue to make its point — the visible, extended, physical labor of cleaning up after an audience that has already left is itself the argument: that necessary labor is most invisible precisely when it is most visible on stage, performed for an audience that, within the play's own fiction, has already gone home.

Act 1, Scene 7, Rose wants to be by herself with Avery. This is an opportunity for her to deepen the bond. And she knows about Avery being into yo-yo and uses that to get in. Sam is not good or bad, but Rose feels bored with him. Avery is fresh, annealing and truthful. This attracts her. She needs attention and emotional connection.

Avery is described as quiet, polite and socially awkward. Do not express romantic interest out loud. The amount of information and interest he has for movies is both impressive and heartfelt. The character has trouble adapting and refuses change, openly calling digital film “immoral.” He writes to the newly acquired theater asking if he can keep the old projector. He is described as cautious, reflective, and ambivalent (Stephany, 2017).

Avery only tells Rose that he 'does' datelike things. Newmann's generic politeness and calmness, married with the awkwardness of pathetically trying to

break his own rule, generate tension between him and others when things aren't going right. It takes real skill and knowledge of film to answer such difficult questions on the fly, and Avery's intelligence is evident in how quickly he offers his responses. He may have all of these attributes but he finds it difficult to socialize and is awkward when around Sam and Rose. The fact that Avery shoots only 35mm film, coupled with his calling digital film "immoral," helps convey his resistance to change. Avery sends out a letter when the new owner wants to get rid of the old projector, showing his fears of losing that part of himself and his need for cinema (Pulitzer Prize, n.d).

Avery presents the play's clearest instance of a character positioned *against* an ideological shift rather than simply absorbed by one — which makes him a useful counterpoint to Sam's more complete internalization of workplace norms. Avery shoots only on 35mm film, describes digital projection as "immoral," and writes a letter to the theater's new owner asking to keep the old analog projector rather than replace it (Stephany, 2017). On its surface, this reads as simple nostalgia or personal taste. Read through Althusser's (1971) framework, however, it is better understood as a conflict between two competing ideological formations — one built around craft, authenticity, and skilled labor, the other around efficiency, standardization, and corporate control — with Avery caught between them.

The shift from analog to digital in cinema is not a neutral technical upgrade; it reorganizes labor itself. Where analog projection required a projectionist with physical, hands-on technical knowledge of the equipment, digital systems reduce that role to operating pre-programmed, standardized processes — a shift that strips workers of the autonomy and specialized skill their earlier role depended on (Stephany, 2017). Avery's resistance to digital projection can therefore be read as resistance not to a piece of equipment, but to this deskilling process — a threat to the specific professional identity he has built around expertise in film as a craft.

This is where Avery's position becomes ideologically interesting rather than simply personal. His investment in analog film is itself a kind of ideology — a belief system in which "real" cinema is defined by physical film stock, and digital images are cast as a lesser, even dishonest, substitute. Avery has not stepped outside ideology by resisting digital projection; he has simply aligned himself with a different one, one that values authenticity and craftsmanship over efficiency and profit (Althusser, 1971). His letter to the new owner is not an act of rebellion against ideology as such; it is an appeal from within one ideological framework (cinophile authenticity) against the encroachment of another (corporate efficiency).

This matters for the paper's larger argument about resistance. If Sam represents ideology operating smoothly a worker who has fully absorbed and now reproduces the theater's norms Avery represents ideology's limit case: a

character aware enough to resist one system, but only by retreating into another belief system rather than escaping ideological structuring altogether. His awkwardness and difficulty socializing (Stephany, 2017) can be read as symptomatic of this position: he is out of step not because he has achieved critical distance from ideology, but because he is loyal to an ideological formation the theater's new economic conditions are actively phasing out.

Avery's resistance does not constitute the escape from ideology this paper's conclusion is interested in locating. It is instructive precisely because it fails in a specific way: it shows that resisting one ideological formation from inside another is not the same as achieving the kind of outside vantage point this paper argues belongs only to the audience.

The play incorporates comedic elements. Sam complains a lot about customers bringing food into the theater and then carries out the same when going to visit family. This representation highlights his human and imperfect nature.

Self-Formation Through Routine

The daily routine in the theater not only regulates behavior but also shapes its practitioners into distinct selves, in the precise sense intended by Althusser. Sam doesn't simply follow the "dinner allowance" system or submit to an unspoken hierarchy; he comes to know himself through these practices. He defines himself as a loyal, competent, and respectable individual within the theater's internal system, a self-understanding that would not have been possible had the routine not repeatedly summoned him to it throughout his years of work (Stefani, 2017). This summoning works as intended: Sam doesn't experience the rituals of the theater as external constructs but as an expression of his true identity. Avery's slow and resistant immersion in these very routines—his annoyance at the "dinner allowance," his discomfort with the informal rules of the theater—reveals a character still in formation, and this is precisely what makes his gradual acceptance of aspects of workplace culture so significant: it demonstrates the power of routine to enforce conformity even in a character who was initially skeptical of it.

From Individual Interactions to Relations of Production

However, it would be a mistake to consider every small interaction between the three characters as a separate example of the application of ideology. Not every conversation, glance, or pause constitutes an analysis of an individual interaction; doing so would reduce Althusser's theory to something closer to the claim that "everything is ideological," which his theoretical framework does not support. Althusser's true claim is narrower and more useful: the functions of autonomous social relations (ISAs) reproduce relations of production, that is, they ensure that the working class continues to occupy its positions within the capitalist economic structure, generation after generation (Althusser, 1971).

In this sense, the routines of the theater acquire analytical significance not because they are small or repetitive, but because of what they reproduce: a workforce that accepts meager wages, precarious hours, and diminishing skill requirements as normal working conditions. Sam's adherence to the tradition of "dinner allowance," Avery's eventual adaptation to workplace norms, and the unspoken hierarchy surrounding the training of the projectionist are all significant precisely because they train each character to accept their position within an economic structure that offers little security or opportunity for advancement, not simply because they involve social behavior. Romantic tensions between characters, humor, and personal friendships, while part of the play's fabric, are not treated here as independent functions of social relations in their own right. These elements are only significant in this analysis when they intersect with and reinforce the working relationships between the characters, as in Sam's use of his intellectual standing to compete with Avery, which is simultaneously a defense of his position within the informal hierarchy of values in the theater (Stephanie, 2017).

Ideology and Stage Form

Baker's use of stage form is not a mere coincidence in this argument; it is a key means by which ideology becomes visible to the audience, rather than remaining hidden from the characters who inhabit it. The play's length, its rejection of traditional dramatic climax, and its insistence on immediate action on stage all contradict the audience's expectation that the play "is about" an event. Instead, the form itself becomes the argument: by having the audience follow the same ordinary time intervals that the characters endure at night, Baker uses stage duration to reproduce, on the level of audience experience, the boredom and repetition upon which ideology depends to remain hidden from its adherents (Brantley, 2013). This formal choice of withholding the spectacle allows the play to reveal the workings of ordinary ideology, rather than simply narrating them.

Silence, Pause, Repetition, Cleaning, Waiting, and Duration as Ideological Structures

Each element of the play serves a specific ideological function. Silence and pauses indicate a point where questions could have been raised but weren't. Baker's stage directions, such as "a long, awkward pause," demonstrate that ideology is passed off unchallenged (Steppenwolf Theatre Company, n.d.). Repetition- the same sweeping, the same shifts, the same phrases—trains the characters and audience to see the conditions of the theater as normal, not as one arrangement among others. Cleaning, especially the long, silent sweeping after the customers have left, presents work as a necessity but an invisible one—performed for an audience, within the play's context, that has already departed (Gardner, 2016). Waiting reflects the underemployment of workers: they are

paid for occupying time, not for production, a situation inherent in the low-wage service economy depicted in the play.

The element of duration, throughout the play, connects all these elements. By rejecting the pressure of time, Baker makes the audience experience the same repetition as the characters - except that the audience, unlike the characters, is in a position to notice it.

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