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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Tony Fitzmaurice for his help and guidance.





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**“Ever since I can remember I’ve wanted to be a Gangster.”**

- (i) An introduction to the integral character’s of the three proposed films, offering an explanation for their desire to achieve more than their peers.

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**“To me it was better than being president of the United States of America.”**

- (i) Reasons that allowed for the consolidation of the mafias power in America for forty years, offering an insight into some of the formal institutions that aided the mafia in attaining more power than the government itself.

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- (i) A discussion of the reasons that allowed the gangster genre to achieve such a success in commercial cinema.

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**“I was earning more in a week than most of the men in my neighbourhood would earn in a lifetime.”**

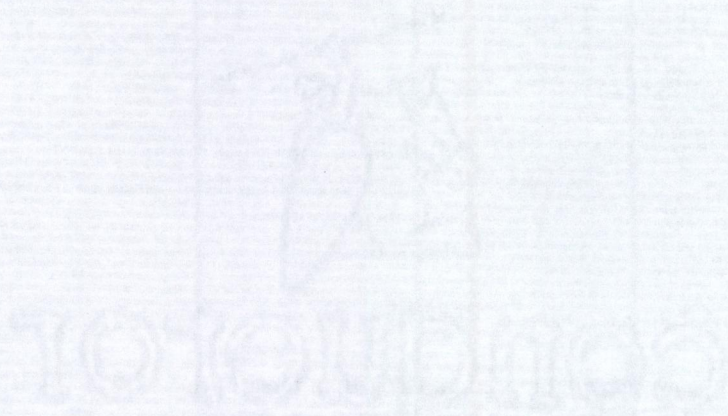
- (i) Suggestions of what it is that we can identify with the gangster.
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**“ I betrayed my wife, I killed men, I ordered the death of my brother, my mothers son, my fathers son.”**

- Why is it that the gangster must arrive at an inevitable downfall.







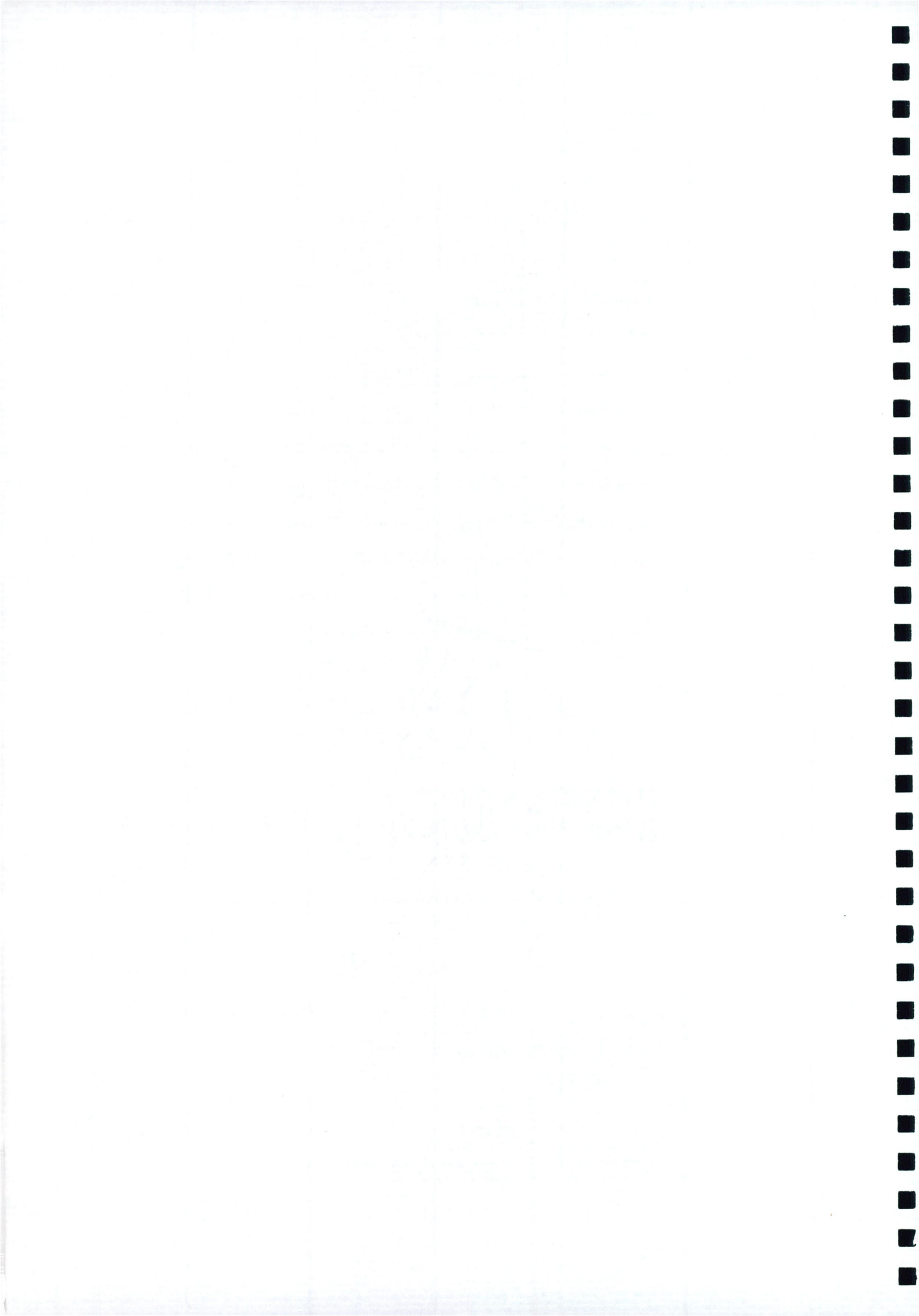
## Introduction:

The mafia is an organisation that has flourished in modern American history. It is as we know an unlawful organisation, An important question to be asked is how it has remained such an integral element in modern American history? In my investigation of the evolution of a particular power system, I am proposing the mafia as a major power institution, and how it managed for several decades to maintain complete control of the land of dreams and opportunities. This proposed case study may not appear as obvious as Foucault's discourse on power through the arrival of the prison systems of Europe, but it is more intriguing, insofar as this organisation achieved the aims we all secretly admire, by in effect becoming the system. The mafia has been documented hundreds of times and was honoured with its own genre in the nineteen thirties, which since its arrival has produced some fine examples in particular, Goodfellas and Once upon a time in America. These in return offer various illustrations of individual "mafia families." It is with these three films, and reference to the real cosa nostra, that my discussion on power in relation to the mafia organisation shall arise. It shall be supported with reference to important cultural texts, that can, and will be related to the proposed films. Aside from the traditions associated with the mafia, its menacing, and coercion; it offers food for thought to consider the lawful and upstanding government and police systems that supported and collaborated with such an organisation. In a phrase this eminence power structure, could substantially be referred to as a reflection of a society already in existence.

In Michel Foucault's discussion on public executions in Europe in the late eighteenth century in Discipline and Punish, he describes

"...In this relation, one of the fundamental mechanisms of absolute power : the executioner acts as a cog between the prince and the people."

Foucault, 1977, p.74



When taken into the context of the mafias position in the 1920's and 1930's they too acted as a cog between the government and the people. Through prohibition times, the mafia acted as a supplier of alcohol to the people on the street as well as the double role of the politicians advocates during election times. The U.S.A. was the land of opportunity, at least as much for the criminal as the honest person. With an over increasing population in a young country where wealth was waiting to be picked up, the spoils for the successful criminal were much greater. America presented new opportunities, with possibilities that were particularly limitless.

This thesis shall therefore offer an insight into this organisation and either humanise or destroy its leaders.





## Chapter One

“Ever since I can remember I’ve wanted to be a Gangster.”



Chapter one:

**“Ever since I can remember I’ve wanted to be a gangster.”**

As we introduce the ascension of each character in the three films we find one common denominator, each character is struggling to survive, each one (except Michael) is :

"In the gutter, but looking at the stars". " Oscar Wilde

To take the cases of Vito Corleone and Noodles first, as they rose from the ashes in the era just before Prohibition, "The Roaring Twenties." Both characters come from different mafia strands :- Vito, a pure Sicilian, and Noodles, a Jewish boy from Brooklyn. They had both been plunged into this new world of dreams and opportunities in the hope of a more optimistic existence. At the beginning of Once upon a time in America and the Godfather 2 we are offered two different insights from two young boys.

Vito Corleone experiences three murders at the beginning of The Godfather, those of his father, his older brother and eventually his mother. He is then hunted by the local don's capos but manages with the aid of neighbours to escape on a ship to America, where he will be allowed to create a new life for himself, away from the pain and the violence associated with Sicily. On his arrival in America we are presented with the Statue of Liberty, a symbol of Vito's new found freedom. This fresh start is accompanied by a name change due to a communication difficulty, and from now on Vito, although orphaned and without any peers will be free to make a new life for himself driven by a passion for revenge for what had been done to his family. As young Vito sits in a cell during his isolation period due to an outbreak of smallpox, he looks through the barred window where the Statue of Liberty beckons.

Unlike Vito Corleone, we are introduced to Noodles as a child living in Brooklyn, he and his friends are messenger boys for the local Jewish capo's. Noodles, however, unlike Vito appears to have a family, but we soon learn of its inadequacy.







Fig 1.1 The funeral of Antonio Andolini, Vito's father in Corleone, Sicily.

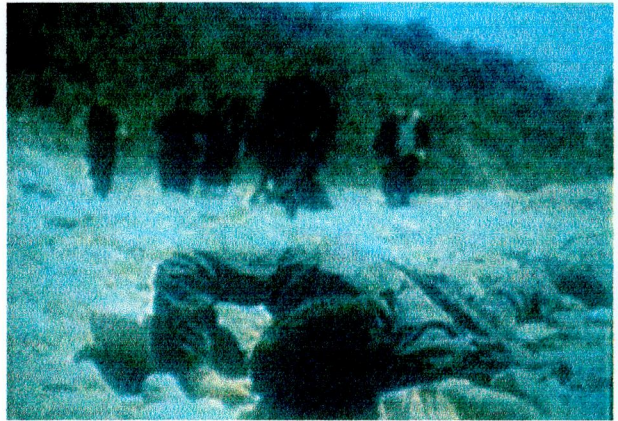


Fig 1.2 The assassination of Paulo Andolini, Vito's brother at his fathers funeral.

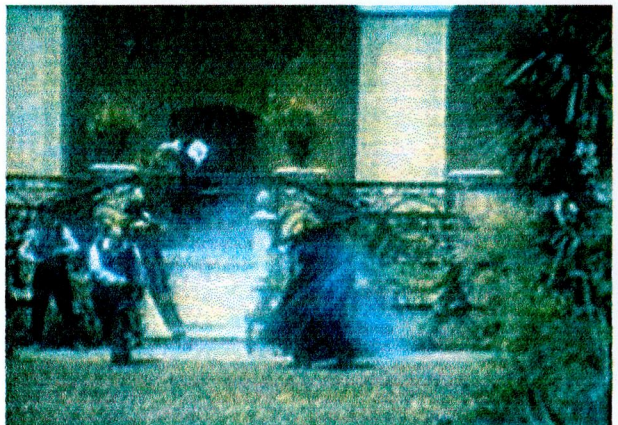


Fig 1.3 The assassination of Vito's mother at the residence of Don Ciccio.

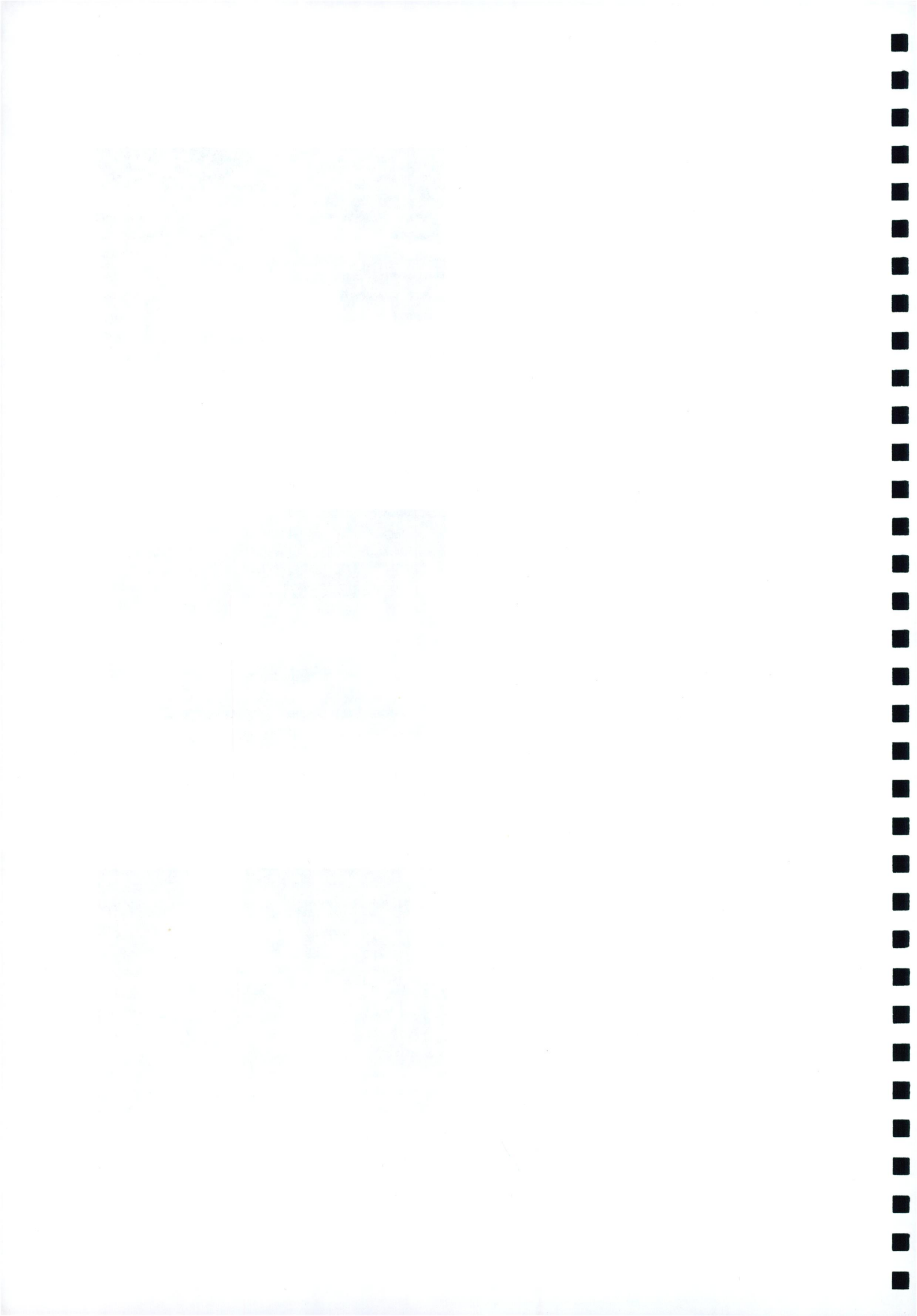






Fig 1.4 Young Vito Corleone on his journey to America.



Fig 1.4 In his isolation cell on Ellis Island, The Statue of Liberty illustrates Vito's new found freedom.



Fig 1.5 Young Noodles as we are introduced to him in Once upon a time in America.





"My father is praying, and my mother is crying and the light is turned off, what's to go home for? "

These streetwise kids who have no strong moral backup steal and bribe for their survival. They do, however, have something to keep themselves together, that is each other. From their first 'real job,' they make an oath to always stick together and contribute fifty percent of their earnings into a safe deposit in a locker in a train station, and promise that it will not be opened until all five are present again.

Both gangsters ascensions to the 'Big time' are gradual through a process of bootlegging until eventually they get their big breaks. For Noodles, Max and friends this comes through an ingenious invention to aid in the smuggling of alcohol. For Vito, it is his murder of Don Fanucci, the notorious don who intimidated and operated local corruption and extortion rackets that gains him respect and honour. These two characters have one essential difference, apart from their backgrounds. Vito marries, and respects family life, and impresses upon his son that:

"A man who doesn't spend time with his family can never be a real man." <sup>1</sup>

As Vito Corleone offers both us and his family security and protection, the title Godfather is very appropriate. Vito creates an inner sanctum for his family, something that becomes more precious than life itself. He commands respect and loyalty from his peers, and proclaims in Godfather 1 that he is not a murderer :

"We are not murderers, in spite of what this undertaker says."

Noodles, does not attain the same strong morals as Don Corleone, he cannot love, maybe because he has never been shown how; but from the beginning of the film his adoration of Deborah gradually turns into a destructive obsession.<sup>2</sup> He never marries, initiates two rapes and escapes from his troubles in an opium den. Noodles pathetic nature is carried through in the character of Henry Hill from the film Goodfellas. Henry lies a generation younger than Vito and Noodles. He is a half Irish half Italian streetwise kid who admits to us at the beginning of the film:





Fig 1.6 The 'safe deposit' or Train station locker where the gang conceal their fortune.

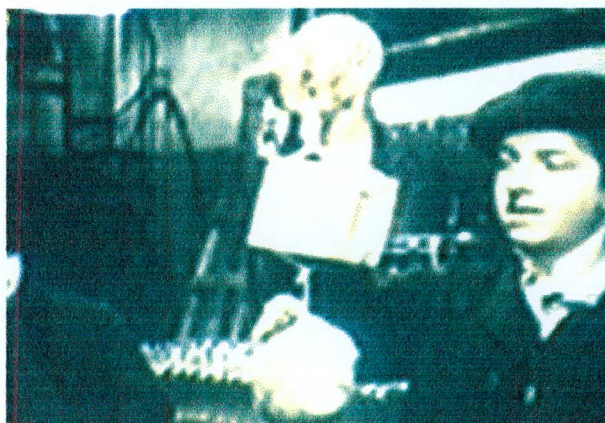


Fig 1.7 Noodles simple invention that allows the gang to aspire to greater levels.



Fig 1.8 The murder of Don Fanucci by Vito Corleone that bring about a greater respect for him.



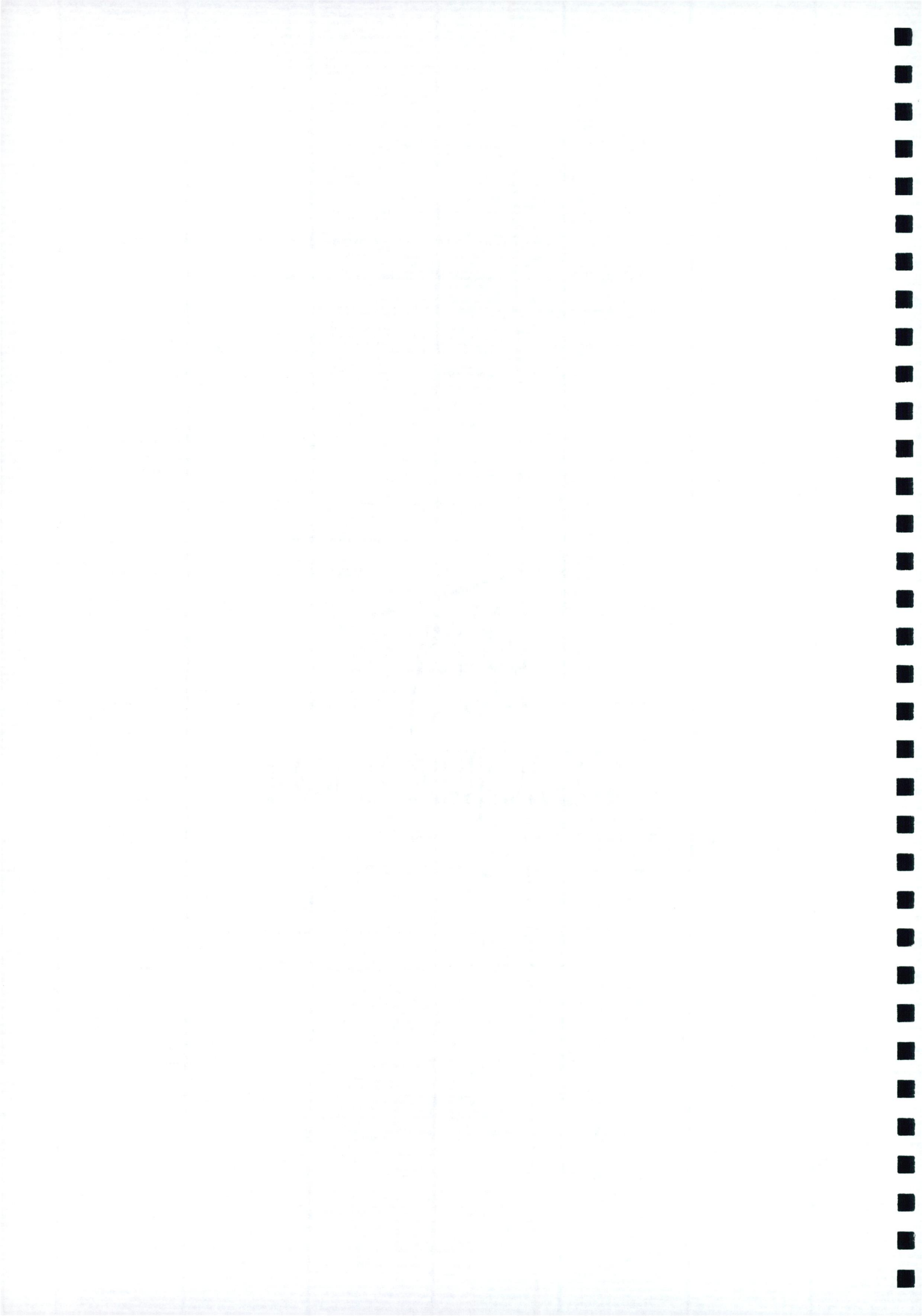


"Ever since I can remember, I've wanted to be a gangster,"

Henry has a love affair with dreams of 'The life.' When eventually he becomes a messenger boy for Paul Ciccerio, he revels in the excitement and authority offered within the mafia boundaries. He eventually makes his big break after a couple of years at bootlegging with Tommy. From this moment on Henry experiences a radical change, he earns more money and proclaims that he earns more in a year than many of the men in his neighbourhood will earn in a lifetime. He enjoys his new found security.

Throughout his ascension Henry is mesmerised by the power and authority of Paul Ciccerio and his pay offs to policemen in the form of cigarettes with dollar bills wrapped up inside them. Unlike our moral godfather Vito Corleone, Henry lacks character and respect, he disregards Vito's golden rule, he doesn't have respect for the Family, he is unfaithful to both Paulie and his wife, until eventually Paulie tells him that he's got to go back to his family, even if only to keep up appearances.

This family union that resounds through the Godfather 1, is not heeded by the youngest son, Michael who becomes a terrorist of sorts. Michael's ascension, I have left until last, as his is comparatively different to the ascensions of his father, Noodles and Henry Hill. Michael is the godfather's son, he has never needed for anything, he has always been protected by a strong paternal union. What makes his ascension different is original nonconformity to the mafia and 'The life.' Unlike his brothers Michael was a college boy and fought honourably in the second world war. Why then does he remain the most notorious don of them all? This can be answered by the sheer nature of Michael's ascension to power. He was plummeted into this position during a time of intense emotions and anger, at the time of his father's attempted assassination. From the moment of the assassination attempt, Michael is filled with vengeance, he wants now to protect his father and his family like he has been shown from a very young age. In the preparation of the double murder about to be executed by Michael, we are already experiencing something never portrayed while Vito was in power; the preparation of a hit. As we progress into Godfather 2 we see :



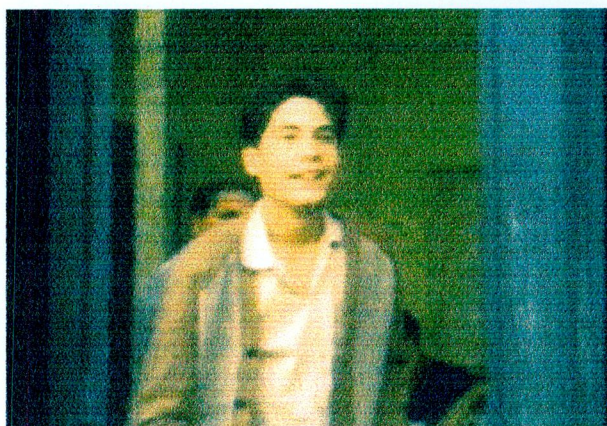


Fig 1.9 Young Henry Hill as we are introduced to him at the beginning of Goodfellas.



Fig 1.10 Henry presenting his first suit to his mother after he has aspired to greater heights.









Fig 1.12 Michael, as he is presented to us in his army uniform at his sisters wedding.



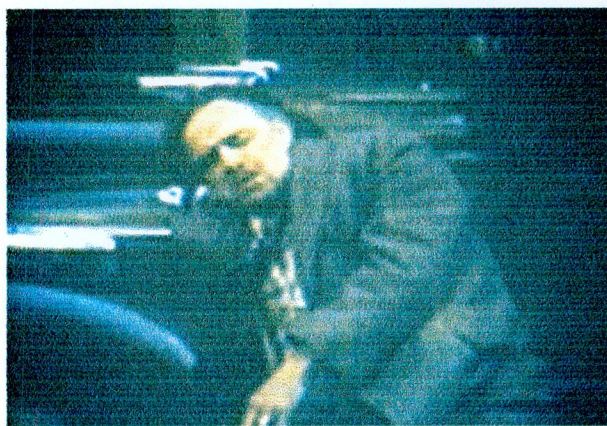


Fig 1.13 Vito Corleone as he is shot down outside his car in Little Italy.



" That as the empire expands and the closeness of the family collapses, more of the outside world is shown to us. Unlike the distance we are kept from it in part one."

Kolker,1980, p.166

An examination of an imperial power structure,The French Penal Reform System, as proposed by Michel Foucault in his writing Disapline and Punish.

In this dissection of a power organisation, it is imperative that we understand some of the milestones in modern history that remain revolutionary in moulding and maintaining large power structures of our society. Michel Foucault has devoted much time to the issue of power and its structures. He suggests that :

"Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And Power insofar as it is repetitious, permanent,inert, self reproducing, is simply an overall effect that emerges from all these mobilities, concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks in turn to arrest their movement."  
Foucault, London, p.92

If power is everywhere, then it is how this power is utilised that makes it so fundamental, it is the name applied to :

"A complex strategical situation in a particular society."

Foucault, 1977, p.93

Foucault deals with penal reform in France in the late Eighteenth century, and confronts several faults with the imperialist power demonstrated by the sovereign. It was an essential transition from public executions to a punishment that was:

" Not a weaker punishment but that was more effective in reaching deeper into the social body"

Foucault, 1977, p.94.





This reform came about due to a final collapse of imperialist power, and a continued threat posed by constant pilfering and illegalities within the social body. Foucault suggests that because the sovereign had his hands in so many pies, there could be no concentration of imperialist power in any one area. One of the main problems with the deployment of imperialist power was that it acted with motives of tyranny and revenge, therefore not upholding any balanced punishment structure. A power bloc that is to control and punish its aggressors should not :

"Depend on personal grudges, but on a single formal system of public power."

Foucault, 1977, p.94

". . .A penal system must be conceived as a mechanism intended to administrate differently, not to eliminate them all."

Foucault, 1977, p.77

This elimination, or attempted elimination was the cause of the eventual need for penal reform in the first instance. The sovereign could not eliminate the entire nation, as by that time a large portion of France were involved in pilfering. So instead of what had been labelled an inhumane form of punishment, regardless of the crime, a balance of punishment had to be achieved. Foucault further suggests that :

"One should punish enough so as not to allow repetition."

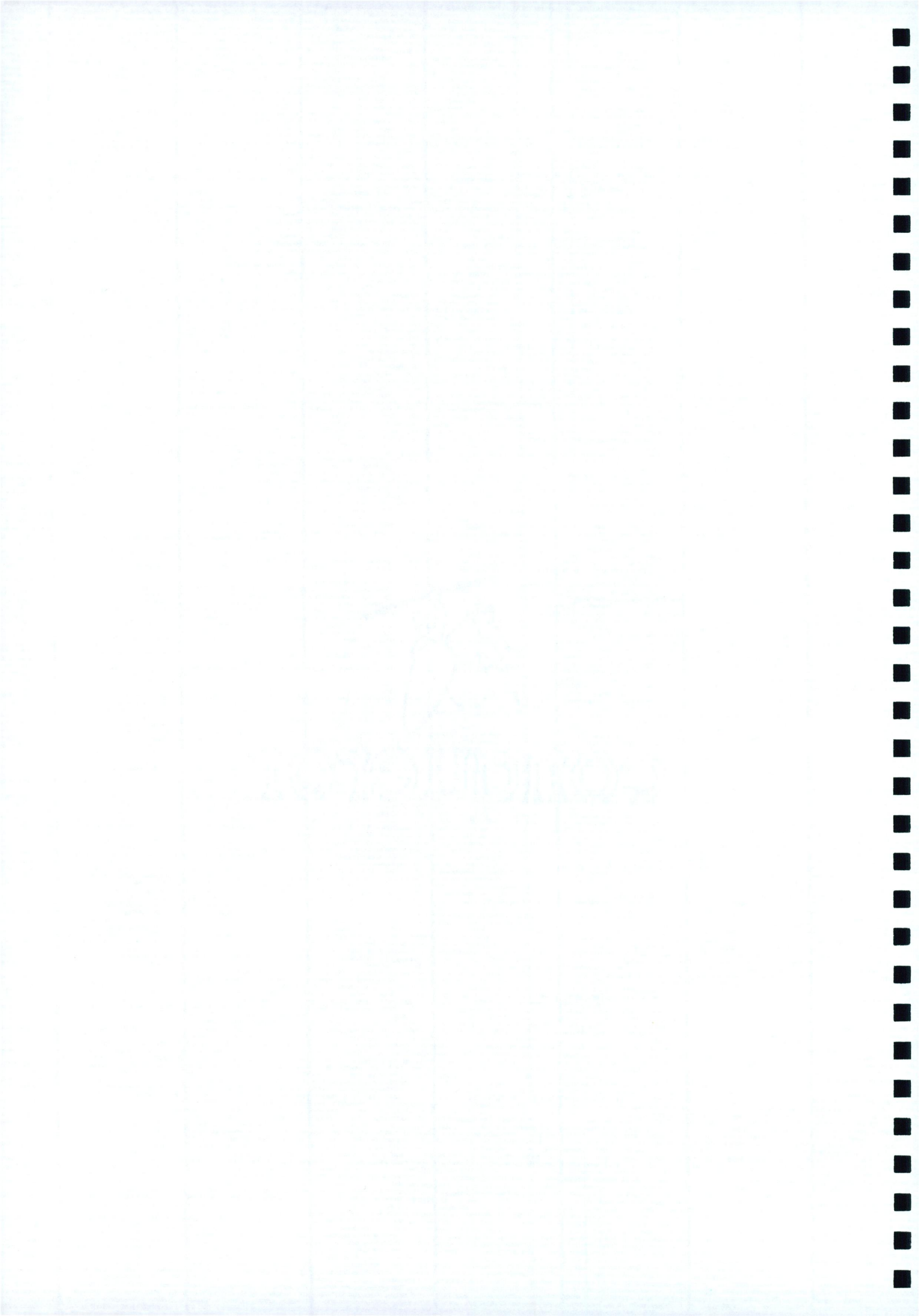
Foucault, 1977, p.93

What needs to be implemented instead is :

"The pain of the idea of pain."

Foucault, 1977, p.94

It is the memory of that pain that will be the future prevention. The new regulations must be inflexible and the implementors also inflexible to the sadistic pleasures enjoyed by some by means of torture. With the application of this system of better punishments, it is suggested that eventually a chain of ideas shall grow within the





social body that will allow respect to be commanded for the sovereign and his guidance and authority to be well received. With this in place, Gramsci would suggest that an ideal police state could come into existence, as the social body could police itself.

The relevance of this imperialist power bloc is its eventual totalitarian<sup>3</sup> control. It is the sheer thought of what may happen, that instills this respect and obedience. This example of a classical power bloc has many parallels with other power blocs in modern society most notably the mafia. The suggestions put forward in Frances penal reform system are successful and unbiased. Their guidelines suggest why Sonny and Fredo, Michael's brothers could never have become dons. Sonny was too impetuous and rash minded, he acted on his emotions, never taking long enough to consider his actions. His brother Fredo lacked the ability to be inflexible, he was very impressionable, and would therefore not have the strength to make important strategical decisions. As a result of Sonny and Fredo's actions they were both gunned down in their prime. Time and time again it has been proven that if one is not true to themselves they shall inevitably be destroyed. Henry Hill, Michael, Noodles and Maxi were all dishonest to themselves, concerning their own conscience, as they indulged in their desires for success, wealth, love, drugs and total power.

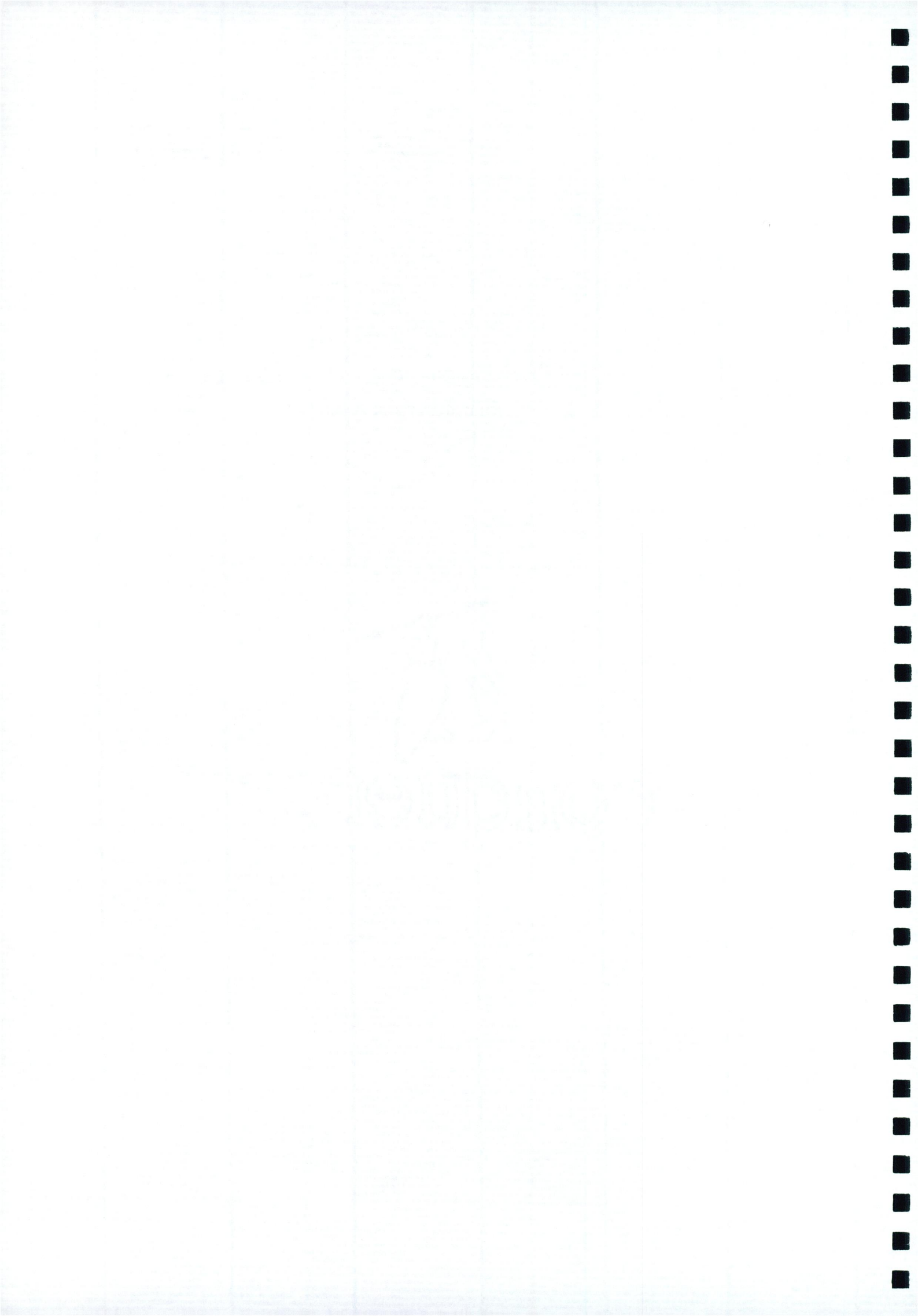
An intelligible illustration of imperialist power is documented by Foucault in Discipline and Punish as he describes to us 'The panoptical prison.' This prison was a system where all the cells surrounded a large watchtower. This tower sat at a point where each cell could observe the watch towers and its windows, but the tower remained high enough so that the prisoners could not observe whether or not anybody was actually in the tower watching them. The prisoners of course believed that they were actually being guarded, regardless of whether or not they were.

The discussions of the mafias methods for punishing enough so as not to allow repetition, and their reign for over fifty years in following chapters shall find many of its origins in a power structure such as the French penal system concerning the effectiveness of Omerta, Murder Inc. and the respect and loyalty commanded as a result.



## Chapter Two

“To me it was better than being president of the  
United States of America.”





Chapter two:

## “It was better than being President of the United States of America.”

“The U.S.A was simply too big to bankrupt, everyone could take what they wanted, legitimately or illegitimately, and there would still be more, while virtually unrestricted immigration meant endless supply of new workers.”

Dorigo, 1992, p.213

Despite ample opportunities for the gangster and such like in America, it is not possible that the gangster could have aspired to the heights that it did without a formal set of structures. This power and corruption is in essence captured in the Godfather 1, when Michael explains to Kay that his father was like a senator or the president, in control, acting with authority; Kay outrightly accuses him of being naive and says, :

"Senators and presidents don't kill people....."

"Oh," replies Michael, "Whose being naive? "

Politicians, big business' and the church were some of the upstanding moral institutions that supported and liaised with the mafia. At the beginning of the century, American politicians realised that it was cheaper to buy gangland minders than it was to buy the voters themselves. These minders went along to the polls with the aid of blackjacks and revolvers and simply terrorised the voters into voting for the right candidate. If one remains still in doubt to the extent of the involvement big business and the government with the Mafia, then consider why it was that J.Edgar Hoover instead of Admitting that he was wrong, said in effect that :-

"There was no mafia but that there was a cosa nostra but that they were keeping tabs on it."

Dorigo, 1992, p.26





Fig 2.1 Senator Geary, an associate of Michael's, presenting him with a plaque.



Fig 2.2 Bonsea, a renowned business man, seeking the assistance of Don Corleone.

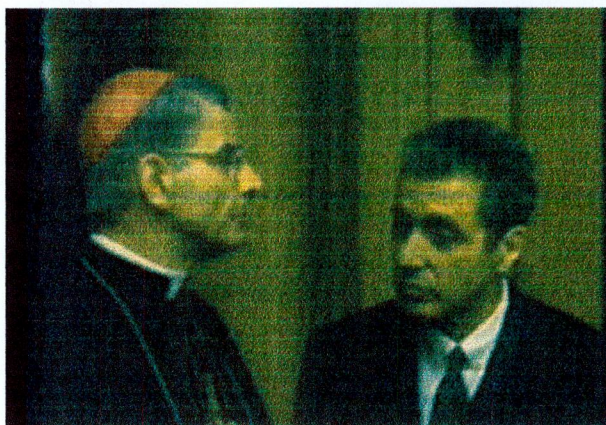
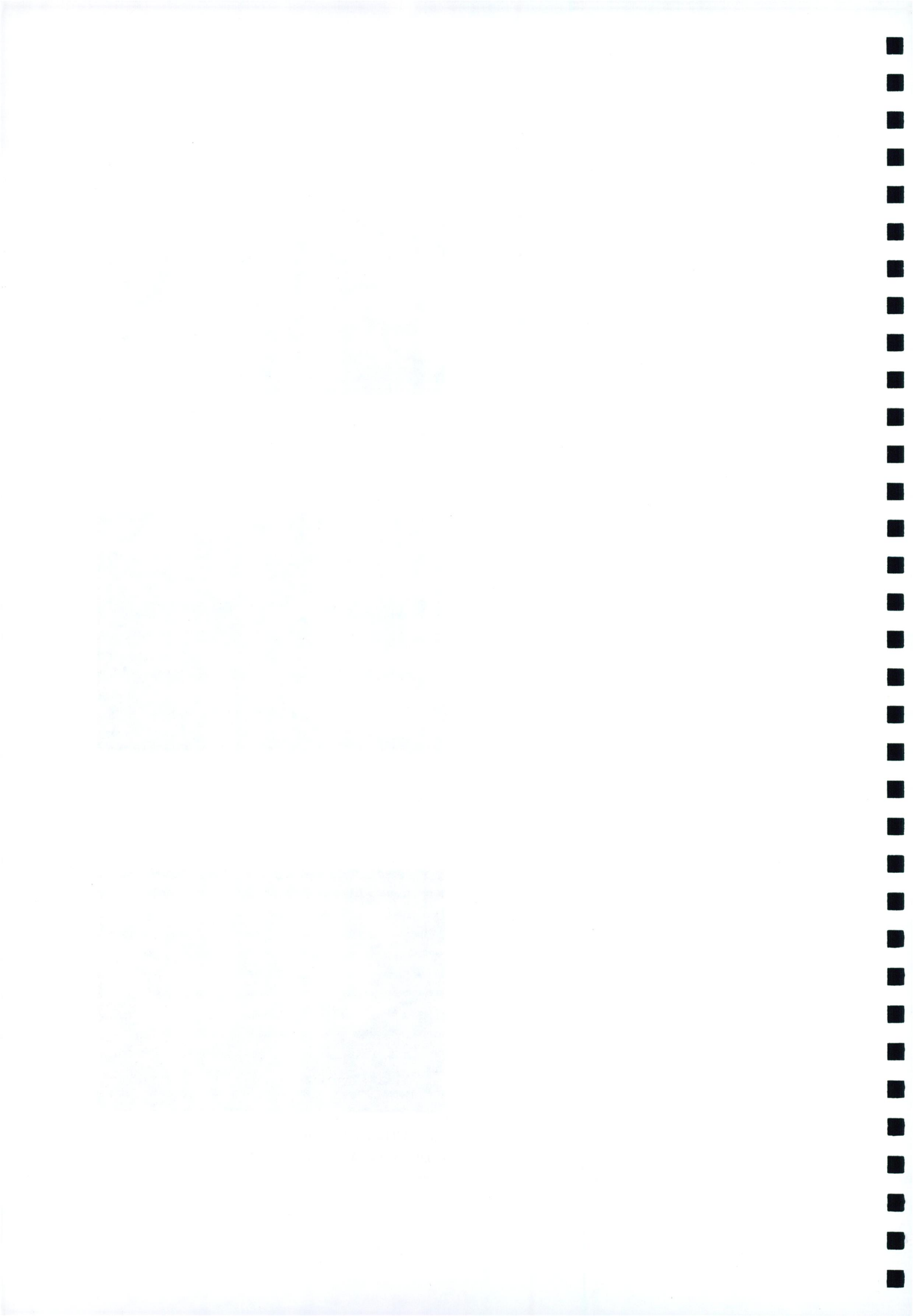


Fig 2.3 The cardinal with Michael Corleone, at the celebration after Michael received his honour from the church.







A decade later, he further denied the existence of the mafia, but also did his best to keep the F.B.I. out of drug enforcement for thirty five years. There was, therefore, no mafia in the eyes of J.Edgar Hoover, the man in charge of security in one of the most powerful nations in the world. After such revelations it is not surprising that the mafia did enjoy such power and success. With such open loopholes in government it was easy for the mafia to succeed and enjoy more power than the president himself. Apart from the government, big business also found great prospects through intervention with the mafia. They used the mafia to break strikes and discourage unionisation.

"A few broken limbs on the picket lines or a few sticks of dynamite through the window;s of the union organiser's."

Dorigo, 1992, p.17

Of course the mafia realised that it couldn't support every businessman or politician, so they in turn were selective about the organisation they endorsed, one that would obviously benefit them in the long run. The new boueracracy in America in the 1950's, needed something to spend their new found fortunes on. The mafia was an answer to some of their needs, in the form of gambling and drugs .

"If people cannot gamble legally then they will find ways to do it illegally. Once it becomes illegal it is easier for organised crime to use it."

Dorigo,1992, p. 82

Fuelled by this niche market, the mafia expanded into drug and gambling rackets when prohibition came to an end. Las Vegas and Cuba became the playground of the rich. Gambling proved to be a huge asset to the mob because there were so many opportunities to cheat. Gambling depends on money, something that can be virtually untraceable, therefore, not only did the mafia depend on cheating the gamblers, but the owners and the taxman also. The drugs racket, another interest of the mob, was so



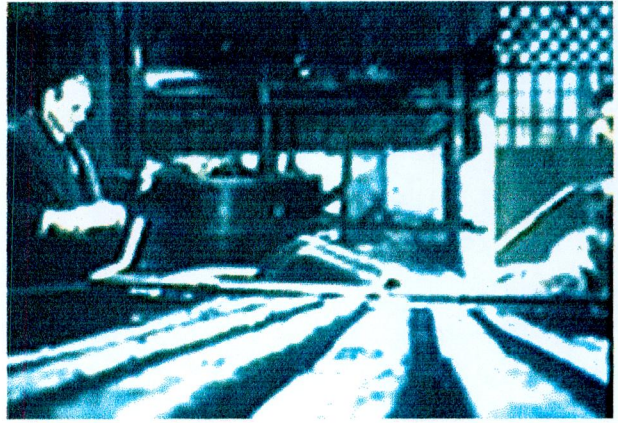


Fig 2.4 An example of the coercion implemented with regard to the unions in Once upon a time in America.



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successful because the only risk with drugs was in its transportation and distribution; by this stage this was a field in which the mafia were specialised, and was, therefore, an area in which the mafia could excel.

It is the mob's versatility that remains a major component of its success. It evolved over a period of forty years to deal with the needs and loopholes of a growing American market. The 1920's provided an opportunity for bootleggers and extortionists that acquired more sophistication and cohesiveness, focusing more on the need for gambling in the 1930's. By the 1940's the extortion rackets were widely extended, and for virtually anything to be done somebody had to be paid off. With the 1950's came a decline in the old style gangsterism, and as is clearly illustrated in all of the films the change arose with organised syndicates replacing the 'Mustache Pete's'.<sup>1</sup>As the 1960's evolved, the need for drugs by the 'Nouveau riche,' was resulting in a huge money spinner for the mob; but at this stage in the evolution of the mafia, many of the don's remained with various semi legitimate business' such as clubs and restaurants.

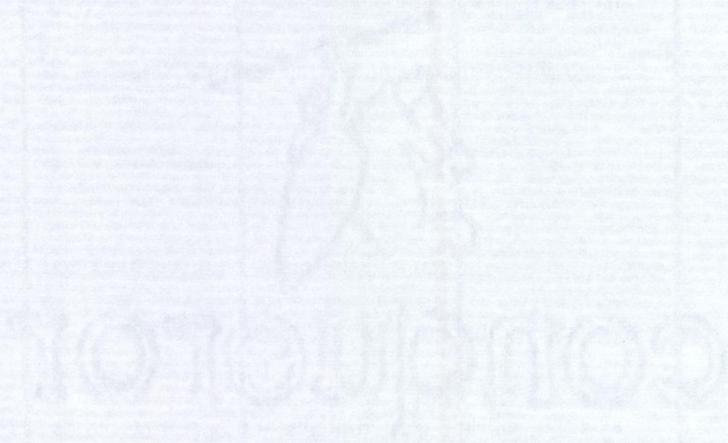
Aside from the obvious infiltration of big business, the government, and slight involvement of the church, the mafia enforced strict codes within its organisation, so as to keep a strong held power system in place.

"Laws, allow the fundamental operation of power to be thought of as that of a speech act: the enumeration of law, discourse of prohibition. The manifestation of power takes on the perfect form of "thou shalt not."

Foucault, 1977, p.72

If one decided to disobey the regulations set out by the mafia, he had better be prepared to watch out and realise that he is on his own from now on. The system founded to protect the mafia organisation can in many ways be compared to a formal body, such as the army. 'The Family,' comprises not just of blood relations, but a host of loyal subjects, soldiers and assistants. Clemenza and Tessio were as much a part of the







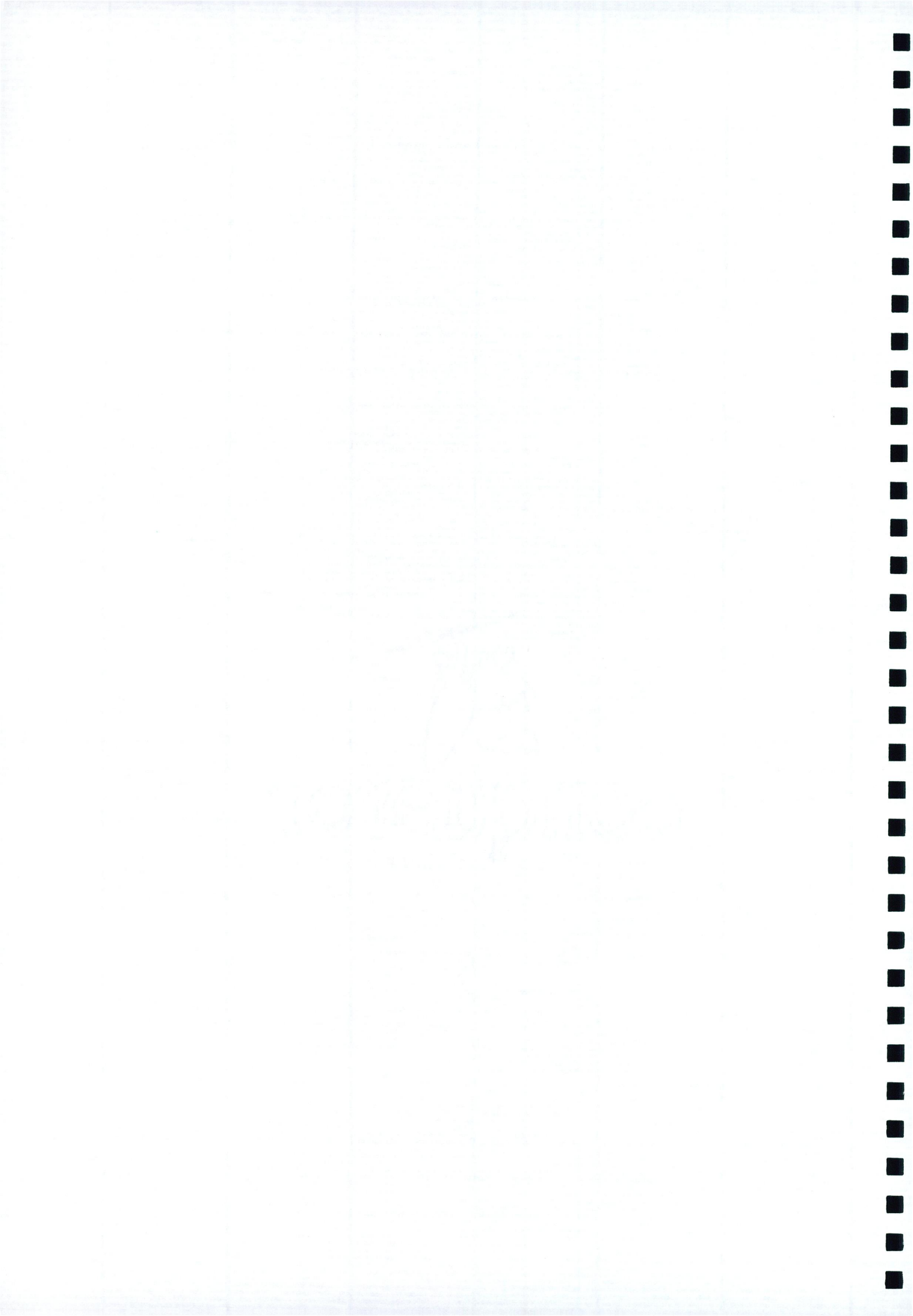
Corleone family as Michael and Connie. These 'soldiers' and aides were an integral part of the success of the mafia. Above these soldiers are the capos or the under bosses, who acted, in essence as right hand men to the don. The Consigliere (represented by Tom Hagan in the Godfather) was the adviser to the don, who had only one client throughout his career; the don. To complete this series of ranking, 'The Commission' was set up. This became an integral Supreme court for all of the families, as each important don was a member. With a formal regimental system like this in place, we must discuss reasons for why it operated so smoothly for so long. There are two main reasons, first, we shall take into account a theory proposed by the Italian theorist, Antonio Gramsci, that :

"In the formation of leaders one premise is fundamental : it is the intention that there should always be rulers and ruled, or as the objectives to create conditions in which this dimension of the human race, or the belief that this division is only on an historical fact corresponding to certain conditions."  
Gramsci, 1971, p. 144

It is natural to the human condition that what Gramsci tells us is true; there of course exists those of us who want to conquer the world and others who are quite content to have others do it for them. In this particular case, Gramsci's quote can be applied to the leadership of the mafia and the willingness of the general public to be lead, or more appropriately controlled by them. There is also the theory that due to the mob's extensive coercive powers that it was in the social bodies interest to be lead or ruled by the mob, John Fiske suggests that :

"A disciplined social body or formation is one that complies with the system that controls it because it has been persuaded that its benefits are greater than its costs, that what it costs are better than what it excludes."  
Fiske, 1993, p.171

This draws us back to the same old cliché , "what we don't have, we always want more."  
Both the general public, the government, big business and the church became these





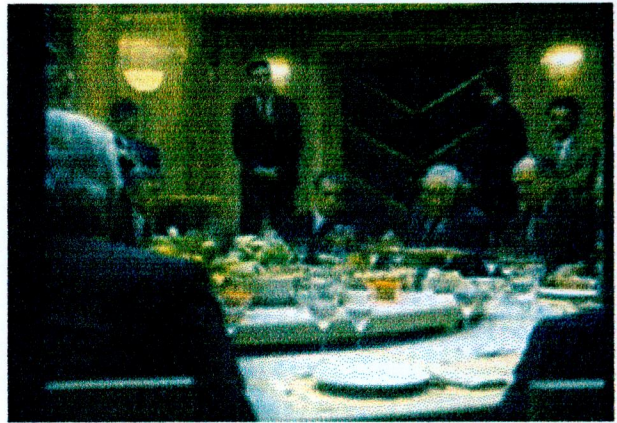


Fig 2.6 An example of a 'commision meet-  
ing.' in Godfather 3.



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social bodies that John Fiske mentions, they each in turn complied with the controlling body :- The Mafia, because it was in their interests. For the government it brought them essential votes. For big business it oppressed any unease in the unions and finally for the church it supplied much funds. J. Edgar Hoover obviously realised some long term benefit and took note of certain advice when he decided to ignore the mafia's existence for so long.





Methods by which "They punished enough so as not to allow reoccurrence."

Coercion has been implemented by the mafia ever since their arrival in the United States. The 'Mustache Pete's,' and other original mafia hoods existed on the principles of respect and revenge. If one appears to be disrespected then this coercion is not used subtly but presented in the open, and it is this unshielded form of coercion that requires no back up system as its intimidation and domination is sufficient. Throughout the three films this respect and revenge element is used and abused. In Goodfellas, Tommy, the murdering maniac associate of Henry's, has no qualms when it comes to lifting a gun or a knife. This appals Henry as he describes to us the series of bodies planted around the city of people who had posed a threat to the security of this family. We are shown various savage attacks :- from the couple in the pink Cadillac with their throats slit, to Frankie in the meat truck and another in a garbage disposal. Tommy's masochistic tendencies arise most potently with the Billy Batt's incident at the beginning of the film, where Tommy finishes off Batt's with a carving knife as he lies helpless in the boot of the car.

The Godfather Trilogy also indulges in grand spectacles portraying the effectiveness of coercion; most notably the famous dual sequence of the christening of Michael's godson, where simultaneously all threats to the Corleone family are efficiently exterminated. This dramatic scene where we witness Michael denouncing Satan and all his works, remains responsible for the multiple assassinations we witness. The efficiency shown to us in this scene brings harshly home to us the threat posed by the mafia when they themselves are threatened.

"The notion of private justice takes forceful, verbal form in the very first scene of the film."

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"Bonsera, beseeches Don Corleone for justice. His daughter has been brutally assaulted By two youths. "I believe in America," he declares like like a creed in the opening ,line, this brilliant scene administrated the principal motifs of The Godfather. This stirs our awareness of the need of the simple minded for a strong protective authority."

Cowie, 1987, p.67

When we know that there is nowhere else to turn, we can always go to Don Corleone for justice.

There were two formal organisations within the mafia that dealt with this enforcement, they being Omerta<sup>2</sup> and Murder Inc. Omerta was an overdeveloped sense of honour, that existed especially in Sicily, and is demonstrated in particular by Vito when he returns to Sicily to murder the local don for the atrocities caused to his family. Omerta created men who became ready to to kill and who were accustomed to murdering.

The need for this extensive use of violence was due to the lack of non violent sanctions in this unlawful organisation. For example if someone refused to pay a gambling debt, they could not be sued; so in its place this terrorism evolved. As bodies could eventually traced, Omerta was taken one step forward in the form of Murder Inc. which was to become a murder machine for the mafia. It was essential that it could make murders virtually untraceable. To an organisation such as this, the task proved to be particularly easy. The organisation only murdered other mobsters, as killing ordinary people always brought trouble with it. Murders were performed if there had been bad business dealings, or if someone was posing a threat to the operations of the mafia. All of the 'Hits' were quick in and out jobs, clean and efficient, a major factor of its success. The hits remained untraceable for the simple reason that as the investigations progressed the coercive organisations within the mafia instilled enough fear in the investigators so as to terminate certain lines of investigation.

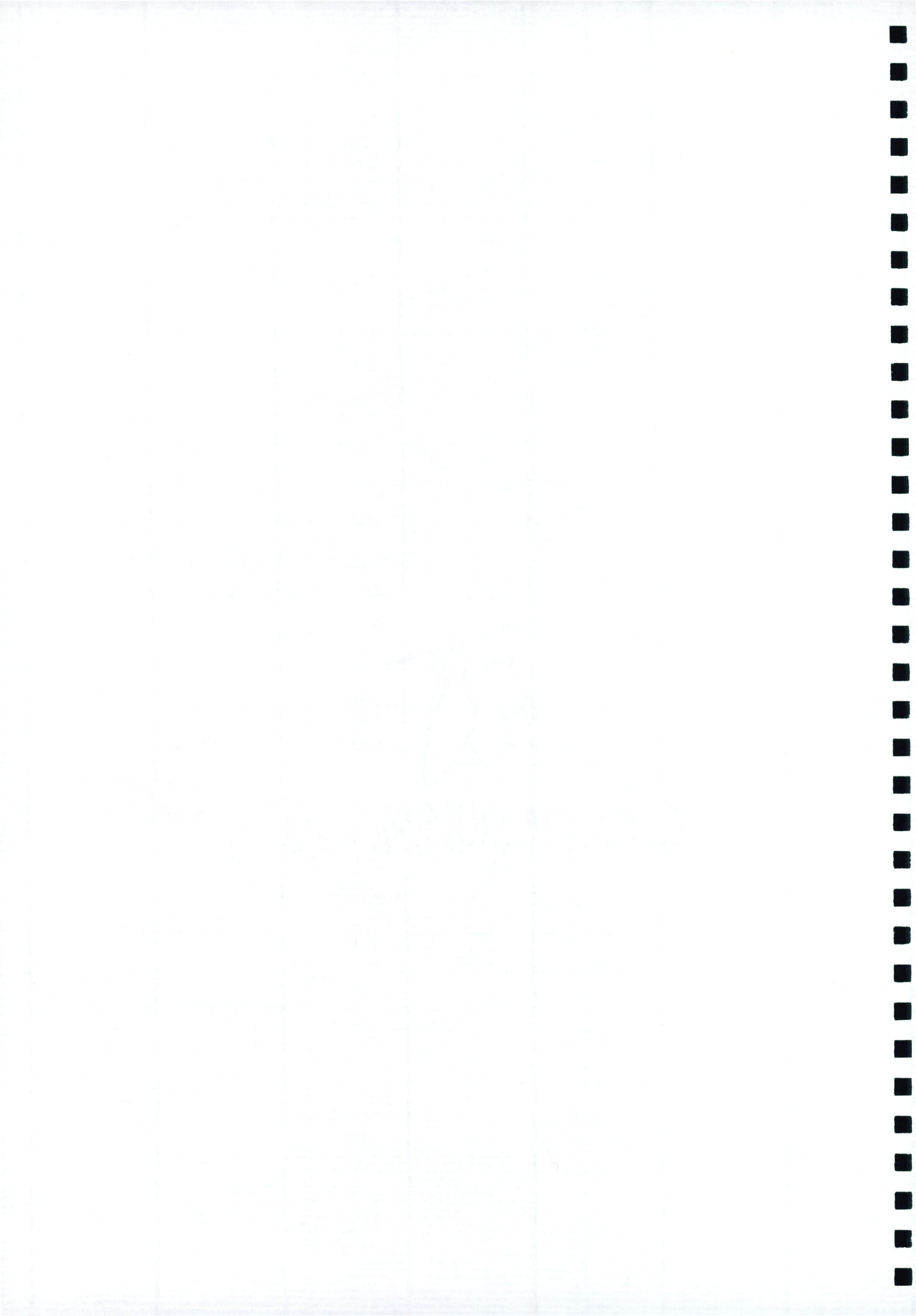






Fig 2.7 The slaughtered couple in their pink Cadillac.



Fig 2.8 Frankie as he hangs frozen in a meat truck.



Fig 2.9 Another victim of the clean up, on this occasion in a garbage disposal unit.





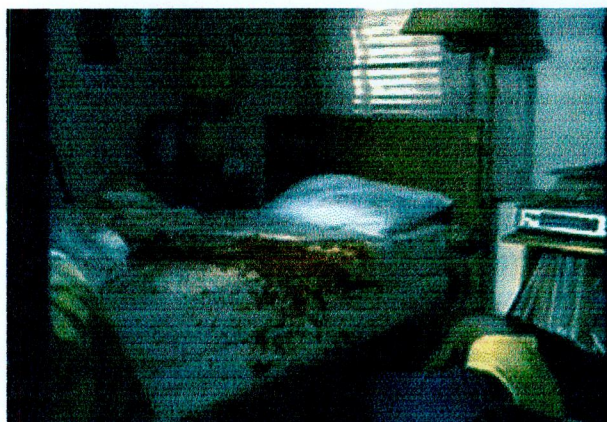


Fig 2.10 The last victim of this clean up operation in Goodfellas.

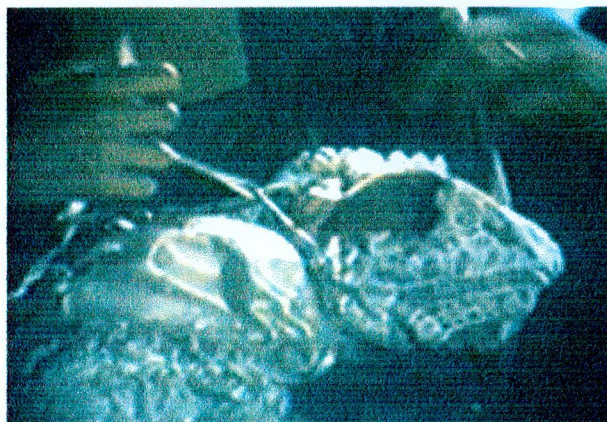


Fig 2.11 Connie and Carlos son as he is presented for his christening.



Fig 2.12 The serene appearance of Michael at the christening, once again demonstrating the hypocrisy.







Fig 2.13 The first murder to occur simultaneously to the christening.



Fig 2.14 The second murder in this sequence.

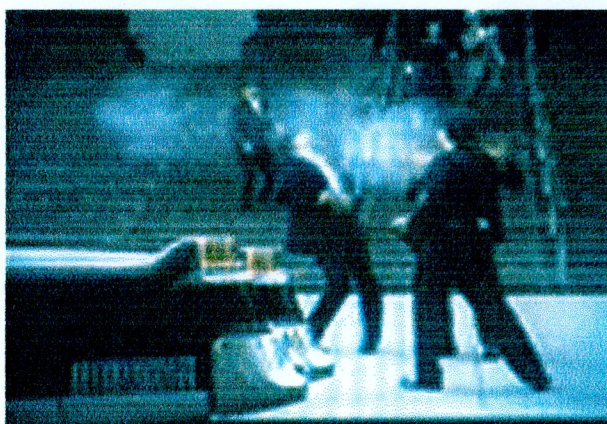


Fig 2.15 The third murder in this sequence



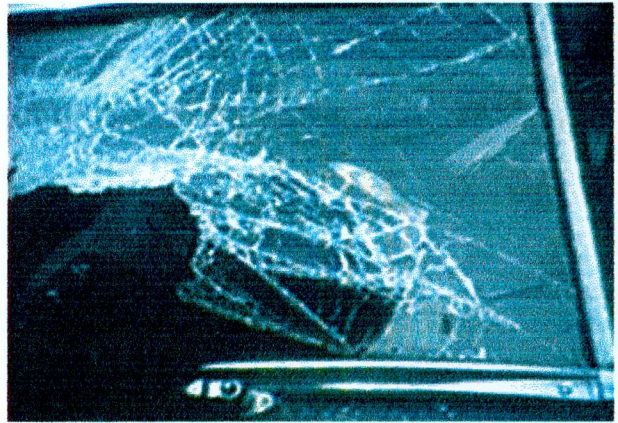


Fig 2.17 The final murder in this sequence, it is the murder of Michael's brother in law, Carlos.





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Fig 2.18 The slaughtering of Billy Batts under the hand of Tommy.





"Violence is violence: whatever form it takes violence involves social bodies in conflict in specific places. It is the conflictual social relations that react bodily."

Fiske, 1993, p.125

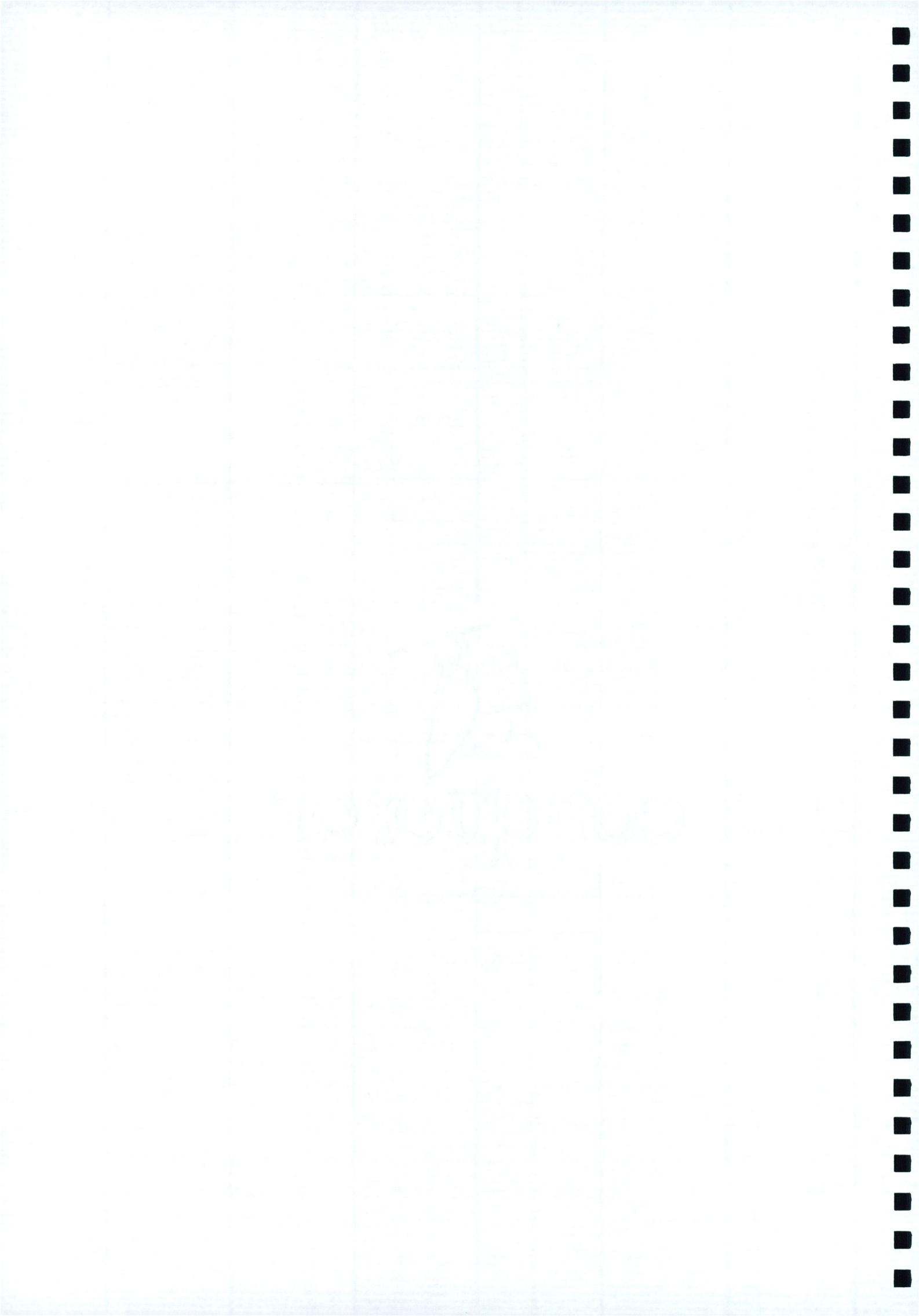
Fiske, however, continues to inform us that stronger instances of violence occur among the socially underprivileged, repressed and subordinate, than in socially privileged areas; thus defying 'The basic instincts theory.' Gramsci himself defies Fiske with his statement suggesting that:

"It is the bureaucracy ie : the crystallisation of the leading personnel which exercises the coercive power and at a certain level welcomes it."

Gramsci, 1971, p.246

With a specific example to the proletariat in America at the beginning of this century. It appears that it was rarely that the proletariat in this case, unless driven by extremes, were the instigators of coercion, it was on most occasions only ever introduced by the Bourgeoise, who decided to act on issues that they considered to be either right or wrong. The proletariat on the other hand, rarely posed any threat to prohibition in the United States as they only ever wished to get on with their jobs, but the upper class remained active in the corruption and illegalities of the *cosa nostra*. So long as the intellectuals and the upper classes remained coupled with the mafia their threat was greatly reduced.

This reign of coercion and cruelty has been in existence since the beginning of man. Machiavelli has also catalogued various princes of Italy and how they chose their various paths to control their empires. Ceasre borgia in particular may have in fact been an example for his Italian descendants.



"Cesare Borgia was considered cruel, notwithstanding his cruelty reconciled the Romagna, unified it and restored it to peace and loyalty and if this is rightly considered, he will be seen to have been much more merciful than the Florentines. Therefore a prince, so long as he keeps his subjects loyal and united ought not to mind reproach of cruelty and coercion because with a few examples he will become more merciful than those who through too much mercy, allow disorder to arrive."  
Machiavelli, 1993, p. 129





## Chapter Three

“Ill make you an offer you can’t refuse.”





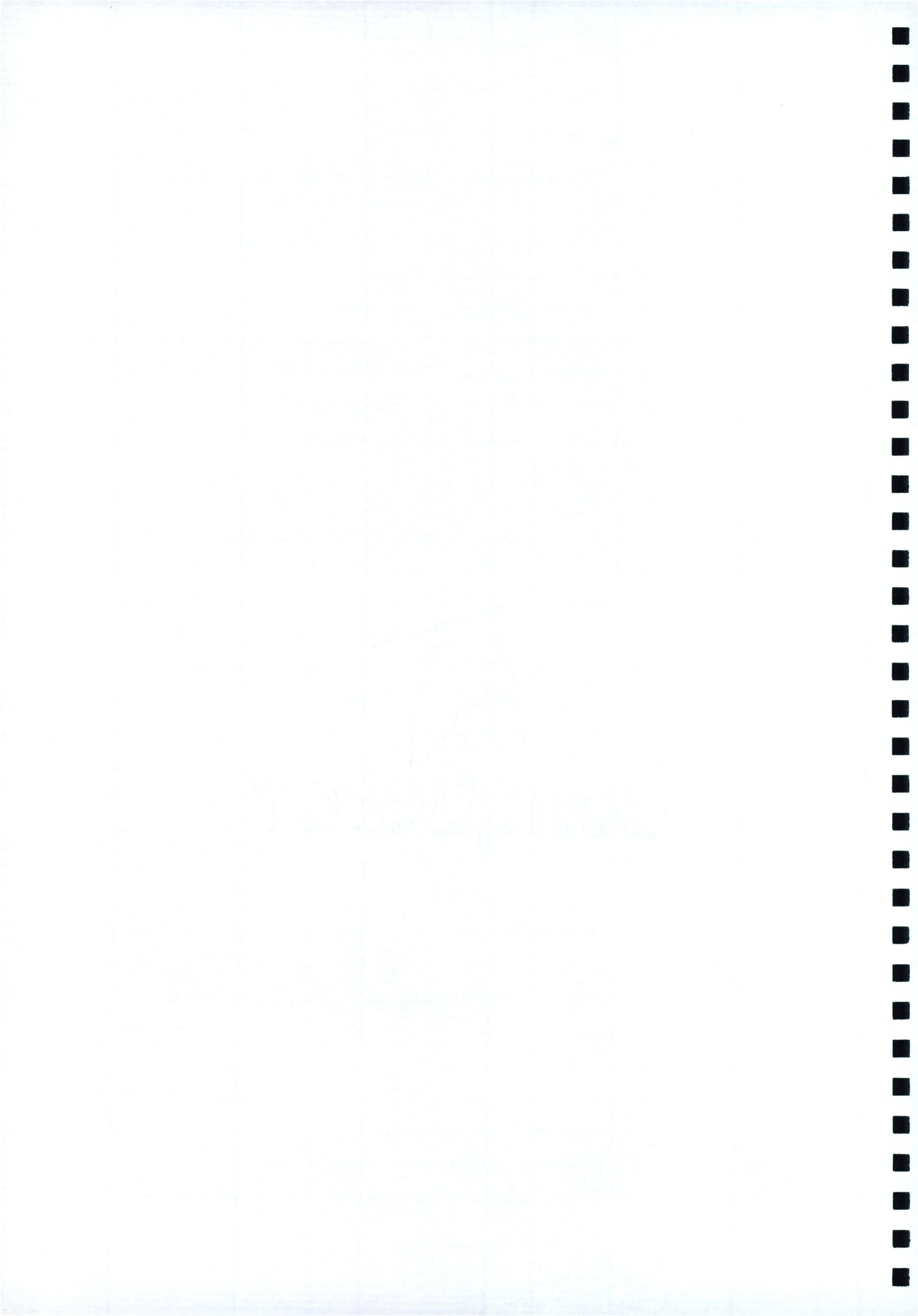
Chapter three:

### **“I’ll make you an offer you can’t refuse.”**

The Gangster genre originating in the 1930's became, and has remained an integral part of modern American cinema. Some of the main reasons for this success lie in its historical background. From its origins, the early gangster films, The roaring twenties, and Little Caesar, this genre was dealing with current social issues supported by a wave of shock stories in the newspapers. American audiences were allured by this new genre as it offered a visual illustration to the mafias operations in New York and Chicago. With the aid of improving sound technology the gangster genre achieved greater realism to its audience.

Apart from this realistic appeal, there was something more important that allowed this genre to enjoy an eternal success, its closer look at the lives of the self made man and ideals of the American dream. Commercial cinema has always been a classic form of escapism. In the 1930's during an era of great depression, the gangster portrayed an existence of immense power and wealth; a captivating formula for the impoverished people in the small towns. The gangster has served a double purpose; for those with a glimmer of optimism, he offers a way to get ahead, to succeed, he clearly demonstrates how he has lifted himself out of the gutter and ascended to great levels of respect and power. For the more conservative audience on the other hand, they are satisfied at witnessing the gangsters downfall, confirming that out of evil comes no good.

This process of ascension, and inevitable downfall is conveyed in each film of this genre. It is because of this predetermined sequence of events that this genre has remained so popular. To those seeking eternal hope, it may be found in the gangsters ascension from the proletariat to bourgeoisie. The audience is seduced by this success and, like the Mirror theory<sup>1</sup> suggests, they are attracted to the gangster, who is to the proletariat, a more co-ordinated and obviously more a successful individual than they themselves are. This parallel between escapism, in the form of the successful gangster, and realism in the form of the corruption and misuse of ethical institutions has moulded a unique genre that offers us the cake, in the form of gangster illusion, and allows us



to eat it, by showing us that we are not bad, or evil for being seduced by such lifestyles, when we see that the church and state have also succumbed to the mob. For those who refuse to admire the operations of the mafia, they too can find an attraction to this genre. These are the people who find pleasure in seeing the gangster to his inevitable downfall. It is for these above reasons that this genre appeals to so many. It fills the needs of the majority. This argument can quite simply be defined by Pam Cooke as she explains that :

"The appeal of the gangster is his ability to grasp those goals for which the status quo says we should strive , despite the minimal options it offers'.

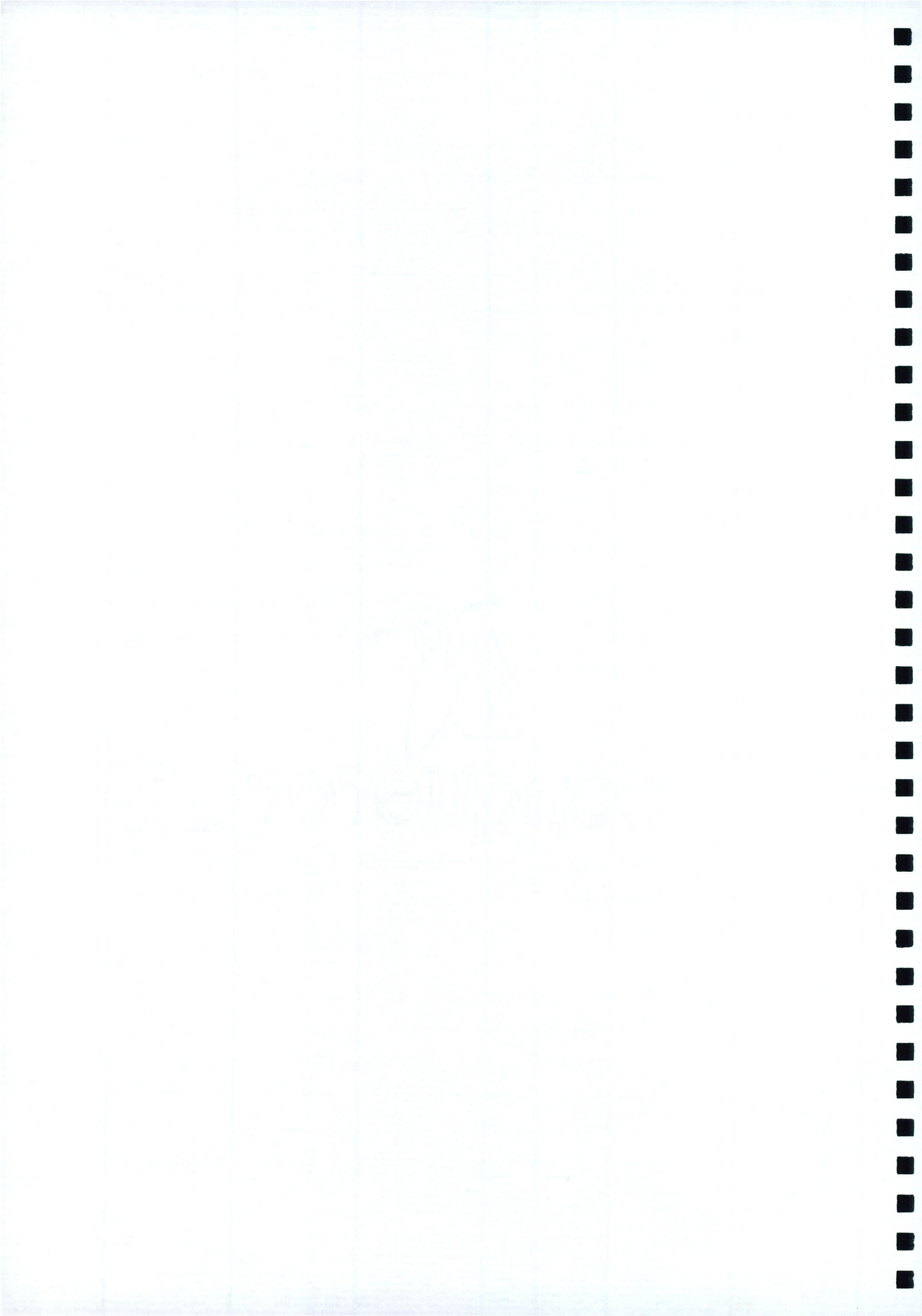
Cooke, 1985, p.84z

"Strong passions are necessary to sharpen the intellect and help intuition more penetrating, because reality is a product of the application of human will to the society of things ."

Gramsci, 1971, p.104

As we observe this quote which on Antonio Gramsci's part may appear very idealistic, we can quickly realised, that infact the gangster has realised exactly what has been suggested by Gramsci, he has applied his strong passions to succeed, to interpret for himself a reality that envelops the American dream. A gangster is the title endowed on a criminal with a certain legal and social status. He remains a figure outside the boundaries of legal society, as he has surpassed the set of rules laid down and abided by the majority of society. It is, therefore, because the gangster breaks the boundaries that the rest of us wouldn't dare tread over, that we admire and respect him. The gangster, in most cases speaks for the proletariat; for a society that is kept in its place by a series of strict laws and suppression. The gangster offers us hope, and even though we realise that we shall never develop his courage to step over these boundaries, he remains for the proletariat; the ordinary man, an icon of sorts. This ideal of the gangster must, however depend on the icon of The Godfather, Don Vito Corleone, not of the character of Henry Hill, Noodles, Max or Michael Corleone.







Why is it that in most Mafioso scenarios, that we easily allow ourselves to be seduced by the elegant suits, beautiful people and unquestionable powers, and not of the dead bodies crumpled in the gutters and alleyways, or the constant fear that any-time, anywhere, someone could pop a bullet in your head? It is not as we are all aware, that the Mafioso are unlike the rest of us in reality, except that their gap between 'I want,' and 'I will,' is a lot smaller than ours.<sup>2</sup> Our continued fascination with the Mafia is that we ourselves want to be mafioso. We envy the respect and authority that the mafia command, their escape from the day to day job, but most importantly we envy their glamorous and interesting lives, as we come to the realisation that no matter how strong our own will to power, 'our will' shall never come to anything more than a desire. Out of the three proposed films The Godfather trilogy is compiled of a unique formula that offers us a desirable existence and someone in the form of Vito Corleone that will protect us from harm. It is this existence portrayed by The Godfather that has attracted Henry Hill into the realms of the mafia.

"Don Corleone is separated from other dons as he is merely a capitalist extended, someone who had taken literally the American myth and did everything in his power to achieve it."

Ray, 1985, p.334

"The sense of magic and awe of their power emanates from the fact that , with a few exceptions - such as Michaels preparations for the killing of Sollozo and McCluskey, we are never permitted to see the details of planning, or of strategies being worked out."

Kolker,1980,

One of the most powerful examples of the above enigma suggested is the scene involving the slaughtering of Woltz's prize race horse. This scene is remarkable in executing the immense and unquestionable power of the Mafia. Coppola provides a series of tracking movements that slowly guide us from Woltz's garden up to his window and



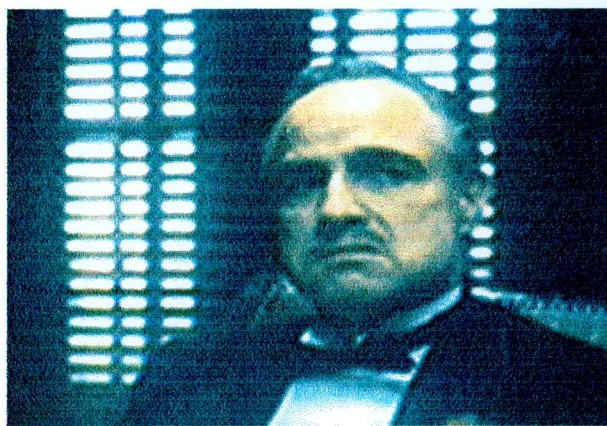


Fig 3.1 A portrait of Vito Corleone our moral Godfather.







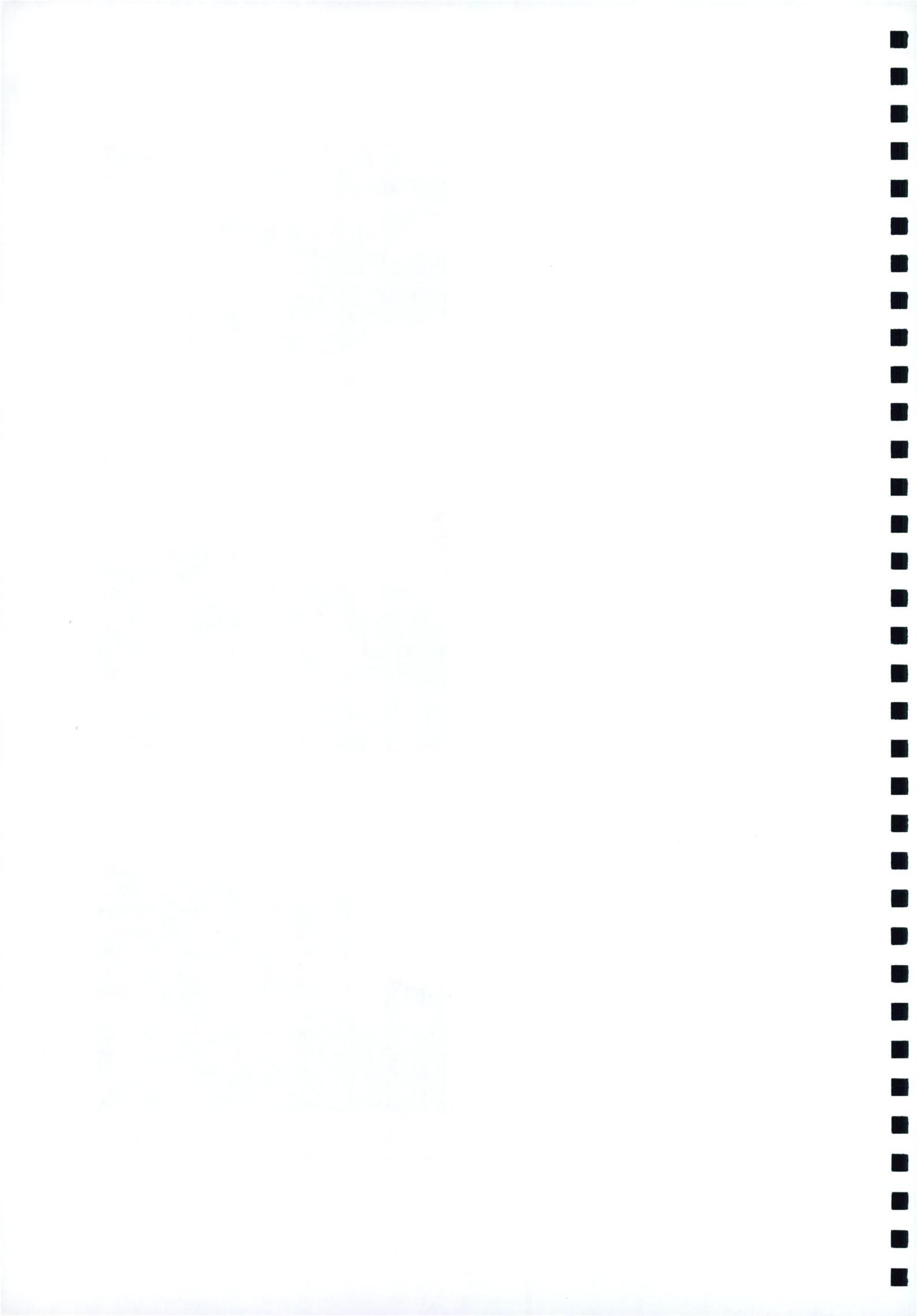
Fig 3.2 Sollozo and Mc Cluskey dead at the table .



Fig 3.3 Woltz's garden as we are first introduced to it.



Fig 3.4 The tracking sequence used by Coppola begins as we move up to Woltz's window.





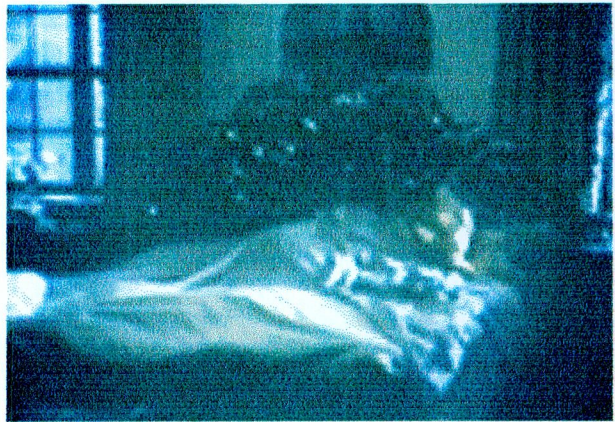


Fig 3.5 The camera now moves inside Woltz's bedroom.



Fig 3.6 We now are brought up to Woltz's bed.



Fig 3.7 We come to the realisation at the same time as Woltz, the fate of his prize race horse.

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finally up to his bed; where we realise at the same time as Woltz what Don Corleone's capos have done. The resounding cries of Woltz bring us once again slowly out of the room and the camera tracks back down to the garden where we were first introduced to the horror. This almost magical power of the Corleone's ascends only when it is needed and operates efficiently without any resistance, even though, as we are aware, they are constantly threatened. It is The Godfather's ability also to stand above the mire created by low - life gangsters such as Henry Hill, and their reaction against the narcotics ring that was being enjoyed by several other families including Goodfellas ,that was unprecedented in modern American cinema at that time. The Godfather was offering a portrayal of empowerment to an audience in a time of great disillusionment:- the early seventies. Therefore, this reaction against the drugs ring by Vito Corleone was appealing to the general audiences and once more reinforced the Corleone's on their pedestal.

Henry Hill, as I have mentioned above, unlike the Corleone's was greatly attracted by a growing drugs ring in the 1960's, as Joe Dorigo suggests :

"It is extremely likely that some bosses refused to deal in drugs personally, simply because they had no need to do so, but there is no doubt that many underbosses, capos, soldiers and hangers-on were heavily involved in the drugs trade.

Dorigo, 1992,p.76

This reaffirms Henry's actions for twenty years. The golden rule of the Mafioso organisation is respect: without respect one is nothing. If Henry didn't have respect for his wife,(Even though he is advised on several occasions about his involvement in narcotics and infidelities) family or his don (Paul Ciccerio), how are we expected to respect him? Although we may admire his sharpness and success at "becoming a gangster," we are given something in Goodfellas and Once upon a time in America, that is not illustrated in The Godfathers; that is an insight into the world of the actual organising of crime and enjoyment of the security offered with it. This is noted by Karen, Henry's wife, as she tells us that mobsters stick together, and that they practically eat, sleep and drink with each other, there are no outsiders. This is afterall, how they maintain their security. Throughout Goodfellas,we are presented with every (cocaine) high





Fig 3.9 A photograph shown in Goodfellas to illustrate the closeness of the mob.

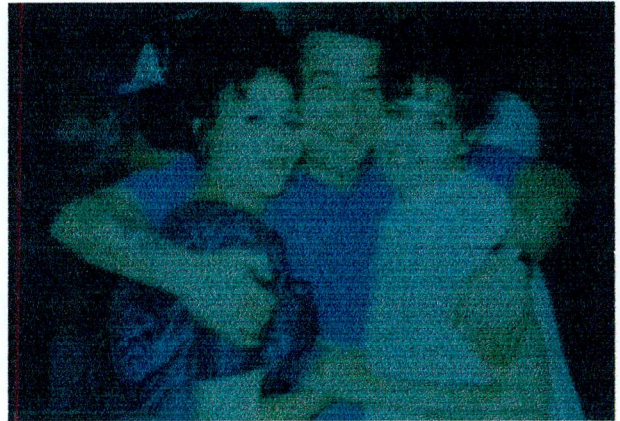


Fig 3.10 A second photograph to illustrate the closeness of the mob.





and low experienced by Henry; and quickly become aware of his disgust of violence and murder, although he rarely lodges any formal complaints. The glitz and glamour portrayed in Goodfellas does not exert the same desires experienced by us in The Godfather part 1 and 2. Goodfellas does not present us with the safe haven as is offered by Vito. Instead, paranoia replaces this safe haven, illustrated most dramatically by Henry at the end of the film, as he fears the consequence of every move that he makes.

Noodles, extracts a different initial desire and respect from us. Sergio Leone presents us with a portrait of a group of young friends struggling to survive. The reason for our reaction to Noodles lies in the fact that he does not portray to us a character that we should envy, but more a character that is to be pitied. This arises from the fact that there is a gap within Noodles concerning his will to power, or whether he has just gone along for the ride. We are amused, however, by their innovation as they craftily bribe the local police sergeant with photographs they have taken of him on the roof of an apartment block having sex with a minor. They are clever enough to survive and make a profit from the Prohibition era, but yet remain sufficiently naive landing each other in trouble, and doublecross themselves. With this in hand, it is not respect we have for these mobsters, nor a desire to live their lives, (apart from enjoying their scams, and roaring parties in the twenties). The impact of Once upon a time in America on us is one of Benevolence for Noodles, who appears throughout the film, to be trapped in some eternal circle. We are annoyed with him as he rapes the girl in the jewellery shop, but are amused at him as he watches Deborah dance through a hole in the wall. He never attains the cunning or the insanity of his friend Max,<sup>3</sup> his passions to create his own reality are not as strong as Max's, Vito's or even Michael. It is not even that he is romanced by "The Life" like Henry Hill, although prohibition and bootlegging provided for him "The good life." Noodles passions, however, are aroused by his desire to find love. This frustrating battle of Noodles goes through many twists and turns throughout the film, from his early days of obsession, to an ending where his one time best friend Max has obtained Deborah his childhood sweetheart and bore a child for him. Max, we discover has become legit and is now a respectable senator.<sup>4</sup>

TO THE HONORABLE





Fig 3.11 A photograph of Noodles and his gang in Moe's apartment, illustrating the time lock in which the gang remain in the mind of Noodles.

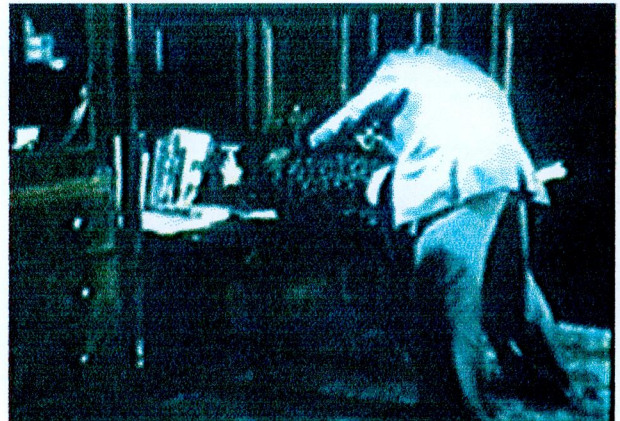


Fig 3.12 The rape in the jewelry shop performed by Noodles.





Fig 3.15 Young Henry's eyes as he spies on Deborah through a hole in the wall.

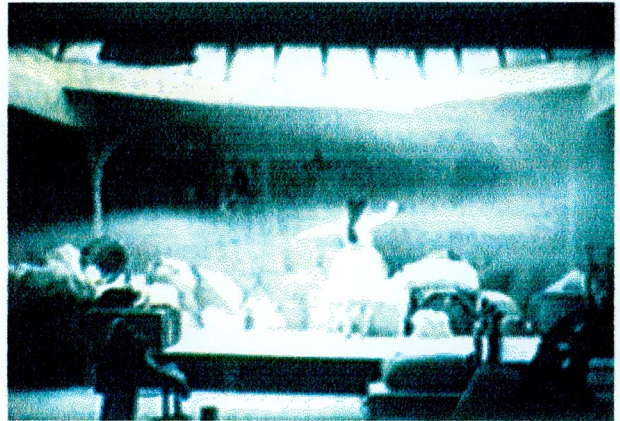


Fig 3.16 Deborah dancing in the back room of her fathers speak easy.





Noodles finally becomes the epitome of "The Rosebud syndrome"<sup>3</sup>, in which money isn't everything. He remains a puppet who has the final curtain pulled down on him as he regresses back to the Opium den where we are first introduced to him temporarily escaping from his pain.

In offering reasons for the success of this genre it is important to finally mention a component of the gangster movie that must have been accepted or even condoned by the audience; this being the vast portrayals of violence and mutilation. For it is impossible that this genre could have enjoyed the success that it did, without this violence being condoned. All three films graphically portray this brutality, and in some of the mafia scenarios, most notably through the character of Tommy in Goodfellas it appears to be enjoyed. There are many reasons that suggest why there is a condoning of this violence, primarily the protection and security offered within the realms of the mafia, demonstrated by these grand exhibitions of violence and coercion. These exhibitions would most certainly appear impressive to some, suggesting that within these boundaries, one shall remain protected from outside threats. Through this genres progression this protection offered appeared more desirable than the security employed by other formal institutions, especially that of the government of The United States of America.

Henry Hill, although he despised violence and brutality, rarely lodged this complaint because he realised the emence benefits offered in other quarters of the mafia existence. It is this notion that when all else fails we can always turn to Don Corleone, that we recognise within within these films. Don Corleone, we can be assured will achieve a more successful justice than any other source one may go to. For the viewer it is this successful deployment of power, regardless of the violent repercussions that appears necessary as it achieves immediate and effective results.

Although we realise that this justification only exists within the realm of cinema. It can be acknowledged that the cinema fulfils our escapist fantasies, allowing us to believe that somewhere a justice such as the one exercised by Vito Corleone can be achieved.





Is the Gangster the epitome of the American dream?

The American dream consists of a number of imaginative thoughts, cherished hopes and ambitions. The idea of the American dream came into existence around the same time as the erection of the statue of Liberty, a symbol of freedom and liberation. As a new and prosperous continent plentiful in resources, the American dream, it could be confidently suggested, was an enigma created by the swarms of immigrants drawn to America by its promise of new opportunities. This young country realised the escapist fantasies for these people who were eager to leave everything behind and start afresh.

Dorigo, 1992, p. 74

"Usually a dream is a strange and disconcerting product distinguished by many "bad qualities," such as lack of logic, questionable morality, uncouth form, and apparent absurdity or nonsense."

Jung, 1974, p. 68

In this quote, Carl Jung suggests to us that a dream occurs only when we are without our full faculties; it may be argued, however, that for the proletariat, it is their dreams that keep them going, regardless of the fact that their full logic may not be intact at the time. The proposed question of the gangster as the epitome of the American dream is two sides of the same coin in its answering. If we take it that the American dream is an object of desire, something we would all like to achieve, but realise that it shall never be anything more than a dream, a figment of our imagination, then yes, the gangster movie could fill the role as the epitome of the American dream as he embodies all the physical components, and he is respected by his fellow man. The above can be stated almost without reference to the victims in the gutter because this is after all a dream, not a nightmare, and we are dealing with idealist fantasies. On the other side of the coin however, we may argue that the American dream is never meant to be realised. Then of course the gangster could not be presented as an icon of this ideal. A dream in this case exists primarily as an ambition, something to aim for.



"The gangster managed to represent all stages of the American development firstly the immigrant arrival from Europe, secondly the Robin Hood phase of frontier individualism, thirdly the robber baron era and fourthly an entrenched organised corporate state. He has traced all the elements that go to compose the United states."

Ray, 1985, p.345

Taking on board this side of the argument by suggesting that each time we go to see a gangster film apart from viewing his wealth and success, we go also with the knowledge that he will eventually see himself to a bitter end. It is this notion that confirms our security as we note that these untold riches and powers are after all only part of a dream. The security borne of this notion allows the ordinary person to believe that it is alright to let other people take the big risks and that it is in fact safer to remain on the lower rungs of the ladder. This is what allows the American dream to continue its existence. The gangster, therefore remains an enigma, no matter how long or short his honeymoon period, and a realisation of certain dreams and aspirations.





## Chapter three:

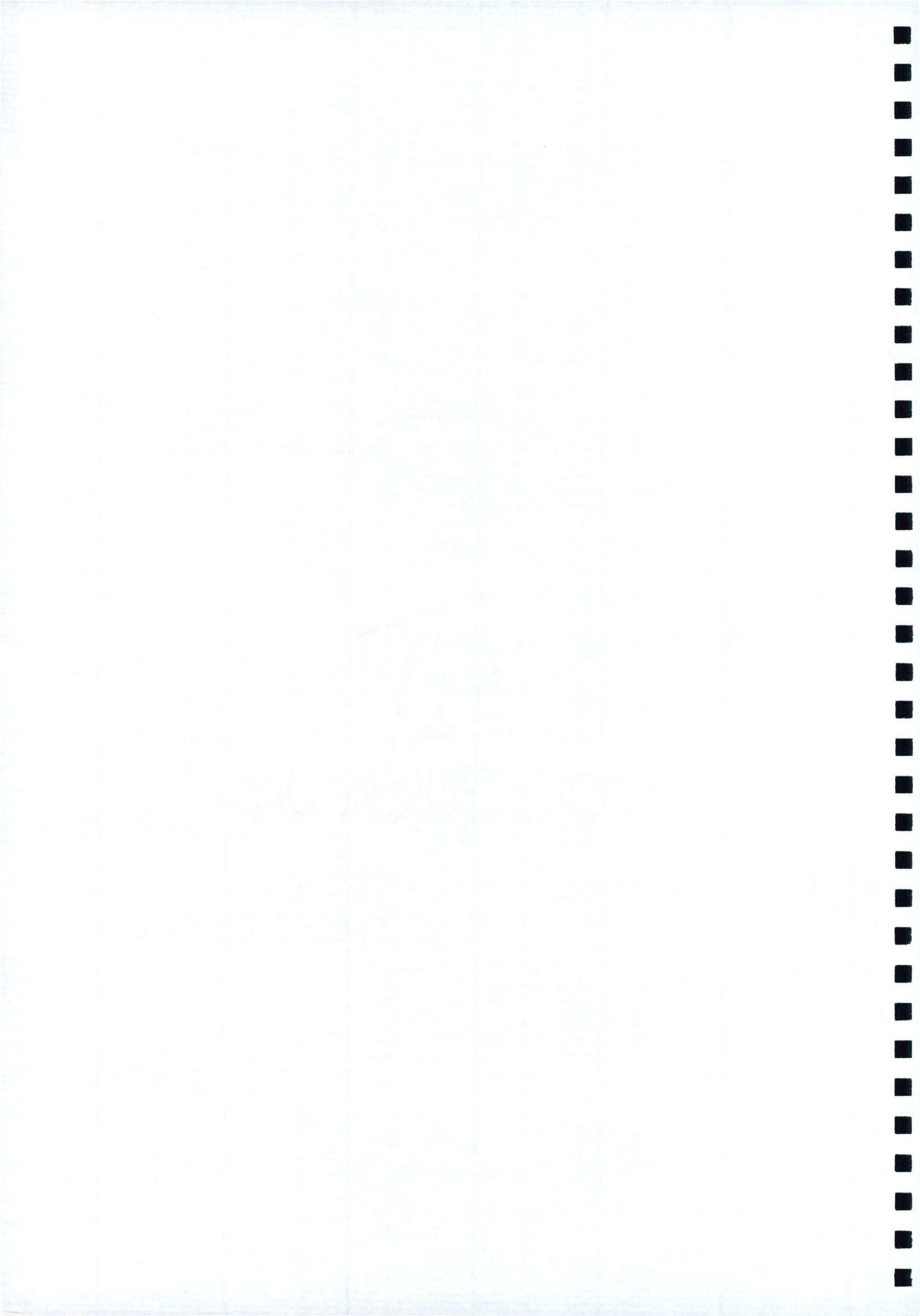
1. The mirror theory suggest that when a baby is still young, they cannot identify as an individual , they see someone who is more co-ordinated, more successful than themselves, this is essentially what we see in power based films.
2. Max's family has a history of insanity. He becomes more and more crazed as the film progresses, demonstrated twice when after Noodles tells him that he is mad, he attempts to strangle him.
3. The Rosebud syndrome, developed by Robin Wood, suggests that money corrupts, money isn't everything.





## Chapter Four

“I was earning more in a week than most of the men in my neighbourhood would earn in a lifetime.”



Chapter four:

**“I was earning more in a year than most men in my neighbourhood would earn in a life time.”**

Henry Hill remains the most personalised character of the three films. Scorsese developed this character to portray the failed aspects of the American dream. He is a man in a permanent identity crisis, from the young boy whose only ambition at the time we are introduced to him is to be a gangster, to that of a cocaine addict who remains in a constant state of paranoia due to his dealings and misdealings. Once he eventually enters "The life," Henry Hill is not the imperialist Don, or capo as portrayed by Vito or Michael Corleone. He was an ordinary boy from an ordinary background, who wanted an indefinable something more from life. It is the gangsters rejection of his surroundings in the quest for something that will help him to attain his desired worldly goals that we can identify with. Henry represents all the decisions one makes in their lives, not because they know that they are morally right, but because they know that they are more materially viable. Goodfellas illustrates Henry's immoralistic decisions in the form of his unfaithfulness to himself and to his family. It starts with his deceit to his father as, with the help of Paulie, he is able to skip school without being found out; something that most people can identify with. This innocence arrives at a more crucial stage when Henry decides not to make any formal protest about murder, something we know repulses him, as he witnesses Tommy on several occasions murdering or assaulting people because he gets a kick out of it. What particularly comes to mind to illustrate this point is the brutal murder of a young bar boy under the brutal hand of Tommy. In this sequence Tommy shoots down an innocent bar boy because he forgot to bring his drink over to him. Henry is repulsed by his behaviour. When Henry eventually does mention Tommy's brutality to Jimmy it is already too late, as Jimmy announces to him,

“One day were going to be working for this guy.”





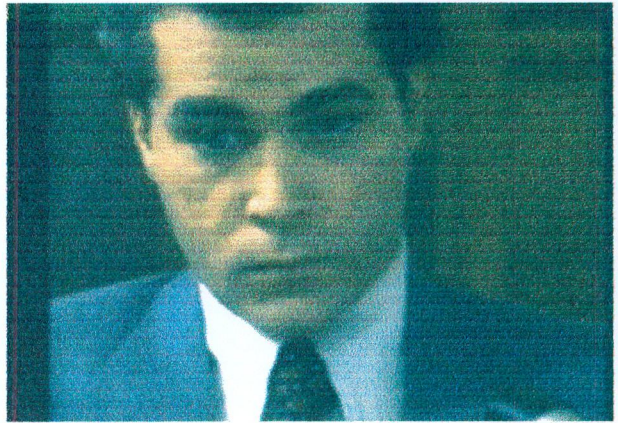


Fig 4.1 Henry Hill never attains the professionalism of Michael or Vito Corleone.

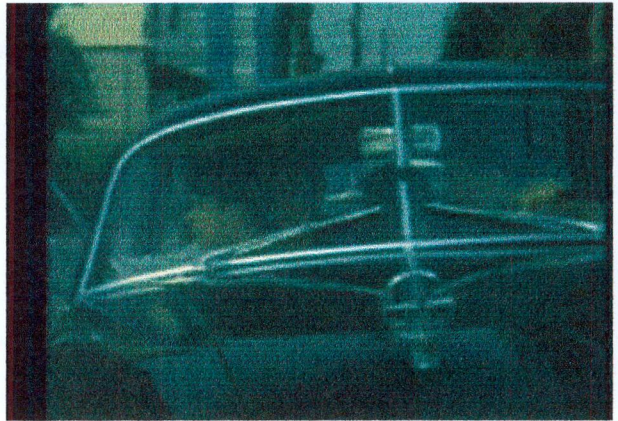


Fig 4.2 Henry in Paulies car as they threaten the post-man.



Fig 4.3 The innocent bar boy who falls victim to Tommy.



This comes with the knowledge that Tommy is about to be "made."<sup>11</sup> Although as the film progresses Henry sees that this never comes to pass.

We can also identify with Henry the confusion brought about on the realisation that the situation that has been so desperately longed for, and eventually realised is not as anticipated. As a young boy on the outside looking in, it was the nice cars, big parties and neighbourhood protection offered by the mafia that Henry desired. Once more demonstrating that it is the existence of Vito Corleone that Henry desired.

"I was earning more in a year than most of the men on my street would earn in a life time."

He simply wanted a little more than his peers. Henry enjoyed the women, the parties and especially the kicks he got from the Luftanza heist in J.F.K. airport; which he proclaims,

" Was the biggest heist in American history."

He did not intend, however, to be imprisoned, disgusted by the actions of his friend's (Tommy), or become a cocaine addict, unable to survive without his fix; and he certainly did not intend as do any of us, for things to go all so very wrong, and for his life and his worldly possessions to go down the drain, although by the stage he entered into police protection, he was glad to surrender being somebody in a neighbourhood full of nobodies.

Noodles' character is not unlike that of Henry's. He was a young and naive boy who like the others ambition was to do more than barely was out to survive. Although both he, and his companions moved quickly and advanced from being paupers to well to do partners. Noodles represents to all of us a figure who is lead in this









Fig 4.4 The savage murder of Tommy as he is about to be 'made.'



Fig 4.5 The pathetic Henry Hill we are offered at the end of the film..



case by Max, his best friend into a world of organised crime rather than the street crime he himself would have preferred. He continues down this road of organised crime because his friend's do, not because he feels that it is right. He also represents two personality traits that none of us like to admit to ourselves let alone anyone else, they being the deceiver and the deceived. By these two statements it is being suggested that Noodles represents "The squealer," the one who tells on his friend's. He has been branded by himself, as the one who finished it all, when in fact the only one who is finished and all washed up is Noodles Himself, and not in fact Max.

"He who seeks to deceive will always find someone who will allow himself to be deceived."

Machiavelli, 1993, p.139

Throughout their relationship, Noodles and Max remain the leader's of the gang, although as time goes on Noodles dislikes the role of leader that Max attains. They are the instigator's and instructors of the gang. Unlike their Italian counterparts their illustration of life in the mafia differs through its apparent informality (with respect to the formality of the Corleone family). It appears as if this is almost like a game, of cops and robbers, that has extended from childhood into adulthood, but the repercussions and results of their actions at this stage are a lot more serious. They remain at the beginning of the film only interested in improving their financial situation and gaining respect among their peer's. It is only when Max's insanity and desire for more and more power becomes evident that Noodles becomes afraid, not only for Max's sanity and security, but also for his own. He realises that things are turning sour, so just before the anticipated robbery, Noodles sneaks into the office, escaping from their last party, to inform the police of the attempted scam, hoping that this is one way that both he and his friend's can escape, if with nothing else, their lives. We are presented with Noodles in this sequence twice in the film, first at the beginning, and secondly at the close of the film. Our introduction to Noodles in the opium den at the

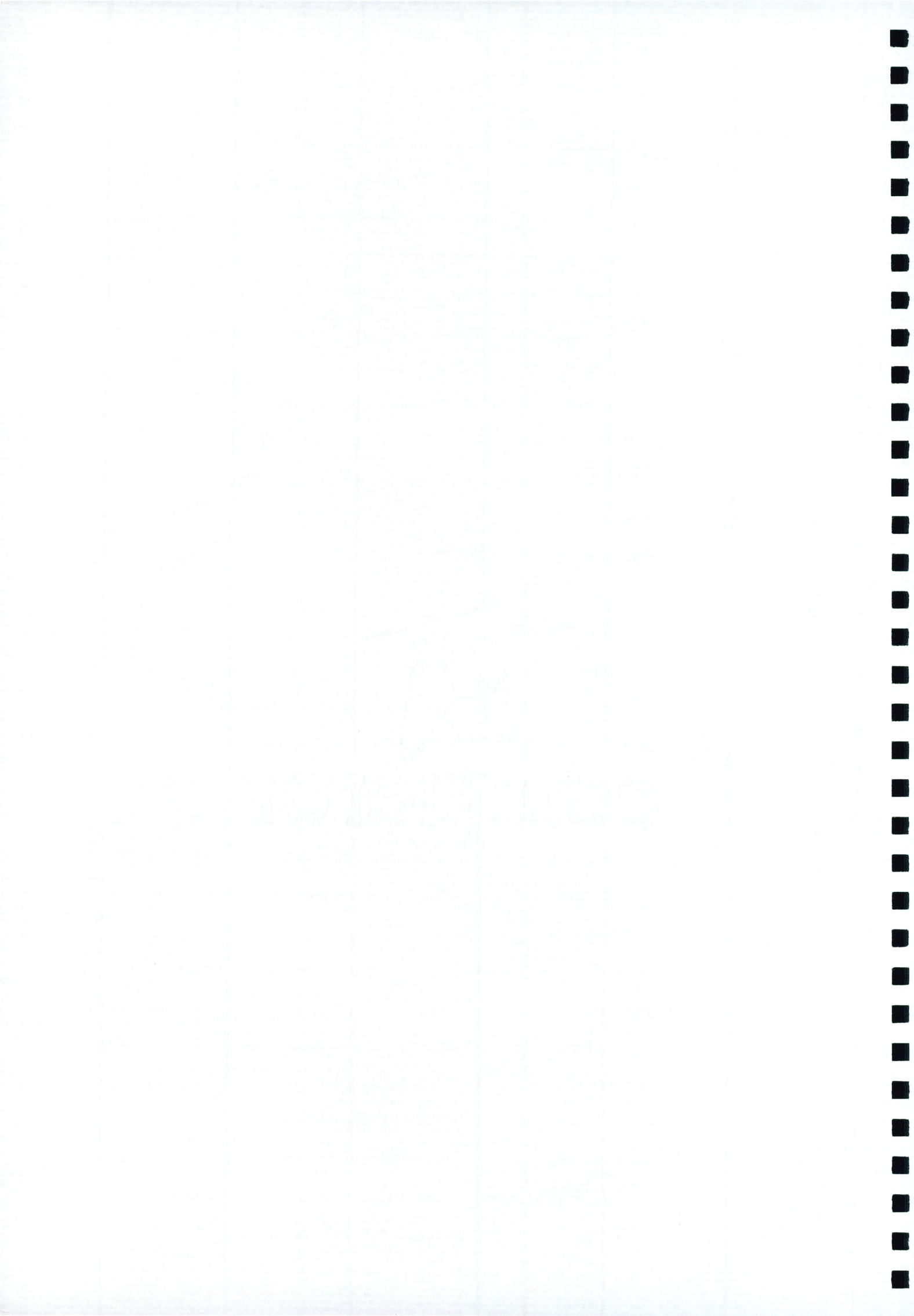






Fig 4.6 Max and Noodles as they lie beaten up after a run in with Bugsy.



Fig 4.7 The insanity of Max becomes more prevalent as he attacks Noodles on the beach, for accusing him of being crazy.



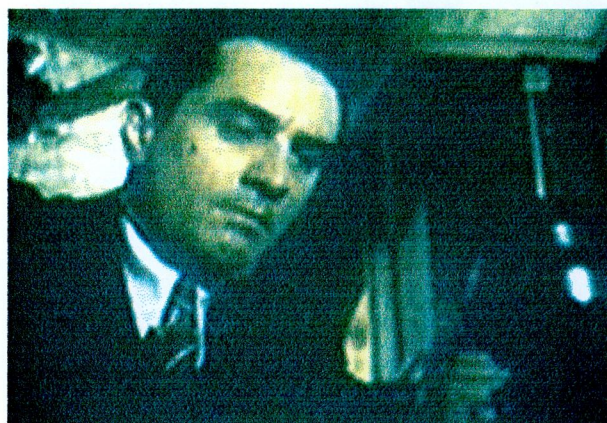


Fig 4.8 Noodles as we witness him in the office at the beginning of the film.





Finally, we can identify with all of these characters' basic need for love and affection, for without it they remain at their most destructive; demonstrated by Michael's transition from loving husband, father and son to a destructive murder machine. For Noodles, his imbalance occurs when he cannot accept the impossibility of a relationship with Deborah, and eventually rapes her.

### How do we accept the good guy when he turns bad?

Of all of the film's there are two resounding bad guys, Michael and Max. It is not due to circumstance that they turn bad, unlike the others, who only physically embody this term; in the form of 'The gangster', labelled by society as bad. Michael and Max, however, are bad throughout. By the time we arrive at their survival into the present, we can evaluate each characters embodiment of badness or evil. Vito Corleone, we can confidently suggest, never used brutality in a personnel destruction mission apart from the incidents when he exterminates Don Fanucci and the local don responsible for the slaughtering of his family. Both of these acts aided not only himself, but his surrounding peer's.

This evilness is something innate within all of us; we also, however, consist of the exact opposite emotion of love and goodness. It is in the balance of these emotions that determines our goodness or badness. It has been widely argued that evil people despise the presence of good because obviously it poses a threat to them. It openly reveals their badness. They will, therefore destroy goodness in order to avoid the part of such self awareness. Although Michael Corleone and Max do not wipe out all the so called 'good' people, they do exterminate (more appropriate to Michael) those who pose a threat to them. Max does not, so cause much physical destruction, but his evilness emanates through an insane determination to fuel his need for power. If he had been completely clear of his motives there should not have been the need to act with







Fig 4.10 The charred bodies of Noodles associates after the raid on the club initiated by him.

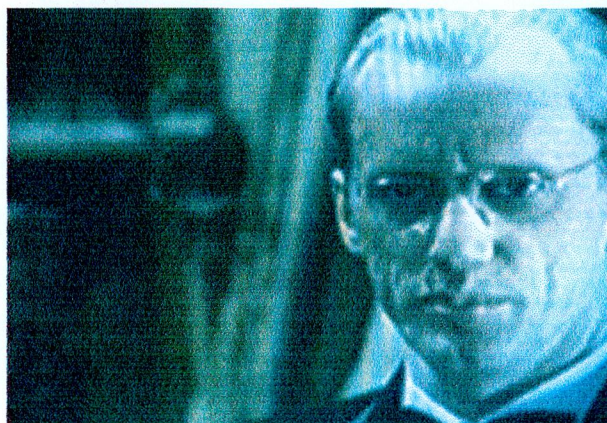


Fig 4.11 Senator Bailey, aka Max as he presents himself to Noodles 35 years arfter his apparent death.



Fig 4.12 Deborah in her dressing room .

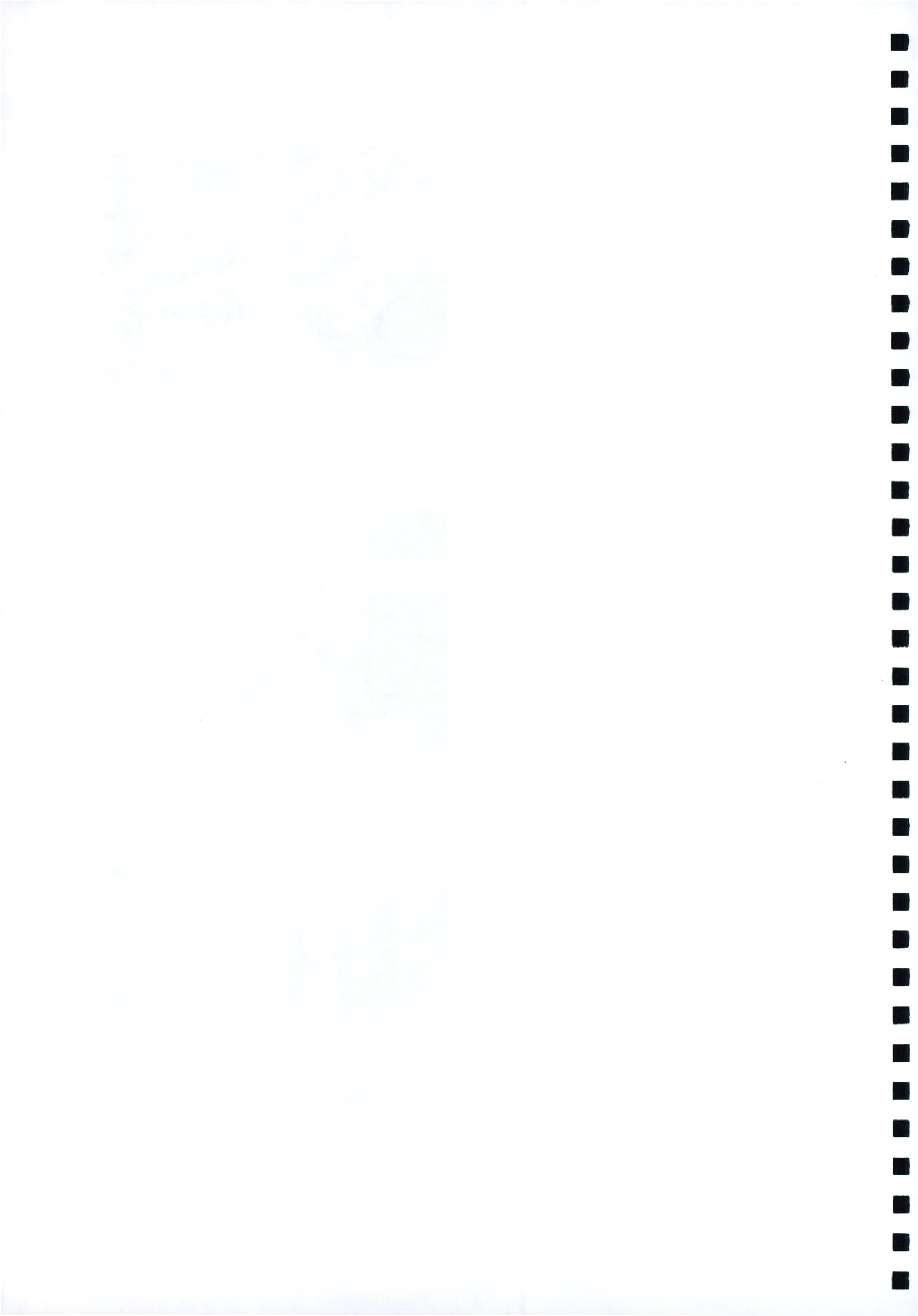


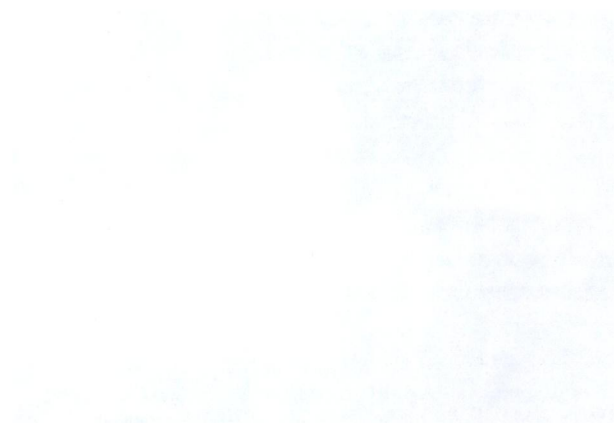




Fig 4.15 The final collapse of Noodles obsession with Deborah as he brutally rapes her in the car.



Fig 4.14 Vitos revenge on Don Ciccio for the massacre of his family.



such reproach or callousness. Indeed if Michael had not been threatened by his own actions and ideas, he too would not have reacted in such a volatile manner. It is Michael's original rejection of the mafia existence that allows for this calous reproach to occur, due to a realisation that this is not true to his original character. It must be considered that Michael has suppressed all his original sentiments in order to carry on as Don Corleone. We, therefore, react to these characters, firstly with confusion, more especially with Michael, because he represented to us an upstanding figure determined to stay away from the family business; into a man more callous than an animal. These two extremes provide that loophole that allows for disrespect from both us, and their peer's, clearly evident in The Godfather 3, when Joey Zasa has been degrading :

"The name of Michael Corleone."

We react, therefore to Michael's transition throughout the film's, from man, to monster, to an eventual groveller without any remorse and a vigilance, because although in Godfather 3 he tries to cleanse himself, we remain aware of all the destruction that is carried on with him, and feel only remorse for his innocent daughter, Mary. His search for redemption remains doubted through Kay, Michael's Former wife, who throughout the third film can never fully accept that he has changed; she even goes so far as to suggest that :

"Now that your respectable, you've become more dangerous."

he goes on to explore :

"I did everything I could to protect you from the horror of the world."

She coldly answers :

"You became my horror."

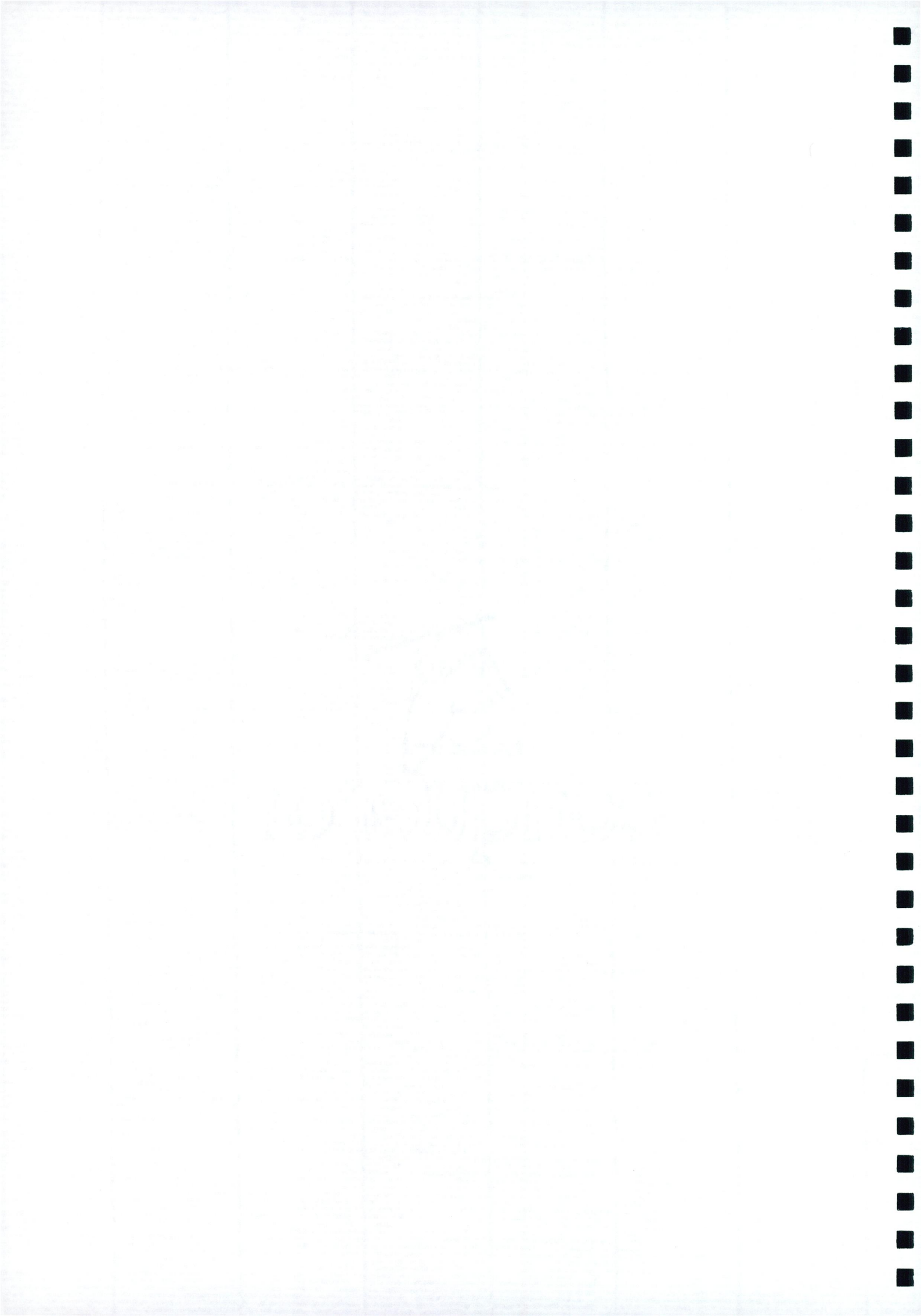






Fig 4.13 Joey Zasa as he is accused of taking the name of Michael Corleone in Vain.



We cannot accept the good guy when he turns maliciously bad, like Michael, because despite the escapism of the life enjoyed by us in all other aspects of the gangster genre; it is beyond our better judgement to accept someone who once represented a series of morals, to transform into a destructive entity. It is because of these reasons, that we cannot accept his misdoings. This view is supported by the cardinal who hears Michaels confession in Godfather 3, who tells Michael that he will never change his ways, and that he must pay for all of his actions.

"Reason, backed up by murder,"

key suggests is Michael's ethos in life. His quest, therefore, for forgiveness, so that he can further his ambitions must remain unfruitful.

Max, although he was never possessed any morals, is also unacceptable in his transition. We are more cautious of his character throughout the film, as he tries from early on in the film to deceive;<sup>1</sup> this deceit progresses into his unrepentant statement at the end :

"I took your money, I took your girl and all I left for you was thirty five year's of grief over killing me."

In regard, therefore, to our reaction to the good guy when he turns bad, we can accept with greater ease the victim, Henry and Noodles, or the victor, Vito Corleone, but never the dominator, dictator and destructor, Michael and Max who eventually find their own destruction, in Max's case his surreal death by garbage disposal, or for Michael's death by conscience.





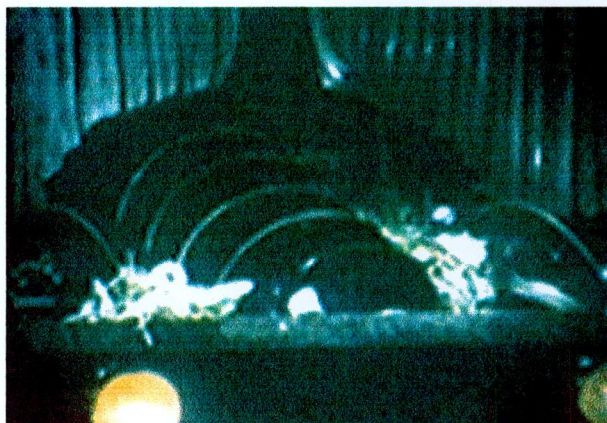


Fig 4.14 The surreal death of Max in a garbage disposal truck, most likely by him.





Fig 4.17 Michael's death, alone in his garden. Coppola creates a pathetic end for a pathetic man.





## Chapter four:

1. The advantage of being made is that once you are in 'in,' you are a lot less likely to casually disposed of, at least by your own people.

Tommy, however, is shot before he is made.

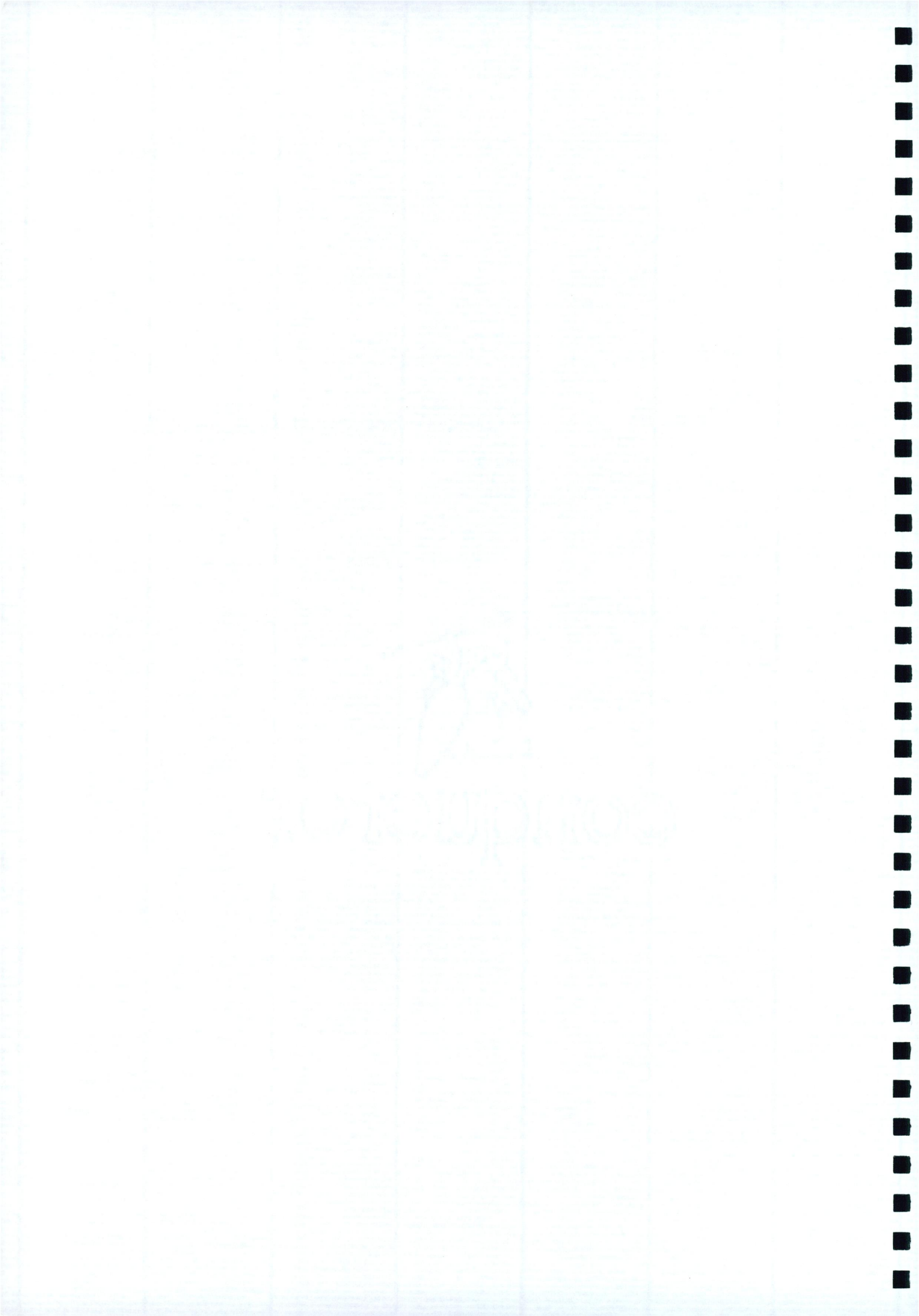
2. Loneliness and aloneness, differ according to Dr. Scott Peck, as loneliness is when one cannot find anyone on any level to communicate with. Aloneness, however is when one cannot find anyone on their own level to communicate with.

3. The murders resulting are much more serious than a child's game.



## Chapter Five

“ I betrayed my wife, I killed men, I ordered the death of my brother, my mothers son, my fathers son.”





Chapter five :

**“I betrayed my wife, I killed men, I ordered the death of my brother, my mothers son and my fathers son.”**

"The paralysis of justice was due, not to so much to a weakening, as to a body of badly regulated distribution of power, to its concentration at a certain number of points and conflicts, and the discontinuities that resulted."  
Foucault, 1977, p.98

If we refer back to Foucault's text, this bad distribution of power arrived in the form of the sovereign having a selection of powers ranging through various regions, and no concentration in any one area. This idea proposed by Foucault, is entwined further in the exercise of power on the part of these three characters and their use or misuse of Foucault's suggestions. It is now appropriate to refer to this text once more to reason for the destruction and collapse of this immense power bloc. This argument is founded mainly on the effectiveness of the power regulations on the part of each of these characters. The reasoning for their inevitable bitter end is compiled of several main reasons. Throughout the various portrayals in these films there remains only one don who manages not to arrive at a bitter end : Vito Corleone. He comes to his end while playing with his young grandson in the garden in an atmosphere of tranquility. The rest, although they may not be shot down, have had to give up their respect, wealth and other worldly possessions, and for Michael in particular, they have been left to live with their conscience and survive into an empty present. All that these gangster's are left with are the memories of the good times embittered by their destructive actions.

One element that was developed by Louis Althusser was the idea that the proletariat are repressed from a very young age as they learn the difference between good and bad behaviour, according to their social status. Their now exists for the majority, a submission to the rules laid out. We can further incorporate this thinking into the existence of the gangster. He is firstly afterall a menace to society; if we are to under-



stand that the social apparatus (government) were upstanding; and he remains to society and most importantly an enigma. If the social apparatus succeeds in convincing us that he is only an enigma, then they have successfully managed to thwart the gangsters existence without further haste. If he remains, however, human, a reality (as he does), then he also must be guarded and repressed for the simple reason that he has defied the rules and laws enforced by the social apparatus. Through his arrival from the proletariat to bourgeoisie, he defies further, the divide created to keep the proletariat low and the bourgeoisie high. It becomes difficult for the bourgeoisie to accept such an existence. Foucault brings this idea further when he acknowledges that the bourgeoisie of France at the time of penal reform did not offer much concern to the growing instances of pilfering. It was not until their own land was under threat that a reaction a reaction was put in motion.<sup>3</sup>

The gangster has echoed Gramsci's ideas on leadership, when he ignored the rules impressed on both himself and the rest of the proletariat, that they shall abide by these laws laid down by the ruling class; and thus acknowledge Gramsci's writings that suggest to us that :

"Every man is as much as he is active . . .contributes to modifying the social environment in which he develops; in other words he tends to establish 'norm's' rules of living and behaviour." Gramsci, 1971, p.265

These "norms" established by the gangster included a desire for a better existence, no matter what price had to be paid. He was allowed to realise this ambition through the much discussed loopholes in the social apparatus, most notably, the dependency of the government and big business on the mafia for a certain length of time. These loopholes talked about in relation to the social apparatus shall also be utilised to discuss further the end of the gangster's reign.





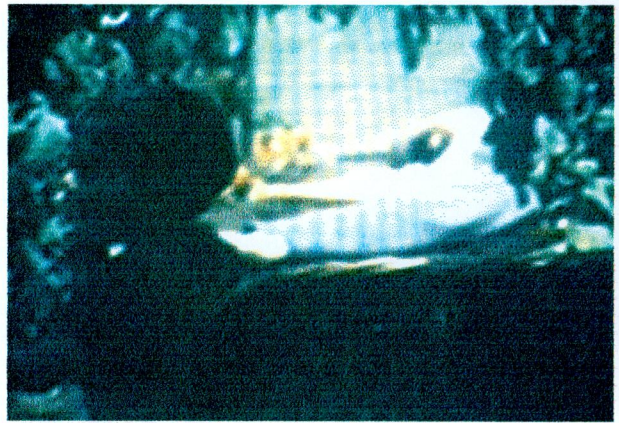
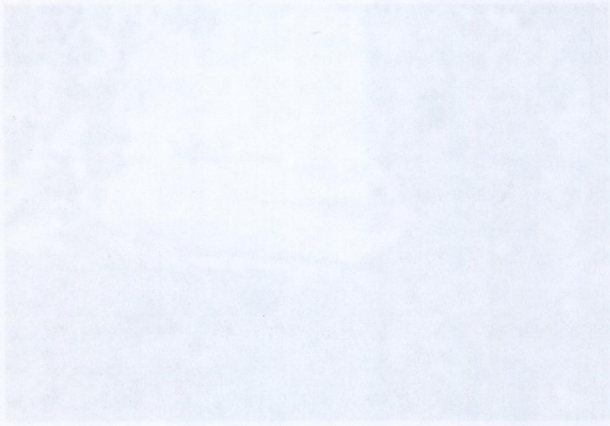


Fig 5.1 Vito dead in his garden while playing with his grandson in his garden.



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"Where there is power there is always revolt."

Foucault, 1977, p.98

The new undertaking of power of all of the characters portrayed, is a trial to see how each of them try to mould their power into their own ambitions and in all but one case, lose it. It is either through weakness or excess that this loss occurs. The gangster in all cases with the exception of Michael Corleone, arrive at the 'Big Time.' As they progress and settle into their new lifestyles, they in the case of Henry, Max and Noodles lose their heads through a period of excess in their new found life. Most notably, Henry who becomes induced by the wealth and material goods. He cannot go on deceiving everyone including his don; Paulie and expect to enjoy this existence forever. This is true also for Max, who also becomes induced, however, not solely by the parties and the good life, but more importantly by the need for more and more power.

"Greedy power, extending its reach beyond what is necessary merely because it is able to, produces discipline that is perceived as excessive and thus ripe for challenge. No bodies are completely docile agents. Our sense of the proper limits of their docility may not coincide with that of the disciplinary order."  
Fiske, 1993, p.64

This greed that occurs because the culprits know that they can achieve it represents a main reason for their downfall. As with the excess of the sovereign in France. Max, Michael and Henry end in ruin because they are charged by this greed to further nothing but their own existence and ambitions, and not those of their surrounding peers. They shall, therefore, eventually be shown in their true colours, no matter how long and destructive their reign proves to be. They, therefore, create their own weaknesses and loopholes in the form of their greed and subsequent lack of attention to their environment and peers. They command their own disrespect, and architect their own eventual and inevitable downfall through this imbalance of right and wrong. This argument relies on the characters of Max, and Henry; but most relevantly on Michael, whom as we have discussed draws no respect or remorse from us. Unlike his father





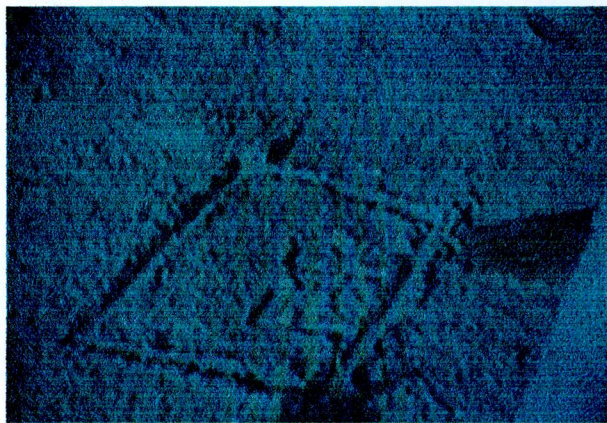


Fig 5.2 Max on the beach outlining in the sand his master plan to rob the Federal Bank.



who reigned without any large threat to his power, due to his morals and balance of his actions and ambitions. Michael, however, embodies a devilish figure who allows a loophole of revolt against him to grow from the contradiction of his dispiement of the mafia to a transition into a figure who emanates nothing but evil. In order for Michael to take control in the first place it was essential that he suppresses all his emotions of hatred towards the mafia. When he proclaims to his daughter that he would:

“Burn in hell to keep her safe,”

we know that he has in effect actually done this to achieve his despicable level of power and control. Even as he tries (in vain) to emancipate his soul and allow himself to be blessed by the pope allowing him to continue his destruction, he destroys the love his daughter has for Vincent, reminiscent of the distancing he allowed, and encouraged between himself and Kay as the vacuum of power pulled him further in. His lonely end is architected by himself towards the end of the second film, when he sits alone after destroying almost everything he has cared for. He cannot use God to raise him from the flames at this stage. It is therefore, most appropriate that he is in fact not murdered (as is intended), but is left with a fate worse than death; living with his conscience. For the destruction of his brother, brother in law amongst others that haunt him for the rest of his life especially depicted by an apparent possession by demon forces in which he cries out in a frenzy :

“Fredo, Fredo, what have you done.”

The only punishment fitting for Michael is the murdering of his daughter, Mary, the most treasured possession in his life. Although this punishment may not appear just, it is the sacrifice of this innocent girl that appears to be the only effective method to make Michael aware of the full impact of his destruction.





"Children are the greatest treasure of life,"

He writes to his children at the beginning of Godfather 3. This destruction of innocence replays over and over again justification for the pain he has inflicted on the victims that fell under his hand. he admits while in confession,

'I betrayed my wife, I killed men,I ordered the death of my brother, my mothers son and my fathers son.'

He now experiences all the pain, and is left, due to his greed, alone and tortured. In case one may be deceived by Michael's attempts for redemption and in the penultimate scene feel pity for him, then we can quickly put this right with the aid of a quotation from Robert Warshow's acclaimed essay, "The gangster as a tragic hero," in which he suggest that;

"T.S.Eliot pointed out that many of Shakespeare's tragic heroes have this trick at looking at themselves dramatically, the things they destroyed when they die, is something outside themselves; not a man but a lifestyle, a kind of meaning."  
Warshow, 1962,p. 136

This suggestion put forward by Eliot is endorsed by Kolker when he suggests that:

"Nowhere does Coppola allow us to engage in whole hearted condemnation of Michael, he will allow us to pity and fear him; and in part two these conflicting emotions will be played almost to the point making him a tragic hero."  
Kolker, 1980, p. 177

Michael is not, however, a tragic figure, as Kolker suggests; he is, by the end of Godfather 3 ,in fact a murderer who has brutally murdered his brother, and as a result has to pay the price.

". . Mixture of excess and weakness, its exaggerations and its loopholes, and above all the very principle of its mixture, the super power, the monarch. . . it is this eternal excess that allows for the disfunction of power."  
Foucault, 1977, p.98

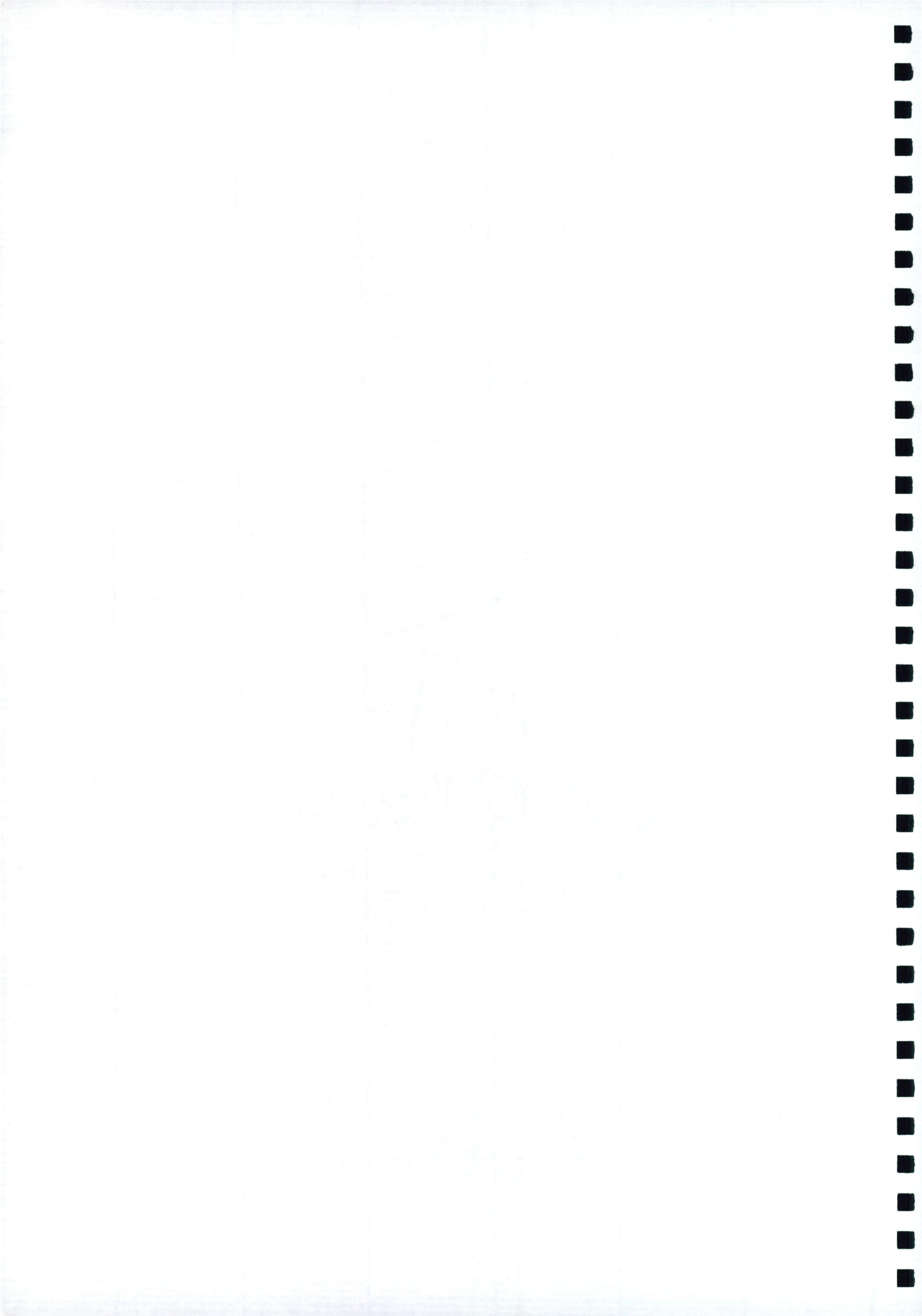




Fig 5.3 Michael receiving a Blessing from the Pope.



Fig 5.4 Mary crying as she learns that her love for Vincent has been taken away from her, reminiscent of the distancing that Michael allowed to grow between himself and Kay.

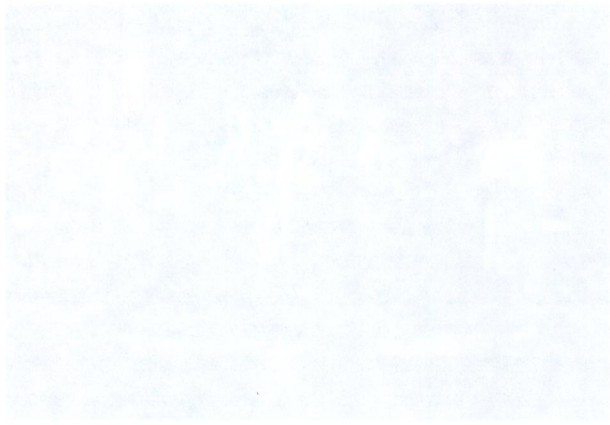






Fig 5.5 The death of Fredo, Michael's brother, ordered by Michael.

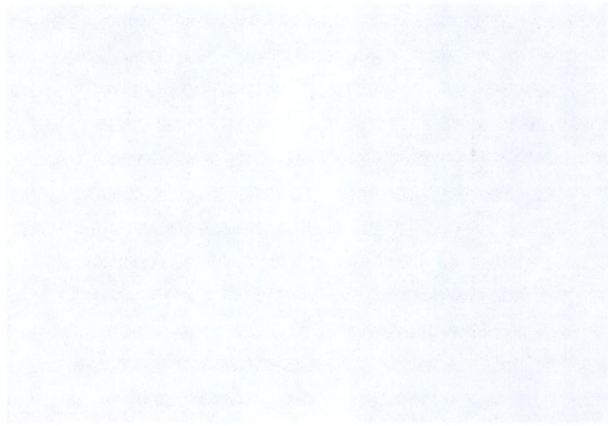
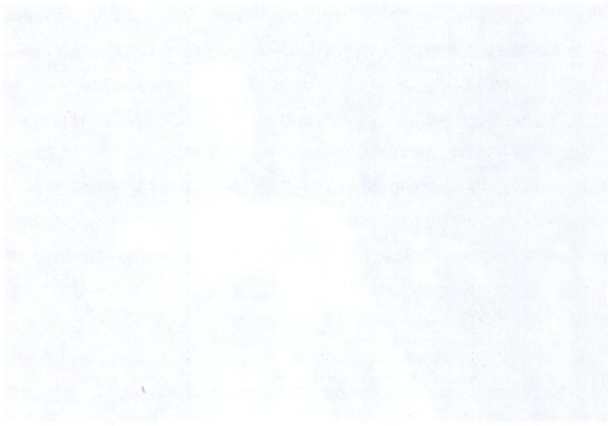




Fig 5.7 Mary as she is shot on the steps outside the opera house.



Fig 5.8 Michael screaming as he holds Mary.





This quote conveys all the reasons for the seeping in of loopholes in the power of both Henry and Noodles. For they both consist of these excesses, in a similar manner. They both want to succeed, have a weakness for drugs as an instrument to retain their disfunctional fantasies and above all a weakness for women, more apparently confused in Noodles, as throughout the film his desire to find love arrives at a destructive end. In both of these cases, it is more the desire to keep their dreams alive through the medium of drugs, or whatever becomes their vice, that eventually causes their downfall. Both of these characters want to believe so much that they are not as strongly driven by greed or power in the way portrayed by Michael and Max.. Their excess lies in the determination to preserve their fantasy, when they realise that it has all gone terribly wrong. They realise in both of their cases that they are doomed. Noodles, however, squeals on his friend's so that they can escape with their lives. Both Henry and Noodles survive in the past, in the good old days; and merely exist in the present.\*

" . . . It cannot be called talent to slay fellow citizens, to deceive friends, to be without faith, without mercy, without religion; such methods may gain empire, but not glory."

Gramsci, 1971,p. 124

Machiavelli, offers us a guideline for the success and downfall of a prince(Leader).The Republic, a system with a central power is desired by Machiavelli; the prince should therefore be the authority behind this power.

"Machiavelli represented this process in terms of the qualities, characteristics, duties and requirements of a concrete individual."

Gramsci, 1971,p.124

In his chapters regarding those who attained and maintained power through wicked-



ness, he suggests the above quote rightfully encapsulates another proposed reason for the eventual downfall of Michael, Henry and Noodles. The above statement rings clear to us the traits of all of these characters. Although he suggests that the strain of princes (leaders) may obtain their glory for a certain amount of time; they will inevitably not gain any respect and not attain any glory for their "modes d'emploi."

"It makes him despised and hated above all things, as I have said to be rapacious, and to be a violator of property and women of his subjects, from both of which he must abstain."

Machiavelli, 1993, p.145

Machiavelli's advice in this instance falls on deaf ears with particular regard to these gangsters. It is through this combination of events that the theories of Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser are united. Foucault's suggestions of imperial power accustomed by Althusser and Gramsci that the bourgeoisie (ruling class) are the ones who exert coercion; and force the proletariat to submit to their ideologies. Althusser's 'state,' is a machine of repression can be interpreted with 'mafia,' replacing state, as the mafia did become a ruling class in America for several decades. Coupling Althusser's machine of repression with Foucault's suggestions on excessive power in one area and not in another; we arrive at a point on which all three would agree leads to the destruction, or fall from power.

"Where there is power there is always revolt."

Foucault, 1977, p.102

Even though Althusser and Gramsci may agree more on the element of subjection to the commands of the ruling class. Gramsci leaves way to suggest that every man is a legislator /leader; and even though the ruling class (in this case the mafia) seek to

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repress them, through means of coercion, terrorism and menacing; there shall always occur revolt; as occurred in France with the system of public executions. In conclusion to this ideal of the reasons for the downfall of the mafia, it is only, therefore, if the means employed are repressive, that this inevitable end will occur.

**"The strongest man is never strong enough to be always master, unless he transforms his power into right and obedience into duty."**

Foucault, 1977, p108

To conclude, it is not the power itself that causes the treachery and corruption associated with the mafia. As Foucault further suggests :

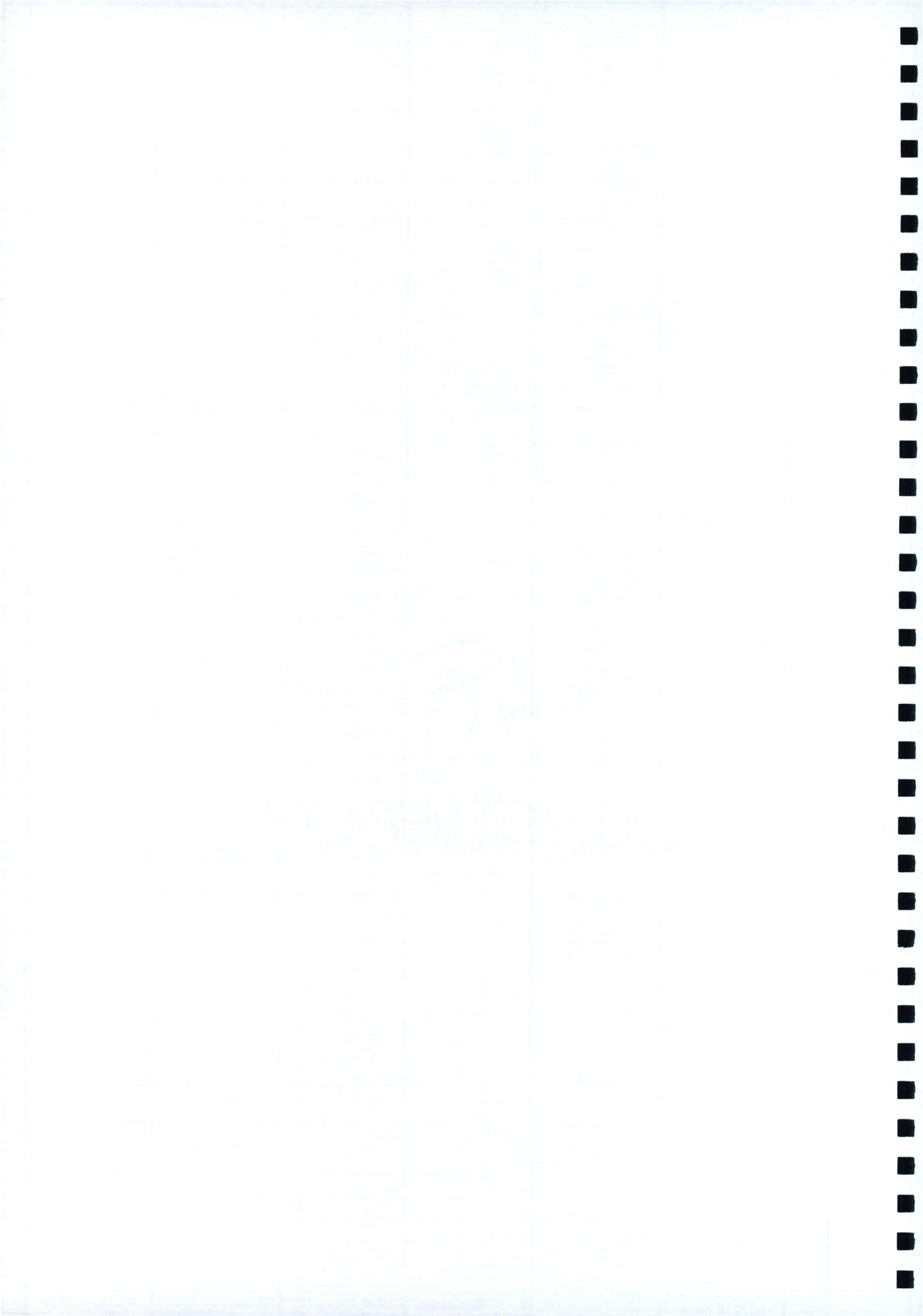
"Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And power insofar as it is permanent, repetitive, inert and self reproducing, is simply an overall effect that emerges from all of these mobilities."

Foucault, 1977, p.111

It is how this power is exercised, the reasons behind it, and the ambitions it is used to fulfil. It remains, therefore, in the misuse of power that a destruction occurs. It would take more than the strongest man, as Foucault suggests, not to be possessed by the advantages offered by power. The power demonstrated in these film's induces the characters, by:

"Making them an offer they can't refuse,"

whether it comes in the form of money, love or respect. It is a temptation that must be held tight onto, as its benefits become too hard to resist as one wades deeper and deeper within its realms.



In regard to the three characters, is there any one who is not weakened by this power, in the sense that each and every one pursues it until they possess it, or it possesses them.

"Mickey Corleone, sensible, quietly defiant, educated, whose not going to enter into the family business, is transformed into Michael Corleone, an avenging devil, whose driven to wreak justice by the near murder of his father, the godfather, Vito Corleone."p. 33  
(Sight and sound, Kiss of death, B.F.I., vol.2, issue 2, London, 1992).

This quotation describes with complete accuracy, the transformation of Michael Corleone as he descends into the depths of his enormous power bloc. A similar formula can be adapted to the various other characters, however, with not so much destruction.

Michael, even though he appears to be the strongest of them all, due to his demolition, and strong held power, could not infact remain the weakest of all the characters. This statement can be supported by a return once more to Foucault's quote, by which we can obviously suggest that, because Michael becomes so involved with the need for greater and greater power, he is in fact the weakest , insofar as the power he desires, is one of nothing but of a destructive nature. He becomes most repulsive to us when he tries to legitimise his business by convincing his daughter that he truly is making amends.

Henry Hill, also never becomes strong enough to repel the destructive side of power that he has associated himself with, through his murdering and drug abuse, to descending to such depths to using his young baby as a method for laundering his drug's so as to support his addiction, but also to replenish his cash flow. Even though throughout Goodfellas, we are aware that he realises himself that it is not all going right, superbly illustrated by Scorsese, when Henry commences the morning at eight in







Fig 5.9 Michael's confession in the vatican with the cardinal, another portrayal of his ongoing search to redeem his soul.



the morning. He plans to spend the day running a few errands, setting up a coke deal and collecting his brother from the airport, all while high on cocaine. The broken up disjointed approach to this sequence provides an atmosphere severely lacking in coordination, paralleling with Henry's paranoia. This confusion acts to illustrate to us how Henry hopes that this nervousness is only paranoia induced by cocaine, however, this time it is in fact reality. The helicopter that follows him throughout the day signifies the end. By the time of his eventual arrest Henry, as I have suggested before is glad to hand over the title of being :

"Somebody in a neighbourhood full of nobodies."

He regresses back to the proletariat, ordinary existence, without the frills and the wealth; resigned to the fact that he is lucky that he managed to escape with his life. He made this regression after struggling and surrendering his dignity and conscience to escape from a proletarian existence he once despised and now finds sanctuary in.

Noodles, also like Henry regresses back to an ordinary existence in Buffalo. It is due to his weakness that he must leave behind his wealth and go into exile for the events that took place between 1923 and 1933. Noodles regression, is due to his lack of character, from the ignoring his better judgement's. He does not, however, initially expect that he shall be deceived, that the guilt he will have lived with for thirty five year's was unessential, as he discovers that his best friend has cheated him due to Noodles untruth, firstly to himself and secondly to his friend's, and his eternal hope to keep the memory of the good times of those ten years alive; he remains in a time warp trapped by his own sorrows, regrets and desire to keep his dream alive.

With this compilation of weak characters in hand, none who can :

"Transform their power into good and their obedience into duty,"



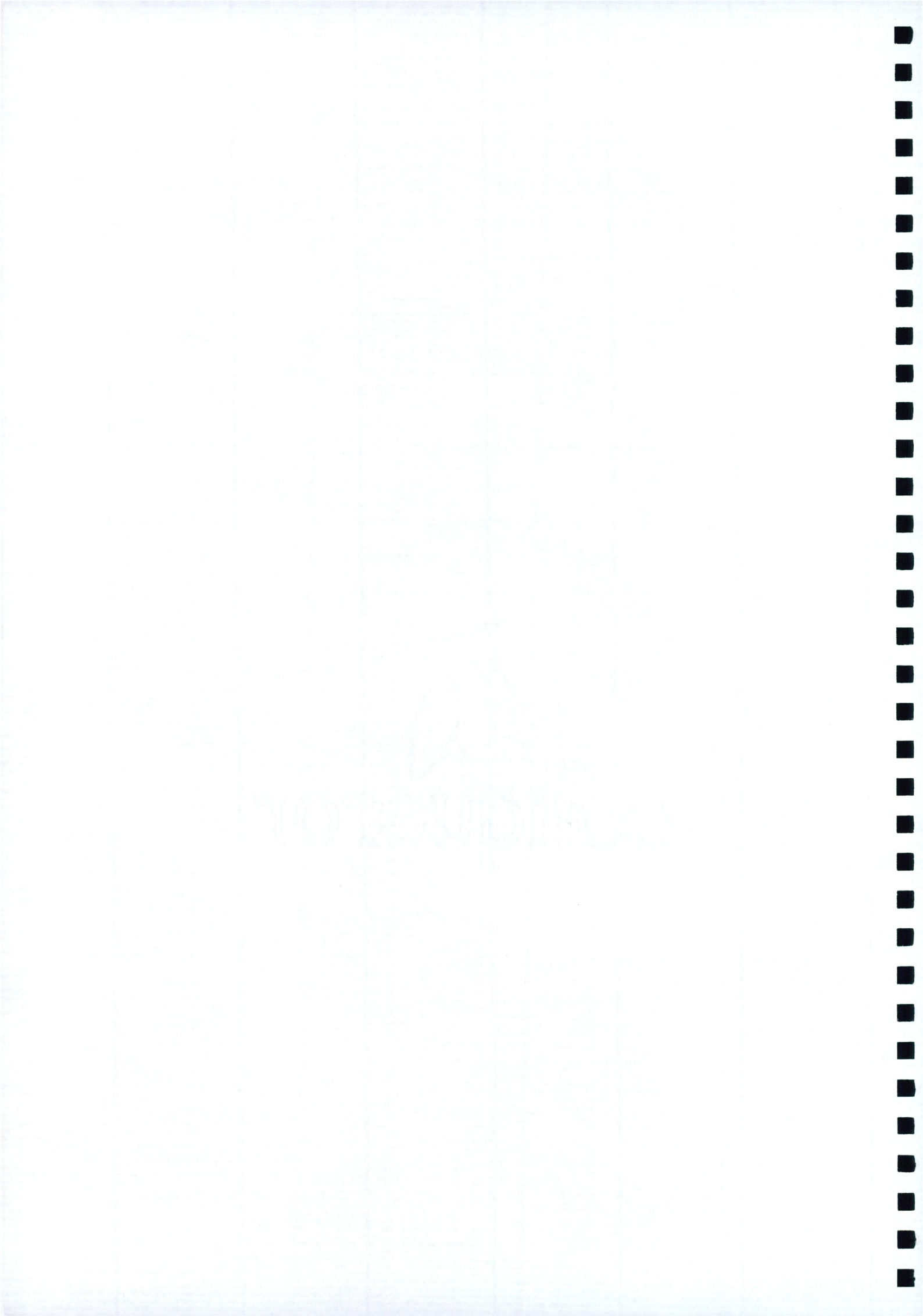


we are left with one person who carries the strength through that conveys a form of right and duty in his own terms, strong enough to preserve his own essence as a strong leader ; that being Vito Corleone.

"Don Corleone was merely a capitalist extended, someone who had taken the American dream literally, and gave everything within his power to achieve it."  
Ray, 1985, p.92

Vito although, his power may not always be right in the conventional sense, it does, however, project a power that is constant , balanced and although he remains responsible for many deaths, we regard these fatalities as a form of self protection. It is Vito's duty to protect his family throughout the Godfather part one and two, fulfilling a role never unbalanced by rash decisions or by the whims of others.

"Between the contradictal principle that expels the criminal from society and the image of the monster 'vomited,' by nature, where is one to find a limit, if not in a human nature that is manifested; not in the rigour of the law; not in the ferocity of the delinquent, but in the sensitivity of the reasonable man who makes the laws but doesn't commit the crimes."  
Foucault, 1977,p.71



Chapter five:

1." Hegemony depends on the ability of the power bloc to win the consent of the various formations of the subordinate to the system that subordinates them. "p.41

(Power plays, power works, J. Fiske, Verso, London, 1993).

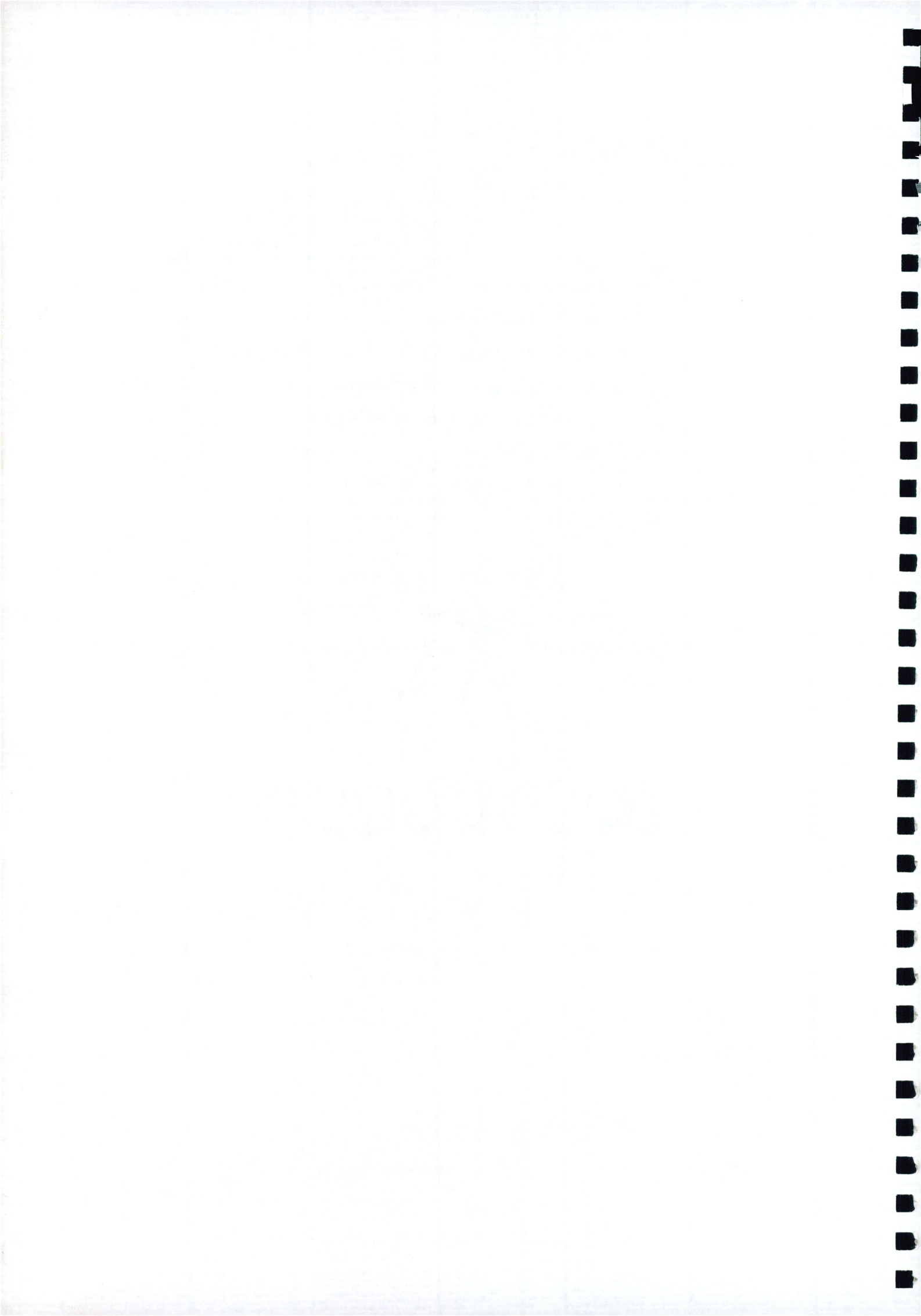




## Conclusion

As a result of this examination of the mafia organisation through the portrayals in the three films, Once upon a time in America, Goodfellas, and the Godfather's, this unquestioned imperialist power structure has been questioned. It has been identified that this much feared organisation, and its members arose, from the depths of poverty with a dream and ambition to succeed. It has been discovered that beneath the polished surfaces of the mafia lies, many different faces, an insight into varying "will to powers," in each of the characters portrayed has been analysed. As one progresses through this illustration of an immense power bloc, one realises that although these characters have realised, with greater success than the majority, this desirable existence, few have maintained the balance to enjoy it.

In conclusion, the gangster although he remains primarily an icon of some of our idealist fantasies, can now be perceived as a human being, who has survived into any empty existence surrounded only by the fragments of the life he has lived, and the memories of the lives he has destroyed.



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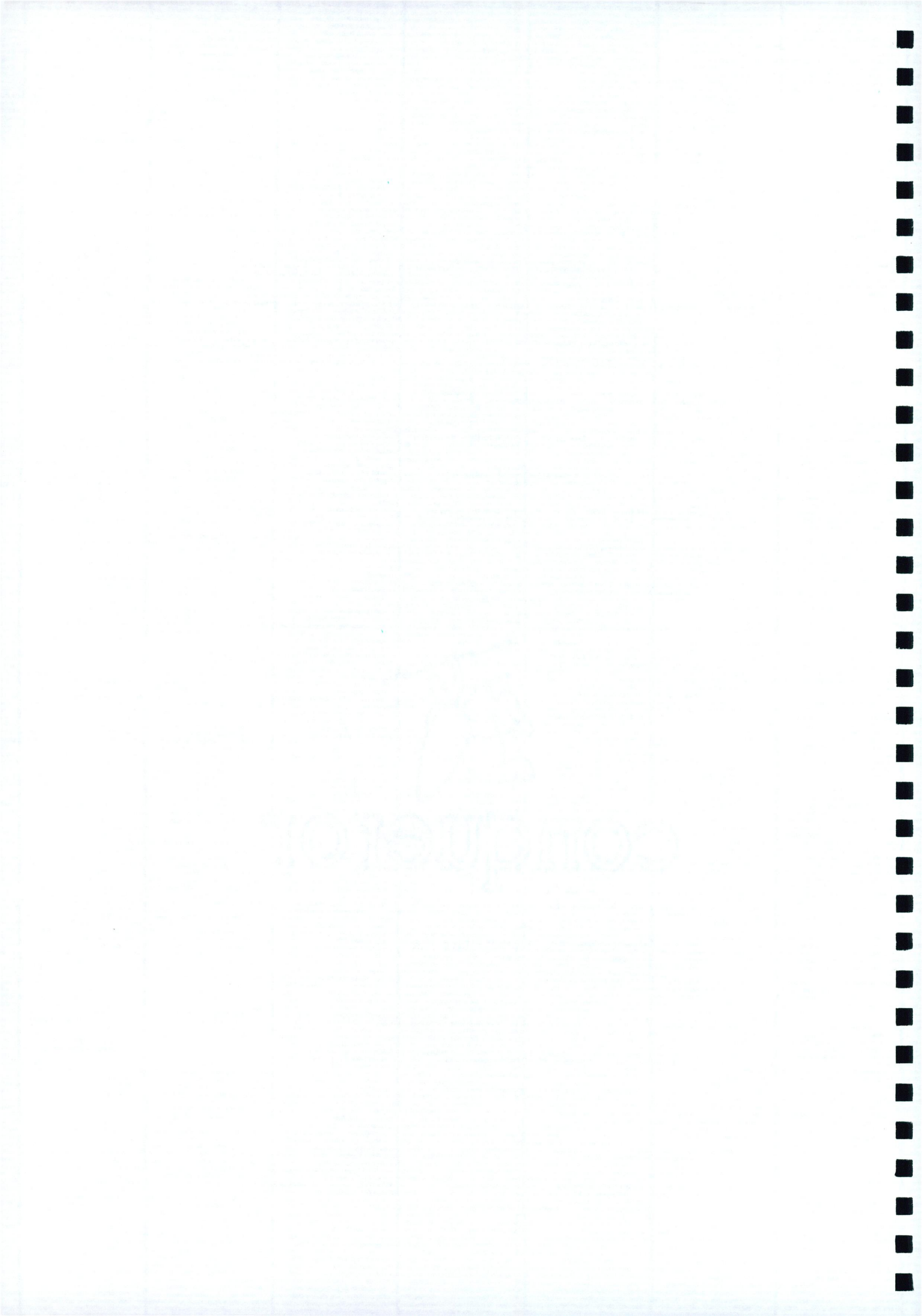
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