

One flew over the cuckoo's nest paper essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

One of the most influential films in our lifetime is One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. It demonstrates many themes with one of the most important being on how institutions are governed and kept in order through the use of power. The best way to analyze this concept in this film, is to interpret Michel Foucault's essay, Discipline and Punishment. He gives a very adequate analysis in governing a particular society which allows One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest to be interpreted and better understood.

In Foucault's essay, he describes the measures that are taken to establish discipline in a town which is stricken by the plague. This is done through many ways, including the use of panopticism which, in literal terms, means all seeing. To govern a society, it is necessary to establish order in the place of inhabitation. Foucault's description of how order would be established in the streets of the plagued town is as follows : " Each street is placed under the authority of a syndic, who keeps it under surveillance... This is similar in how the psychiatric ward is run in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.

In Cuckoo's Nest, this is the main setting for everyday life among the patients. In this case, the " street" is the whole ward, which is under constant surveillance of an authority figure. The patients are constantly being watched to make sure they are not doing anything that they should not be doing. According to Foucault, it is easiest to keep people to a confined area in order to establish order.

Foucault states, " On the appointed day, everyone is ordered to stay indoors: it is forbidden to leave on pain of death. " From this, we can infer that there are serious consequences to leaving. In Cuckoo's Nest, all of the patients are

confined to that particular psychiatric ward and if they try to leave the area they have serious consequences. The patients know this and are very hesitant at the thought of leaving the ward. The idea of escaping is a very difficult task on its own.

In Foucault's town, to leave a the designated area would be next to impossible because the amount of security precautions that are taken. Foucault describes this as, " The syndic himself comes to lock the door of each house from the outside; he takes the key with him and hands it over to the intendant of the quarter, the intendant keeps it until the end of the quarantine. " You can see that the keys to get to the outside are very closely guarded. This is also seen in Cuckoo's Nest when McMurphy plans to escape from the ward and, in order to do, that he has to get a hold of the keys.

The way he accomplishes this is by seducing the guard with two of his " lady friends. " This ends up causing a big mess in the ward and the guard gets himself drunk in the fear of losing his job. This presents the opportune time for McMurphy to steal the guard's keys and plan an escape. He had to go to such extreme lengths to obtain the keys because they were so closely guarded. Foucault's plagued town and the psychiatric ward can also describe the way quarantined people interact with authoritarians. This is shown when food and drinks were distributed.

Foucault states, " Each family will have made its own provisions; but, for bread and wine, small wooden canals are set up between the street and the interior of the houses, thus allowing each person to receive his ration without communicating with the suppliers and other residents; meat, fish and herbs

will be hoisted up into the houses with pulleys and baskets. " Each person is treated like an animal. They are being told what to eat and how much to eat. Also, there is minimal interaction between the guards and the people. This is also the case in Cuckoo's Nest.

Upon the Nurse's call, all patients must line up in an orderly fashion and receive their portioned medication. The interaction aspect is also very much alike in Foucault's town. The patients receive medication from the nurses which are situated at a desk which is in a separated area from the rest of the ward. This separation makes it seem like there are two classes of people: the " crazy" people and the people that watch over them which are higher in class. Foucault's also described how medication would be handled.

He says, " The magistrates have complete control over medical treatment. In cuckoo's nest, the nurses have the control over the medicine distribution. They give the patients unknown medication and expect them to take it in front of them. If this rule is not obeyed, there are consequences. For example, when McMurphy was called up to take his medication, he refused and stated that he doesn't ingest anything he is unfamiliar with. Nurse Ratched threatened him by telling him that he will be forced into taking the medication an alternative (very uncomfortable) way. Nurse Ratched had full control on medicine distribution and leaves no option to her patients.

In every governed institution there is a designated place where leader keeps his eye on everyone. Foucault explains this as being a panopticon. He states the panopticon in the town as " the architectural figure of composition. We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular

building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring. " This " tower" in Cuckoo's Nest would be the nurse's station. Like Foucault's panopticon, it is located at the center of the ward. This lets the observer be able to keep an eye on everything that goes on in the ward.

There is also a big window that opens up towards the patients. This also allows for optimal surveillance of the patients. That way the nurse would know where and what the patients are doing at all times. Foucault states that there has to be one person that is fit to be in the central tower. He states, " All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. " In cuckoo's nest, this person is Nurse Ratched. She is the head of the ward and the symbol of authority of the ward.

She is always seen in the nurse's station keeping a very close eye on her patients. Foucault also describes the panoptic mechanism which has an arrangement that makes it possible to see constantly and recognize immediately. Full lighting is also used to ensure visibility. The ward is always properly lit in order Nurse Ratched to easily be able to catch any wrongdoing. All of these mechanisms that Foucault describes are essentially used to autonomize discipline. According to Foucault, " Hence the major effect of the panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.

He believes that panopticism will lead to internalization of discipline in a person. This is displayed in Cuckoo's nest, when Nurse Ratched held a vote

to allow a ball game to be seen. When Nurse Ratchet opened the poll, no one raised their hands. They had fear instilled in them by the constant surveillance by Nurse Ratched. Therefore, going against her would be, in effect, " wrong. " Therefore, they are disciplining themselves without ever being disciplined. This is an example of Foucault's, " automatic functioning of power" where force is not necessary to enforce compliance in the patients.

Another example seen in the film is when Billy was asked to leave the institution by McMurphy. He stated that he could not possibly leave the institution and that he was not ready. He was constantly watched by Nurse Ratched which internalized the idea that he was, in fact, " crazy" and, therefore, unable to leave the institution. This, in turn, caused Billy to be his own guard and caused him to be unable to leave the institution. Mentally, he became the possessor of power and control of his own imprisonment in the institution.

In Foucault's essay, Discipline and Punishment, he gives a supreme deconstruction of the methods of institutionalization. He describes a very articulate method that establishes order and atomization of discipline. This essay serves to breakdown the methods used to institutionalize the patients seen in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest and to understand why and how the methods function. Once the methods are understood and seen through films such as this one, it becomes easier to resist oppression in the future and be able to maintain a sense of personal identity.