“DETERMINED BY AN AIR DATE”: THE TRUMAN SHOW’S TELEVISUAL LOGICS OF UTOPIA, INTIMACY, AND SUBJECTIVITY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes that Peter Weir’s 1998 film The Truman Show presents three subject positions in relation to the television show it dramatizes – the creator, the spectator, and the performer – in order to develop a criticism of television that expresses the need to question our media culture and the powers that determine and regulate it. Weir presents Christof, the show’s creator, as the autocratic controller of the show whose presentation of Truman’s world reveals its neoconservative agenda in its attempts to recreate the world of 1950s domestic situation comedies. This simulacrum, which Christof portrays as an authentic reality, comforts its viewers by providing them with Truman’s companionship. Further, Weir’s film includes the home viewers of this television program to illustrate the show’s omnipresence in the film world. The show engages its spectator in a relationship of intimacy through its conventions of liveness, immediacy, and affect. Through his portrayal of these home viewers, Weir separates the film spectator from the television spectator by allowing and encouraging his film viewers to feel superior to the diegetic television viewers. Finally, the film’s attention to the performers on the show – specifically Truman and his wife Meryl – develops new conceptions of mediatized subjectivity that exceed other conceptions developed in media scholarship. Meryl presents a televisual womanhood that relies on and fetishizes a nostalgic vision of post-World War II feminine domesticity. Truman’s subjectivity is wholly determined by the world he has grown up
in, but he reclaims an individual subjectivity based on an interiority that cannot be mediated. These performers’ subjectivities illustrate a phenomenon in which media encourage consumers to invest images with emotional and psychological significance, but the film makes clear that the individuality behind the images becomes insignificant; in an endless series of replacements, even the images with which we invest the most time, emotion, and intimacy become easily replaceable. By dramatizing this television show through the three subject positions around which this thesis is organized, Weir prohibits the film viewer from aligning too closely with any of the three. By excoriating television’s promotion of ever-replaceable images, moments, and texts, *The Truman Show* voices an urge for conscious and critical examination of television culture.
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Between 2002 and 2004, Dr. Joel Gold, a psychiatrist at Bellevue Hospital Center in New York City, met with five patients who claimed to be the star of their own reality television shows. Their whole lives were scripted, they maintained, and everyone they knew was in on it.¹

Nick Lotz, a patient afflicted with such a psychosis, described his condition as the belief that everything in your life is scripted out, and that it’s all been organized ahead of time. And it’s all-encompassing in the sense that everything in your life around you is part of the television show. I never believed that no one believed me. I believed that they knew what was going on and they just weren’t telling me what was going on … because that was all part of the television show.²

“In Nick Lotz's mind,” reported the New Yorker in a 2013 article, “the show was everything, and everything was the show.”³ According to Dr. Gold, three of these five patients characterized their condition as similar to the experience of the character Truman Burbank, played by Jim Carrey in Peter Weir’s 1998 film The Truman Show, causing Dr. Gold to name this unique psychotic delusion the “Truman Show Delusion.”⁴

The 2012 publication of Dr. Gold’s experiences⁵ – to which he has added some forty more patients with similar conditions – sparked a flurry of public conversation about the impact of culture and technology on the forms that individual cases of psychosis take. Though his original findings closely followed the release of The Truman Show, the wide dissemination of Dr. Gold’s findings through August and September of 2013 returned this film and the reality television show it dramatized to the national conversation.

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⁴ Kershaw, “Look Closely.”
Sufferers from actual psychotic delusions about their lives being reality television shows are not alone in questioning their worlds in this way. Years before *The Truman Show* even debuted in theaters, I have a distinct memory of asking my father if I wasn’t on television. It had never occurred to me that the people I saw on television weren’t all real people – I hadn’t yet learned to distinguish between that old guy my dad watched on the news, whom I later learned was Jim Lehrer, and fictional characters like Lucy Ricardo and Beaver Cleaver. My father’s answer to my question was, of course, “Well, no,” and that seemed to satisfy me for the time. But now, in the post-9/11 culture of surveillance – and our post-Snowden awareness of it – we actually could be the subjects of 24/7 surveillance. After the recent revelations about the National Security Agency’s abuse of its surveillance power, it is not beyond the realm of reason to wonder if NSA agents aren’t getting together in front of their computer screens seeking entertainment in hidden surveillance footage of Americans’ everyday activities.6

Peter Weir’s 1998 film *The Truman Show*, written by Andrew Niccol, dramatizes the final three days of the eponymous television program, “The Truman Show,”7 which relies on 24/7 surveillance to provide entertainment to hundreds of millions of viewers. The star of the show is Truman Burbank who, unlike everyone else around him, does not know that his life is the subject of a reality television show watched by hundreds of millions of viewers. Throughout the film, Weir portrays Truman’s gradual realization that his world is fabricated and controlled.8 But Weir also focuses on the television show vis-à-vis three subject positions that the medium of television engages with: creators, spectators, and performers. The creator of “The Truman Show”

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7 To avoid confusion, I shall follow the lead of many scholars of *The Truman Show* and refer to Peter Weir’s film as *The Truman Show* and the television program within it as “The Truman Show.”
8 *The Truman Show*, directed by Peter Weir (1998; Burbank, CA: Warner Brothers, 2005), DVD. All subsequent references to and quotations from the film follow from this citation. Though I mostly refer to Weir as the film’s auteur, my intention is to give creative credit to the filmmakers collectively.
is the enigmatic Christof (Ed Harris) who oversees Truman’s daily activities in Seahaven – the city-sized television studio built for this purpose – from the lunar control room above Truman’s world. Weir’s film also depicts the television show’s home viewers, who generally sit at rapt attention, taking in every moment of Truman’s broadcast life. It is through these home viewers that the film provides key information about the “The Truman Show,” such as the show’s refusal to capture and broadcast Truman’s moments of sexual intimacy with his wife Meryl (Laura Linney). Finally, Weir’s film closely addresses Truman and Meryl in their mediated roles as performers on the show.

This thesis takes up the three subject positions that Weir portrays – the creator, spectator, and performer – and approaches The Truman Show through each in turn. Beginning with the creator, Weir reveals the neoconservative, ideologically motivated plan according to which Christof’s character constructs and controls the show. The focus on the television audience demonstrates the show’s power in developing a relationship of intimacy between Truman and the home viewers. Weir’s attention to the performers illustrates the unique project of “The Truman Show”; the presentation of Meryl and Truman as the show’s leading performers exceeds previous theories of celebrity subjectivity, proposing that even the celebrities who hold our most ardent devotion are easily replaceable and thoroughly insignificant. This thesis proposes that Weir’s project with The Truman Show is to engage these three subject positions in order to force media consumers to question our psychological and emotional investment in televisual representations of reality. Specifically targeting television and its anonymous viewing masses, Weir excoriates the power that this medium continues to enjoy many decades after its inception. As this thesis demonstrates through its attention to the three subject positions in relationship to the television show, Weir demonizes the television audience he depicts while allowing his film
audience to place themselves in a position of moral superiority over the diegetic audience. In so doing, Weir’s film proposes that these two media are oppositional and that film occupies the superior position in American media culture. In dramatizing a television program that draws its viewers into a sedentary, manipulable, unchallenged position of spectatorship, Weir encourages the film spectator to question and criticize the totalizing influence that media have on our everyday lives. Of course, his valuation of film over and against television reflects Weir’s position as Hollywood filmmaker; as The Truman Show suggests, television turns us into anonymous viewing masses that would prefer never to leave our television sets, but Weir leaves film out of the equation. No evidence of the latter medium’s existence can be found in Truman’s world, making room for The Truman Show to propose film as television’s opposite and as a possible antidote to the negative consequences of television’s dominance. I conclude by questioning the implications of this proposition in The Truman Show and in the media culture that Weir reaches with his film.

This project contributes to scholarship on The Truman Show that has continued to develop since the film’s release. Many articles and book chapters have criticized the film for its disingenuous media criticism, asking whether The Truman Show can contribute meaningfully to conversations about the influence of media in everyday life when the film itself engages with and profits from the industries it purports to critique. Other scholars have dismissed the film’s portrayal of suburban space, calling The Truman Show one of the recent “didactic essays on the

dystopian aspects of suburbia.”

While most scholarship on this film surfaced in the years immediately following its 1998 release, recent work on the film has taken a more in-depth approach to the film’s nuances and the complexity in its exploration of television and film as two different but related media. Simone Knox, for example, examines the film shot-by-shot distinguishing between the show’s cameras and Weir’s cameras to argue that Weir’s film blurs the boundary not only between film and television but also between other associated binaries such as the world inside versus the world outside of a visual text. Further, Emma Kafalenos scrutinizes the embedded – what she calls “doubly coded” – television text as a mode of introducing and examining new forms of narrative storytelling that have not yet been developed in our world.

This thesis approaches The Truman Show and “The Truman Show” through scholarship on film, television, and media cultures with notable influence of the work of feminist film theorists such as Laura Mulvey as well as the work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer on the culture industry and Jean Baudrillard’s precession of simulacra. Although this project also engages with the three subject positions that Weir poses as most important to television culture – the creator, the spectator, and the performer – it engages most intimately and most frequently with the role of the spectator, drawing on a history of theories of both film and

television spectatorship. This thesis is the first scholarly work to approach the film through the subject positions around which it organizes itself, which allows for a fuller – though by no means fully comprehensive – analysis of the film’s media culture-oriented project. Contributing to the lasting conversation about *The Truman Show* and its commentary on contemporary media culture, this project aims to draw together the often oppositional arguments that other scholars have made about Weir’s project with this film.

Furthermore, this project engages a historical perspective to consider the media and cultural histories out of which *The Truman Show* and “The Truman Show” emerge. As I will argue, “The Truman Show” draws on conventions of 1950s domestic suburban situation comedies. This return to the postwar period – and the nostalgia with which the show’s creator within the film engages imagery and themes of that period – relates to a larger neoconservative narrative of American history. Mary Caputi’s book *A Kinder, Gentler America: Melancholia and the Mythical 1950s* characterizes this impulse to imagine the 1950s as the best decade of all when times were good and people were happy, but as she also notes, that vision of the postwar period was at least encouraged, if not completely constructed by, the decade’s own representations of itself on television. Working from this perspective, this project joins together cultural history with media theory to tease out the ideological project of the show within the film and to illuminate the film’s position on that televisual project.

Each of the three sections of this thesis addresses one of the subject positions listed above: creator, spectator, and performer. Beginning with the first of these, Section I examines Christof’s role as a supreme creator and controller of the television show and the world within it. Weir’s portrayal of this subject position indicates that Christof utilizes the program to further a

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neoconservative ideology that is obscured by the show’s apparent authenticity and reality. Weir’s film reveals that the particular “reality” of the show is really a simulacrum of an idyllic postwar community depicted on 1950s domestic television shows, and this representation of a false reality provides comfort for the home viewers. The Truman Show’s attention to the subject position behind the television show indicates that the creator exercises a great deal of control not only over the world he has constructed but also over the world he purportedly aims to replicate.

Section II focuses on the subject position of the television spectator in The Truman Show. Weir’s dramatization of television spectatorship depends upon the text’s omnipresence, which provides the home viewer with constant access to Truman and the world he inhabits. Further, “The Truman Show” engages its spectator through its liveness, immediacy, and affect, which develops an intimate relationship between the spectator and the performers she watches on television. Finally, the film forces its spectator to recognize her position as distinct from the television spectator: by portraying the show’s home viewers on screen, The Truman Show creates a privileged position for its viewer as she also watches – and judges – the people who are watching Truman.

The third section centers on the performer. I refer to categories of mediatized subjectivity, including mediated personhood,\(^\text{17}\) the star persona,\(^\text{18}\) and the television personality,\(^\text{19}\) to show how Meryl and Truman blur and exceed these characterizations. Meryl – and Hannah Gill who plays her on the show – presents a televisual womanhood that puts on display a nostalgic vision of post-World War II feminine domesticity. Adhering to the ideal of televisual womanhood proves impossible for this actress, but the insignificance of her

individuality in contrast to the prominence of the role she fills renders her insignificant and replaceable. Weir presents Truman’s subjectivity as entirely determined by the show-world he has inhabited, but Truman’s reclamation of selfhood through his unmediated interiority (as his declaration, “You never had a camera in my head” demonstrates) does not prevent him from being similarly replaceable in the end. In this section, I adapt Baudrillard’s precession of simulacra to account for the replaceability of these performers: in an endless procession of simulacra, even the images, personalities, and media texts in which we invest the most time, energy, and apparently sincere interest are individually insignificant and ultimately interchangeable.
Christof occupies the subject position of creator, and Weir presents him as the autocratic controller behind the television show. Through Weir’s portrayal of this subject position and the ideological agenda with which Christof operates, “The Truman Show” aims to present an illusion of reality: Christof’s television show frames its world and scripts its narrative to obscure the calculating impulses that make it run. As Weir focuses on Christof’s methods of control, *The Truman Show* reveals that the world Truman inhabits is, in fact, not real at all and is instead an example of Baudrillard’s simulacrum. Further, the particular utopian characteristics of the world Christof’s show portrays are especially significant because they refer to a mythical memory of the 1950s as a time of universal prosperity and contentment, and that return adds a second layer to the precession of simulacra in Weir’s portrayal of Christof’s constructed world. With this simulacrum of an idyllic postwar community reminiscent of 1950s domestic television shows, Weir’s film verifies Christof’s assertion that “The Truman Show” provides comfort in the form of companionship for his viewers. Ultimately, *The Truman Show*’s attention to the subject positions on both sides of the television screen indicates that Christof exercises a great deal of control not only over the world he has constructed but also over the world he pretends to be merely replicating.

*5,000 Cameras and Counting*

Through his network of surveillance, Christof cultivates a voyeuristic gaze that nevertheless aims to convince its audience that it presents an unmediated, unscripted real life. As

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20 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*.
21 Caputi, *A Kinder, Gentler America*. 
the creator of the show within Weir’s film, Christof builds this illusion of authenticity and spontaneity into his program through camera positions and framing as well as the realism he engages in its storytelling. However, Weir directs his viewer to understand that the show is completely scripted and controlled, portraying the world of the show and the story that unfolds within it as a simulacrum of a nonexistent reality.

Beginning with one camera, apparently in the womb, followed by another in Truman’s crib, Christof’s network of surveillance expands over the course of thirty years to include “somewhere in the vicinity of 5,000” cameras.22 At any moment in producing the show, Christof has several cameras at the ready to capture Truman’s actions from a variety of angles both to maintain continuity and to give the illusion that the cameras capture a whole life, unmediated and unfolding in real time. Individual shots in the film display the aesthetic of everyday observation that Christof cultivates in producing “The Truman Show.” For instance, a tracking shot captures Truman’s car driving through town on his way to work. Additionally, Weir shows that Christof utilizes hidden cameras placed on garbage bins, in Truman’s car stereo, and even in the ring that Truman wears on his left hand. Iris shots, in which the corners of the image are obscured either by shadow or by an object in which the camera has been hidden remind the viewer that the footage is captured from cameras that Truman cannot see (Figures 1-3). These hidden camera shots, other high- or low-angle shots, and shots that shake unstably as their host moves, connote the documentary form, and according to Simone Knox, they “give the impression of

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22 Christof reports this figure to an interested caller during his interview on TruTalk.
being less staged, of greater immediacy, intimacy, and liveness.”

In other words, these shots suggest to the viewer of “The Truman Show” that the event being captured is not specifically staged for the camera itself, it is merely captured and transmitted. This technique elicits the feeling that all viewers are merely observing Truman go about his daily business from inside Truman’s world.

The camera positions that the show-within-the-film utilizes around Truman’s daily route to work are clearly the result of routine, and Knox points out that these stable and repeated positions highlight the show’s omnipresent gaze as they follow Truman’s predictably repeated actions. Yet, even in these stable shots from cameras that Truman acts in front of repeatedly, Weir reminds his viewer of the show’s voyeuristic gaze. For instance, while Truman sits at his desk at work Christof captures a shot of Truman from across his desk, and though the shot frames Truman well, part of the shot is also obscured by a large envelope propped upright in a box on the desk (Figure 4). This particular positioning of the camera reminds the viewer that this observation of Truman is only possible because of a network of hidden cameras.

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24 Ibid., 5.
While many of the shots included in the film reveal themselves to be from the show’s hidden cameras that Weir includes in *The Truman Show*, other cinematographic techniques differentiate between the television image and the filmic image. As Knox points out, many shots of Truman in the film are not television shots: in one example of a shot from the film’s camera, Truman sits on the beach at night captured in a series of medium and medium-long shots from a camera positioned directly in front of Truman’s body, and other shots from behind Truman reveal that there is no place that Christof’s camera could hide to have captured Truman from that angle. For Knox, this inclusion of strictly filmic shots in opposition to the televisual shots problematizes the oppositions between cinema and television, reality and simulation, and outside and inside.25

The film’s opening credits exemplify this blurring of binaries since they introduce the show rather than the film itself. Laura Linney’s characters are introduced through an intertitle reading “Hannah Gil as Meryl,” and the shots of Christof interspersed through the opening credits position him as the creator of the show and as the one who first introduces us to the film’s concept, again blurring the lines between cinema and television, reality and simulation, and outside and inside. Since *The Truman Show* devotes a significant portion of the film’s narrative to the creator and his team’s development of and control over the show, the film asks its

25 Ibid., 2.
spectator to consider the difference between Weir’s camera and the show’s cameras. Because Christof’s cameras are hidden and appear to capture what simply presents itself to them, Weir reminds his viewer of Christof’s voyeuristic gaze that purports to capture an unfolding reality rather than a series of staged events. Of course, Weir accomplishes this through his own camera, and by setting up an apparent opposition between television and cinema, Weir shows the film camera to be more honest because it does not attempt to deceive its audience into believing in the authenticity and actuality of the staged events it records.

Because Weir’s camera reveals that “The Truman Show” presents itself as merely a presentation of real events in an authentic world, Weir also directs his viewer’s attention to Christof’s method of scripting reality into the show’s narrative. Christof asserts at the film’s beginning that everyone – creators, performers, and spectators – has grown tired of phony emotions in phony stories. To combat this growing boredom with mediated storytelling, Christof and his cohort have aimed to give the world something more authentic. Weir reveals that this claim is wholly disingenuous because the hired actors display inauthentic emotions, but it is Truman’s apparently unscripted reaction to Christof’s staged events and actors that appears to legitimize the show’s claim that it is merely a life televised. Tony Jackson indicates that when Christof makes his argument about the need for realism, he recognizes that viewers in *The Truman Show* are portrayed as wanting “real emotions,” even if they “occur in some form of artificially determined (fictional) setting that looks like our everyday life.”²⁶ Christof’s world and the story that his show tells are indeed artificially determined, as the film’s scenes in the show’s control room remind us, but what Christof aims to provide for his viewers is actually the impossible “complete collapse of the distinction between real and fiction.”²⁷ Because the


²⁷ Ibid.
television viewers do not have access to Christof’s control room in the same way that Weir’s viewers do, the film highlights that the show obscures that control. To strengthen the impression that the show transmits a *life* via television rather than a fictional story, the show follows Truman’s every move no matter how mundane – the broadcast does not cut out or cut down the moments in which Truman drives to work, mows the lawn, or even sleeps. Transmitting these moments of the everyday bolsters the illusion that the show merely captures and relays unmediated reality.

But no matter how authentic that story appears to be, Christof scripts Truman’s life for him. In one sequence, Weir reveals for his viewer how the show is scripted: Truman’s best friend Marlon (played by Louis Coltrane who is played by Noah Emmerich) reassures him that there is most definitely no plot in which Truman is being watched or made to be part of something he is not aware of. During a single line of Marlon’s monologue, the film cuts from a shot of Marlon’s face to the lunar control room where Christof feeds Marlon his lines via a microphone and an earpiece. Though Marlon takes a few minor liberties with the words in his script, this level of involvement on Christof’s part indicates that Christof’s script subjects the actors participating in Truman’s apparently authentic life to immediate and totalizing control. In this particular scene, Christof appears to be improvising rather than following a pre-planned script, but in providing the language directly to Marlon for him to repeat, Christof reminds the viewer of a stage director whispering forgotten lines to a performer. Similarly, Christof scripts larger goals and themes for the show. As the film explains, Truman’s childhood dream was to be “an explorer like the great Magellan,” but Christof redirects the narrative in order to restrict Truman’s desire to leave the island: by killing off Truman’s father in the water surrounding Seahaven, Christof attempts to ensure that the show’s script will not have to write in more obstacles to keep Truman on the
island. While Christof may provide his audience with the illusion that Truman is living a normal, self-determined life, what’s hidden behind the scenes – and what Weir’s film only reveals to its viewers – is the master plan according to which the narrative of the show develops.

Weir reinforces the show’s illusion of reality and authenticity through its 24/7 broadcast. Because the action of the show plays out in real time for its home viewers, as Jackson notes, the viewers are able to look “at the actual real as it happens.”

Through its equation of real time and television time, “The Truman Show” accomplishes what Adorno and Horkheimer refer to as “the industry’s ideal of naturalness” wherein “the perfected technology reduces the tension between the culture product and everyday existence.”

Section II will focus on how this technique engages the spectator in a relationship of intimacy, but the point to be made here is that Weir shows Christof’s awareness of his audience’s viewing habits, and Christof capitalizes on the lack of dissonance between the television spectator’s everyday existence and the temporality of the cultural product that Christof provides for her in order to enhance the program’s apparent authenticity.

Christof remarks that the show “isn’t always Shakespeare, but it’s genuine,” and this apparent authenticity gives the illusion of spontaneity, which further obscures the script behind the show. Adorno and Horkheimer explain that mass-culture products may give the illusion of chance, but in reality, “Chance itself is planned”; instead of genuine spontaneity, these cultural products merely give “the impression that the web of transactions and measures into which life has been transformed still leaves room for spontaneous, immediate relationships between human beings.”

As the show’s value is predicated on Truman’s lack of awareness that his world is a scripted television show, the audience has the impression that they are watching the spontaneous

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28 Ibid., 141.
29 Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, 101.
30 Ibid., 117.
actions of the show’s protagonist. But even Truman points out that everything is “beautifully synchronized,” and it is in this moment that the show’s apparent spontaneity begins to reveal itself as the planned illusion of chance. “The Truman Show” depends upon this planned chance, but it also depends upon the impression of spontaneous immediate relationships between human beings that Adorno and Horkheimer characterize. This is clear in the attention Weir pays to the performers on the show as actors – when Louis Coltrane steps outside his role as Marlon or when Hannah Gill steps outside hers as Meryl, the film viewer must remember that the relationships that Truman has developed with Marlon and Meryl over the years are not authentic. However, the mechanisms of the show that obscure its scripted nature – framing and realism in its storytelling, as explained above – cause its viewer to forget that chance is planned and to believe genuinely that the show merely depicts spontaneous, immediate relationships.

Weir’s portrayals of the television audience’s interest in the show suggests that Christof’s obfuscation of the show’s scriptedness successfully convinces the viewers that they are watching a true reality television show. Though Christof’s character asserts that the world of the show is only “in some respects counterfeit” he maintains that the show merely captures and transmits a genuine, real life. Later on the film, Christof defends Seahaven against Sylvia (Natascha McElhone), the former cast member who attempted to liberate Truman, saying that Seahaven is a better place to live than the sick world that Sylvia inhabits. Indeed, the film’s attention to the act of scripting the show and to controlling the show’s environment – as in the climactic final scene when Christof and his minions instantly conjure up a violent storm over the soundstage’s body of water – highlight that Seahaven is not a reality but a simulacrum.
“A Nice Place to Live”: Utopia for One

Christof’s television program aims to portray Truman’s life and the world in which he lives as wholly authentic, and the form that Christof’s “real” world takes is that of a utopia reminiscent of the mythical post-World War II moment portrayed on 1950s domestic television shows. It is through his construction of a postwar suburban utopia that Christof’s ideological project with the show reveals itself. Christof creates a utopia for Truman that excludes a specific set of features that are labeled as unpleasing in order to protect Truman from them, and in so doing Christof provides his utopia as an example of a better world, as he explains to Sylvia during his TruTalk interview. From Sir Thomas More writing in 1516 to the present, the term “utopia” has been invoked to refer to more or less specific characterizations of the universally perfect social space. While Seahaven appears to be a utopia according to the definition provided by the town’s motto, “A Nice Place to Live,” The Truman Show proposes that utopia is in the eye of the beholder. The film makes clear that this presentation of utopia in “The Truman Show” is just one person’s ideologically motivated conception of the perfect society based on televisual representations of post-war suburban domestic life.

Seahaven – and the real town of Seaside, Florida, in which The Truman Show was filmed – invokes the cultural significance of the American suburb. Entirely enclosed in a television studio in southern California, Truman’s hometown island of Seahaven provides an aesthetic backdrop that reflects the middle-class prosperity, cleanliness, and contentment of the New

32 Seaside and Seahaven are technically New Urban spaces. Whereas a suburb is a primarily residential space located just outside a larger city center, “New Urban” refers to developments where home ownership is still the norm but individual homes and buildings are condensed into a smaller space to curb sprawl and organize neighborhoods around a small urban center, usually a town square. “New Urban” and “suburban” are often conflated for the similarities in their communal, non-urban environments and because both are characterized by single-family, middle-class home ownership. See: Beuka, Suburbia Nation; and Douglas A. Cunningham, “A Theme Park Built for One: The New Urbanism vs. Disney Design in The Truman Show,” Critical Survey 17, no. 1 (2005): 110.
Urban/suburban space. The town’s large houses are meticulously maintained, from their perfectly cut lawns to their pristine white picket fences. No unsafe neighborhoods can be found, and all of the neighborhoods and the houses in them look just alike, as Weir shows in establishing shots from the rooftops of Seahaven (Figure 5). Every person with whom Truman comes into contact — as in his repeated daily commute to work — dresses conservatively and greets him with a warm smile and friendly chitchat.

As the utopia that Christof has created for Truman to inhabit within Weir’s film, Seahaven also conforms to an aesthetic of middle-class domesticity that recalls 1950s suburban living as television shows of the period portrayed it. Calling Christof’s constructed world “straightforwardly utopian,” Jackson aptly describes Christof’s utopia as one that “involves reducing randomness to a minimum; providing comfortable living conditions; regulating economic, political, and social forces so that they have only predictable and positive effects.”

Seahaven appears to be a contemporary utopia simply because there is nothing too serious to worry about in this world beyond common middle-class concerns about putting one’s money toward responsibilities and a prescribed set of life goals, which Truman and Meryl discuss together. Part of Christof’s project with the show is to protect Truman from the “sick” world outside, and he does this by not introducing Truman to any cultural, political, or economic conflicts not directly related to Truman’s story. Douglas Cunningham characterizes the utopianism of Seahaven by focusing on the absence of race and class antagonisms in Truman’s

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33 Jackson, “Television Realism,” 145.
world, suggesting that no comfort would be derived from portraying such antagonisms.\(^{34}\) In his interview on *TruTalk* about halfway through Weir’s film, Christof characterizes the world outside Seahaven as “the sick place” whereas “Seahaven is the way the world should be.” Through their exclusion from Truman’s world, Christof labels race and class antagonisms as “sick.”

The specific portrayal of the African-American family who live across the street from the Burbanks demonstrates the television show’s refusal to acknowledge a history of racial conflict. As Cunningham points out, the show’s narrative imposes on all families depicted in Seahaven a middle-class, nuclear family-oriented, suburban mode of living reminiscent of 1950s white domesticity.\(^{35}\) On the first morning of Weir’s film, the African-American family across the street greets Truman. Weir portrays this family as the show’s token African-American family. The husband, suit-clad and briefcase-toting, kisses his wife and child from the street side of their white picket fence as he goes off to work and the wife and daughter remain safely on the inside of the white picket fence. The sameness exhibited in Seahaven’s family structures completely ignores a history of racial segregation and any other versions of family life not based around a nuclear unit in which the father works and the mother stays home with children. By ignoring possible points for race- or class-based difference, “The Truman Show” equates comfort with coherence and homogeneity rather than diversity. Cunningham compares the comfort that Christof cultivates in Seahaven to the “‘protective cell of comfort’ created at a Disney theme park” where, as a visitor,

You won’t be accosted by the homeless. You will never experience white guilt over imperialism or genocide (the savages are kept at bay in Adventureland while the Native Americans dare not step foot out of Frontierland). And on no occasion will you be

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\(^{34}\) Cunningham, “A Theme Park Built for One,” 124.

reminded that America (and by extension, the park in which you stand) rests on a historical foundation of slavery.\textsuperscript{36}

Without these realities of the world, Truman’s culture exists in a separate realm where these issues appear to be easily sidestepped.

Christof strives constantly to control the influences of the outside world, but provides Truman ready access to 1950s television programs that conform to the ideologies and aesthetics of Truman’s own world. Truman watches \textit{I Love Lucy}, but his favorite show is \textit{Show Me the Way to Go Home}, a fictional program within Weir’s world that features the Abbotts of Camden Village. Weir introduces this show through a voice-over on Truman’s television that characterizes \textit{Show Me the Way to Go Home} as “a hymn of praise to small town life, where we learn that you don’t have to leave home to discover what the world’s all about.” While that message has an obvious relation to Truman’s confinement to Seahaven, the inclusion of \textit{Show Me the Way to Go Home} suggests that the utopia Weir’s character Christof has created for Truman is closely related to the mythical status that the 1950s holds in the American historical imagination through televisual representations of the period.

As contemporary scholarship has noted, the suburban space is intimately associated with the 1950s in the American cultural imagination, an association that is “neither accident nor coincidence.”\textsuperscript{37} According to Mary Caputi, invocations of the 1950s as emblematic of better times and attempts to recreate that decade are symptomatic of a neoconservative narrative in the American political sphere that relies on nostalgia for a past reality that never actually existed. As Caputi explains, this postwar period holds a mythical status in American cultural memory, a status that has been encouraged by – if not wholly constructed by – 1950s television shows.\textsuperscript{38}

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\textsuperscript{36} Cunningham, “A Theme Park Built for One,” 126.
\textsuperscript{37} Beuka, \textit{Suburbia Nation}, 4.
\textsuperscript{38} Caputi, \textit{A Kinder, Gentler America}, 4, 114-115.
\end{flushleft}
And it is the world of that television programming to which the neoconservative movement has been attempting to return since the 1980s. The *Truman Show* dramatizes a return to 1950s television in Christof’s creation of the world in the show. Even the vibrant color palate displayed in the shots of Seahaven give the illusion that the televised world is shot in Technicolor, suggesting that Christof’s show evokes representations of a bygone era rather than reality.

By actually appealing to 1950s television programming – including the very real *I Love Lucy* as well as the fictional *Show Me the Way to Go Home* – Weir connects that imagination of the postwar period through television to the world that has been constructed for “The Truman Show.” Through Christof’s construction of Truman’s world as a recreation of a 1950s television show, Weir reveals that what Christof attempts to return to is not a true memory of a better time in American history. Instead, what Seahaven really aims to reestablish is the mythologized conception of the 1950s that television’s early domestic sitcoms made popular and memorable.

As Truman listens to the show’s introduction, Weir positions the camera in a medium close-up shot of Truman’s face. Throughout the narrator’s characterization of the show, Truman’s smile fades and his brow furrows, suggesting that he is beginning to question the extent to which televisual representations of an idyllic world can present a satisfactory vision of the world.

Among the details of the small town that Christof cultivates throughout the production of “The Truman Show,” other elements such as costuming also signal nostalgia for and an attempted recreation of the world of 1950s television. Meryl works as a nurse at the local hospital and always dons a traditional nurse’s uniform, complete with classic white cap and a matronly cardigan. When not heading to or from work on her retro bicycle, Meryl wears other dresses in a classic postwar style in addition to low, vintage-looking heels, and her hair is styled to reflect the popular curled look of that era. As I will examine in more detail in Section III,

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39 Ibid., 2.
Meryl’s physicality labels her as wholesome and wifely in an implicit return to June Cleaver of *Leave it to Beaver* and Margaret Anderson of *Father Knows Best*. Other minor characters’ retro clothing – from the next door neighbor’s driving hat to the female characters’ dresses (rarely do women sport pants in Seahaven) – reinforce this visual return to the mythical moment of the 1950s on “The Truman Show.” Through the portrayal of women as traditionally feminine caretakers, glossing over points of difference and conflict, and the recreation of the idyllic suburban space, Christof’s incarnation of utopia reveals that the ideological agenda that motivates it is born out of 1950s suburban domestic television shows.

*Leave Him on All Night for Comfort*

It is through its return to 1950s televisual representations of American life that “The Truman Show” provides comfort for its viewers, a power that Weir shows Christof to exploit throughout the film. Christof’s statement at the beginning of the film that “many viewers leave him on all night for comfort” resonates with his later assertion that the show has “been an overwhelmingly positive experience” both “for Truman and for the viewing public.” The film shows that this perception of “The Truman Show” rings true. The man in the bathtub is the film’s most prominent example of the comfort that the show provides its viewers. Though we see him on multiple occasions through the three days of the film’s narrative, Weir never shows this man outside of his bathtub. He watches a television located within the space of his bathtub stall and is never shown to leave the television – even for a moment – to relocate himself within his home. Watching from the bathtub, a site of relaxation and intimacy, indicates that this man finds ease in “The Truman Show.” Furthermore, he sleeps in his bathtub when Truman sleeps, suggesting that
the show provides additional comfort because this viewer is lulled to sleep as Truman goes to sleep.

Throughout *The Truman Show*, Weir suggests that comfort takes the form of companionship. As I will discuss further in Section II, the show builds a relationship of intimacy between the home viewer and Truman, giving the impression that the viewer shares a domestic space as well as a common story with Truman. Though many of the home viewers watch with at least one other person, their attention is always directed toward the television screen, suggesting that Truman is the one with whom they connect. This companionship presumes loneliness for viewers who watch in isolation and viewers who watch in a community. Remembering Christof’s statement that we’ve grown tired of phony emotions given by phony actors and that the world outside of Seahaven is a sick place, the portrayal of the home viewers in *The Truman Show* suggests that they have also grown tired of their real-life relationships in that sick world and instead find more comforting satisfaction in Truman’s companionship. Fully aware of the comfort that his show provides for viewers, Christof capitalizes on this through the 24/7 live broadcast, which provides constant access to that companionship. Christof employs other particular techniques including camera positioning to heighten this closeness between Truman and those who watch him. For instance, the film frames the show’s control room to include the main “on air” screen, which displays a gigantic close-up of Truman’s sleeping face. A camera could show Truman sleeping from any other angle in his bedroom, but this close-up shot on Truman’s face gives the audience the impression that they are in bed with Truman. Through this impression of closeness and the 24/7 broadcast, Christof is able to provide his viewers with constant and comforting companionship. However, this scene in the film continues to suggest that Christof also gains comfort from his own television show. With a cameo by Philip Glass
playing the scene’s diegetic melody on the studio’s piano, Weir frames Christof, pajama-clad, standing in front of the giant projected image of Truman sleeping. Truman stirs in his sleep, and Christof reflexively stretches out his hand like a parent comforting a sleeping child. Christof echoes this gesture again at the end of the film as he gently strokes Truman’s face on the hand-held screen, which he holds in his lap. These moments when Christof seeks out tactile contact with Truman occur when he attempts to be alone with the image of Truman – in the first scene, only Philip Glass is present, and in the second, Christof sits hunched over his chair in a corner of the production room. The stolen moments and Christof’s apparent desire for physical contact with Truman suggests that he also feels the comfort of Truman’s companionship. The show’s home viewers may leave the show on all night for comfort, but so does its creator.

While Christof produces the show to provide companionship to the home viewers, another opposing force challenges the viewers’ comfort in watching “The Truman Show.” Sylvia, who played Truman’s earlier love interest Lauren, wears a button on her sweater that asks, “How will it end?” As scholars have noted, the show constantly pushes the boundaries of its diegetic world by creating situations that would force Truman to discover the truth of his world. For example, in one of the film’s first sequences, Truman’s boss coerces him to attend a meeting across the water that surrounds the island of Seahaven. Moments such as these remind the home viewer of the possibility that Truman will one day discover the truth, eliciting anticipation and anxiety, which contrasts with the comfort that the show normally provides. This anticipation of the end is particularly distressing because the end of the show would mean the end of the companionship that the show affords. However, the show’s comforting impulses overshadow the anticipatory impulses, allowing the viewer to forget her anxiety about the show’s end as she revels in the comfort of the show. In fact, Weir does not show the audience’s

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anticipation in the sequence described above, but he does devote significant screen time to
demonstrate their comfort through shots of pajama-clad or naked viewers resting on their
couches or in their bathtubs. What Weir ultimately indicates here is that Christof’s show has
cultivated a relationship with its spectator that simultaneously comforts and torments her. She
wants the show to go on forever, but she knows that the show could end at any moment so she
must never stop watching the show just in case it does end.

Christof’s utopia and the ideology it holds also aim to alter the world outside of
Seahaven. Through portraying Truman’s utopia as a comforting reality, Christof’s television
program aims to convince the real world that it would be better off if it were more like Truman’s
utopia. The nature of his project (the fact that it is funded by product placement and that
everything not breathing on camera is for sale) provides the world an ideal that it attempts to live
up to. Through their appropriation of the show’s images and repetitions of its lines, the viewers
engage with the features of “The Truman Show” that make Seahaven such a nice place to live.
Jackson points out Christof’s assertion that “Seaheaven is the way the world should be” and that
Truman has been given “a chance to lead a normal life.” Through his repeated assertions that
“The Truman Show” is “genuine” and that the world in which Truman lives is a better version of
reality, Weir presents Christof as seeking to naturalize Truman’s world for his audience and to
naturalize the simulacrum that he portrays as reality. Christof labels suburban American upper-
middle class life as the norm that hundreds of millions of viewers around the world will either
recognize as their own cultural milieu or hope someday to attain. Weir’s film illuminates this

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41 Jackson, “Televisual Realism,” 145.
42 Lavoie, “Escaping the Panopticon,” 64.
process for its viewer and as one scholar puts it, “excoriates television’s power to determine how we think, feel, and act.”

Through the control Christof ultimately gains over the world outside Seahaven, his ideology becomes, as Adorno and Horkheimer write, “the emphatic and systematic proclamation of what is.” Adorno and Horkheimer write further, “Through its inherent tendency to adopt the tone of the factual report, the culture industry makes itself the irrefutable prophet of the existing order.” In this vein, Weir’s presentation of Christof’s television show indicates that this reality television program pretends to be the truly real world, in contrast to the spaces the home viewers occupy. Christof aims to suggest that the world outside the show is the simulacrum and that Seahaven is genuine reality, but his televised world contributes to the outside world’s development into a simulacrum. Within the diegesis of the film, “The Truman Show” is the most important program in the culture industry as its viewers have begun to center their lives around the show. Not only do they learn and repeat the show’s catchphrases (“Good afternoon, good evening, and good night,” recite a family of Japanese viewers), but their homes are filled with the products that Christof places within the show as well as merchandise of the show itself. Truman’s face and those of the show’s other characters are ubiquitous throughout the world outside of the show. By portraying this better world of Seahaven to his hundreds of millions of viewers across the globe, Christof is able to alter the world he supposedly aims to replicate.

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44 Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, 118.
45 Ibid.
SECTION II
THE SPECTATOR: OMNIPRESENT TELEVISION AND RELATIONSHIPS OF INTIMACY

Weir’s presentation of Christof focuses on the techniques of realism that he uses in constructing his televisual utopia, and Weir engages the television spectator within his film to reveal the efficacy of Christof’s work. In *The Truman Show*, the home television viewer’s existence and daily activities are carried out alongside the events broadcast on the show, developing an intimate connection between the viewer’s world and the show’s world. In other words, home television viewers are able to live closely with Truman through their television sets. Weir’s presentation of the subject position of the television spectator indicates that the medium of television develops an intimate relationship with its spectator through conventions of liveness, immediacy, and affect. First, “The Truman Show” is an omnipresent text within the film, and Weir imagines a fully enveloping form of television spectatorship that draws the spectator into the program such that her life is lived alongside the program. Next, the film’s portrayal of television as a medium of intimacy illustrates how “The Truman Show” incorporates its spectator via its liveness, immediacy, and affect to the extent that individuals watching behave as if they were part of the world of the show. Finally, *The Truman Show* does not ask its spectator to occupy the same position as the television spectator; instead, Weir’s double coding – to engage the term Emma Kafalenos uses in her discussion of texts within texts – encourages the film’s viewer to distance herself from the show’s viewers that she sees on screen.

Omnipresence and Participation

“The Truman Show” isn’t a singular entity, and its viewers’ experience of the text is not limited to a particular time or space. This program expands beyond the confines of a single
television transmission and it has become intimately connected to almost every other commercial industry such as fashion, architecture, and food. In addition to the product placement spots (in one example, Meryl asks Truman, “Why don’t you let me fix you some of this new Mococoa drink? All natural cocoa beans from the upper slopes of Mt. Nicaragua. No artificial sweeteners!”), home viewers can also purchase the clothing, houses, and cars they see in Truman’s world. The world of the show is made accessible through a variety of other means, which Weir’s film primarily explores during the TruTalk interview with Christof, the show’s creator.

Viewership communities in The Truman Show are formed in the flesh but are mediated by the television set. Only one home viewer watches in isolation – the man in the bathtub – and all others share the experience with at least one other person. Nevertheless, when these small communal viewing parties convene around “The Truman Show,” they are nearly always facing the television. Even when directly engaged in discussion regarding the show’s plot points or predicting Truman’s next actions, the two waitresses watching from the Truman Bar talk to each other but still face the television set. The relation between viewers in the community around “The Truman Show” is so closely tied to the show – spatially and temporally – that viewers do not stop watching the show in order to discuss it or critique it.

In The Truman Show, the inner life of its main performer is laid bare to the spectator within the broadcast itself to the fullest extent possible. Until he escapes near the end of the film, every moment of Truman’s life (or at least the ones that aren’t sexually explicit46), is made

46 One of Weir’s repeated home viewers, the parking garage attendant laments, “You never see anything anyway. They always turn the camera and play music and the wind blows in and the curtain moves, and, you know, you don’t see anything.” Weir does not indicate whether Truman’s bathroom privacy is respected when he showers or uses the toilet, but the show does broadcast his morning one-man shows in front of the bathroom mirror. It remains unclear where the line is drawn on this television
available to every interested home viewer with access to a television. A home viewer of this reality television program can simply turn on the television, tune in to the correct channel, and watch Truman, even when Truman thinks he is alone. While there is no camera inside his head, as Truman finally points out, the show structures itself so that the viewer feels as though the camera is inside Truman’s head; while Truman contemplates Sylvia’s red sweater, the show provides a flashback sequence of Truman’s key memories associated with this object. As Truman appears to be remembering Sylvia, the one who got away and left the sweater behind, viewers also relive the stolen moments with Sylvia. Weir shows the Truman Bar’s television set as the flashback begins: with a classic dissolve to signal the jump in time, the image on screen fades from Truman’s contemplative face to the footage from the past as if that footage were Truman’s own memory. Once the flashback sequence ends, the Truman Bar waitresses are shown reacting to it, then the camera returns to Truman’s face, completing the illusion that the images the viewers have just seen originated in Truman’s own memory. The show suggests that Truman’s plot pauses in these moments, suggesting to the audience that the flashback still occurs in real time. Rather than viewers engaging with each other in person or via other media to remind each other of this portion of the show’s plot – how Truman liked Sylvia, how she was sent away to Fiji, and how Meryl entered the picture instead – the show’s framing and editing in broadcasting this flashback provide its viewers with an apparent entrance into Truman’s own consciousness.

Although “The Truman Show” itself is the sole site of storytelling, other television programming provides another locus for analysis and insight. Mike Michaelson, the host of TruTalk, is granted access to Christof, the show’s elusive creator, which Michaelson shares with show, but what is clear in the parking garage attendant’s lamentation is that Truman’s home viewers know what he’s up to whether or not they can see it happening.
his own audience. *TruTalk*, a talk show centered around “The Truman Show” analysis and discussion, provides home viewers with a vehicle for communal analysis: viewers can call in to ask questions about the show and to participate in a discussion of the show. This scene in the film reveals that although viewers have 24/7 access to “The Truman Show” and to Truman himself, they still want behind-the-scenes access, not even to Truman but to the production of the show itself. They want to know how it all began, how the footage is captured, and how Truman’s world is maintained. Even as the focus shifts to the production of the show, *TruTalk*’s broadcast does not sacrifice access to Truman because it appears on the same channel during the broadcast of “The Truman Show,” and a small picture-in-picture window shows Truman sitting idly. Viewers can watch analysis of the show while still watching the show itself, and they express interest in probing ever deeper into Truman’s world: Weir intercuts shots of its home viewers sitting at full attention during the introduction to *TruTalk*, and the show’s home viewers call in to the program to ask questions of the show’s creator. This bridging of the show itself and the other texts that it has merged with is symptomatic of this desire to keep watching. In *The Truman Show*, the television program is able to engage its audience through other texts without even having to sacrifice its own time and space.

“The Truman Show” is omnipresent, providing both constant localized contact and widespread accessibility. Another part of its widespread accessibility is what Misha Kavka calls “industry convergence,” a term that refers to programs that involve the television industry while engaging directly with another industry such as fashion or food.47 While Kavka describes shows like *Top Chef* or *America’s Next Top Model* that involve a televised competition for entrance into another industry, “The Truman Show” ought to be considered an industry convergence program

for its excessive engagement with product placement. Weir has created a television world where every object on screen is for sale and the show’s massive budget is exclusively funded by product placement. Through a “Truman Show” catalogue, the home viewer is easily able to purchase all objects featured on “The Truman Show,” from the characters’ clothing, to their home furnishings and the homes themselves. In a quick montage, Weir briefly frames for his audience images of people in the film’s diegetic world going about their daily business while still connected to the world of “The Truman Show,” even if their TVs are not currently tuned in to the broadcast. For example, a young girl plays with a dollhouse that looks just like all of the houses in Seahaven (Figure 6). While this child simulates “The Truman Show” with a dollhouse, others simulate “The Truman Show” in their own actions, as exemplified by the couple eating a “Truman Show” breakfast and wearing clothes in the style of Truman and Meryl’s (Figure 7).

Figure 6. A "Truman Show" dollhouse.

Figure 7. Simulation at the breakfast table.

Tie-ins have been a key feature of television for decades. Graham Meikle and Sherman Young note that “The expansion of a franchise to include everything from plastic dolls to comic books was a common phenomenon with television shows as far back as the 1960s.”48 But Weir’s film extends this concept – for the viewers within the film, it is not enough to have readily

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available access to the subject of the show through their televisions. Through purchasing products advertised on the show, the home viewers recreate Truman’s home in Seahaven within their own homes. Meikle and Young characterize contemporary franchises as likely to include not just books and movies, but also “clothing, theme park rides (or even complete theme parks), Lego, fast-food meals, and crockery.” 49 In the case of The Truman Show, the massive range of tie-ins goes beyond Meikle and Young’s list; what’s offered to viewers of “The Truman Show” is a complete simulation of a specific lifestyle. As the in-show product advertisements make this manufactured soundstage world fully available to its audience, this aspect of the film represents what Meikle and Young call “blurring of content types” in which “what might once have been identifiably advertising is now part of a more complex media presence.” 50 As viewers purchase and use the products advertised by their inclusion in Truman’s world on screen, the world outside of Seahaven becomes a simulacrum of Seahaven.

In Weir’s imagined media culture, the television industry is merged with fashion, architecture, interior design, food, and automobiles since objects in all of these categories shown on screen are for sale. As Kavka explains, industry convergence shows depend upon sponsorship from advertisers, but these programs are set apart from other reality television programming because “the sponsors’ interests intersect fully with the economic interests of the producers and the content of the program.” 51 These other industries engage with reality television for one reason: the home viewer. Advertising easily becomes embedded in a reality television show, moving beyond the “message from our sponsor” model which is “as old as commercial television itself,” 52 to one that reaches the television spectator within the program itself and which viewers

49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 96.
51 Kavka, “Industry Convergence Shows,” 77.
52 Ibid., 80.
engage with through simulation in their own homes. Meryl’s product placement spots incorporate the direct advertisements of these products within the show. In these moments, Meryl’s product promotions are only tangentially related to the flow of the show’s story. For instance, the plot stops briefly so that Meryl may explain the features of the Chef’s Pal to Truman: she interrupts Truman’s yard work to say, “Hi honey. Look what I got free at the checkout! It’s a Chef’s Pal. It’s a dicer, grater, peeler, all in one. Never needs sharpening. Dishwasher safe!” Feigning interest, Truman replies, “Wow...that’s amazing” and returns to his yard work.

Because the show itself transcends the boundaries of space set by network programming and bleeds into other visual media including other television programming and a greatest hits tape as well as other industries from fashion to food, the omnipresent nature of “The Truman Show” leaves its viewers nearly without want when it comes to access to and knowledge about Truman’s life. Unlike most reality television shows, viewers of “The Truman Show” are not asked to wait around until the following week to find out what happens next. The intersection between “The Truman Show” and other media texts as well as the overlap between the television program and advertising creates for the home viewer a fully enveloping television experience. But what this fully enveloping television experience provides is a window onto the everyday life of a single individual and the people with whom he comes into contact – between a few brief moments of heightened excitement, the show mainly consists of longer periods of vaguely interesting activities and much more frequent and longer-lasting periods of dullness. Why, then, is Truman’s everyday story still so compelling when it completely saturates the media culture and completely consumes its viewers’ lives? As I will argue next, “The Truman Show” engages
its home viewer via liveness, immediacy, and affect, which trump the alternately dull and maddening everyday-ness and cause the viewer to feel that no level of access is ever enough.

A Medium of Intimacy

Weir’s inclusion of the home viewers of “The Truman Show” suggests that the home viewers develop a close, intimate relationship with Truman through the television set. Many writers have characterized television as a medium of intimacy, and “The Truman Show” thrives on this feature. Throughout the film, Weir illustrates that the show builds a relationship of intimacy between Truman and the home viewer through liveness, immediacy and affect. Intimacy is defined here as the state of understanding oneself to be in a close relationship based on personal knowledge and characterized by familiarity developed over time. Liveness refers to the apparent transmission of a television text in real time and develops the viewer’s impression of the show’s authenticity as well as its actuality, while immediacy refers to a sense of spatial proximity between a television spectator and televised people and actions. Misha Kavka defines affect as “both more and less than ‘emotion’” and suggests that “affect covers the entire range of feelings, but before they have been assessed or identified in relation to a particular object or source.”53 In The Truman Show, liveness and immediacy combine with affect to develop an intimate relationship between the television viewers and Truman.

Writing on the relationship between liveness and mediatized texts, Philip Auslander suggests that television’s “essence” has always been its “ability to transmit events as they occur,” making television’s ontology more akin to theater than to film.54 The relationship between

53 Kavka, Reality Television, 29.
54 Philip Auslander, Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 12.
television and theater at television’s inception “enabled television to colonize liveness.”

Liveness is the essential feature of “The Truman Show” for its spectator and develops both a sense of the story’s actuality as well as its authenticity. Jane Feuer’s essay “The Concept of Live Television” characterizes television as transmitting an “ideology of the live, the immediate, the direct, the spontaneous, the real.” “The Truman Show” is a live broadcast that transmits almost all of its events to viewers in real time (though not all – an idea to which I will return shortly), the film nevertheless portrays its show as also engaging with the ideology of the live as Feuer describes it. One of Feuer’s most important arguments for the present analysis is that the history of television as a medium of live broadcasts has persisted and makes even prerecorded televised events feel more real. Feuer writes that the history of television as a medium of live broadcast “positions the spectator into its ‘imaginary’ of presence and immediacy.” Live television (Feuer’s definition of which is “that the time of the event corresponds to the transmission and viewing times”) has encouraged “an equation of ‘the live’ with ‘the real’”: “Live television is not recorded; live television is alive; television is living, real, not dead.” In a sense, when an event is broadcast on television – technically live or not – the ideology of liveness positions the spectator to be more likely to believe in the reality of the event televised. Put differently, apparent actuality enhances perceived authenticity. The flashback sequence mentioned above exemplifies the ideology of liveness: although the footage that appears as Truman’s memory is not broadcast in real time – it is a montage of shots taken years earlier – the show’s conventions (such as the dissolve between a shot of Truman’s face and the first shot of the flashback as well

55 Ibid., 13.
57 Ibid., 14.
58 Ibid. Original emphasis.
as the immediate return to a shot of Truman’s face at the flashback’s end) place the footage in
the flow of the show as if it were Truman’s actual and authentic memory transmitted in real time.

In the case of *The Truman Show*, the temporality of the show’s events corresponds to the
transmission and viewing times, but they originate from a world that is wholly fabricated and
controlled for the purposes of the television show narrative. Its engagement with the ideology of
liveness helps “The Truman Show” to obscure the lack of reality in the world it portrays – to
enhance authenticity through actuality. For example, the scene in which Truman battles the
thunderstorm aboard the *Santa Maria* illustrates this principle. Though the storm is
manufactured, the liveness of the event positions the spectator in an imaginary of temporal
presence. The home viewer sits on the edge of her seat because she does not know whether
Truman will live or die. She is able to forget that Truman lives in a world dedicated to keeping
him on television because the liveness of this transmission directs the spectator’s focus to the
apparently undetermined outcome. This feeling of not knowing what will happen next because it
hasn’t happened yet obscures the scripted, controlled nature of the show itself. This ideology of
liveness and the feeling of not knowing what will happen next heighten the viewers’ interest in a
program that relies primarily on the everyday and the ordinary.

Immediacy is used here to refer to the sense of spatial proximity that the television set
fosters between the home viewer and the performers on screen, and in *The Truman Show*, this
sense of physical closeness builds on the ideology of liveness that Feuer describes. Lynn Spigel
describes immediacy in early television broadcasts as drawing on the medium’s use of the
conventions of live theater performances to provide the audience with the illusion of proximity.59
As Feuer argues, liveness makes television appear more real, but as Spigel illustrates, the

59 Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar America* (Chicago and
immediacy that early television programming supplied for its home viewers also depended heavily on “the unique power of the medium” “to bind public with private space.” Television not only brought the live audio-visual performances of theater into the home, it gave “the home audience not just a view but rather, a perfect view” of a far distant space. Even shows that were not broadcast live depended on their “ability to convey a sense of presence, to make audiences feel as if they were on the scene of a theatrical performance.” Considering Spigel’s work on the subject, we can see how “The Truman Show” builds immediacy between its subject and viewers through its liveness as well as through its provision of the perfect view of Truman’s world; although some shots of Truman on television may be oddly angled or obstructed, they provide a constant view. Because they can always see Truman no matter where he is or what he is doing (unless he is having sex with Meryl), the home viewers feel as though they are granted immediate access to Truman. The man in the bathtub demonstrates this perception of proximity as he leans forward to bring his own body even closer to the television screen, as if the television’s provision of a window on Truman’s world is still not close enough. Weir’s imagined television show is so good at making its viewers feel that their spatial access to Truman is immediate, that the controllers (Paul Giamatti and Adam Tomei) worry at one point that Truman has spotted their camera (Figures 8-9). This camera, positioned so that Truman appears to be looking directly at his audience, is another example of the immediacy developed between Truman and the viewer.

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60 Ibid., 139.
61 Ibid., 140. Original emphasis.
62 Ibid., 142. Emphasis added.
The blurring of public and private, which Spigel describes, is also essential to the immediacy depicted in *The Truman Show*. Truman’s private life is made public and that public life is made private again when viewers experience it from their own homes. When the home viewer is invited into Truman’s home, these two distant private spaces – the viewer’s home and Truman’s home – merge. According to Spiegel, with television, as opposed to cinema or other theatrical experiences, “The spectator was now physically isolated from the crowd, and the fantasy was now one of imaginary unity with ‘absent’ others.” Additional, “Television provided an illusion of the ideal neighborhood—the way it was supposed to be.” While post-war television shows usually depicted a family and their neighbors, the shows themselves also “promised modes of spectator pleasure premised upon the sense of an illusory—rather than a real—community of friends.” As a new alternative possibility to forming relationships with real people in order to develop a sense of social community, Spigel explains that television viewers found an equally rewarding sense of community through the television. Although they were physically divided, characters on a program easily became the friends with whom viewers spent regular and enjoyable time. Television accomplished this in part through its “one-way

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63 Ibid., 116.  
64 Ibid., 129.  
65 Ibid., 132.
view” of the world – television “was a ‘window on a world’ that could never look back.”\textsuperscript{66} Capitalizing on its “perfect view” of Truman and his neighborhood and his work life, “The Truman Show” provides for its viewers a similar sense of community through a window on Truman’s world. Not only do they have real-time access to everything Truman does, they are also invited into the neighborhood they watch on his show. Watching Truman participate in the community of Seahaven makes his viewers feel that they are also participating in the community of Seahaven, and this heightens the sense of immediacy between Truman and his viewers. The television serves as an access point between their homes and his, and having immediate access to Truman at any time of day develops intimacy between Truman and his viewers.

Kavka proposes that affect is the bridge between this immediacy and intimacy, and I propose that \textit{The Truman Show}’s presentation of television’s intimacy agrees with this estimation. Kavka argues that reality television has become as successful as it has – and I argue that “The Truman Show” is as successful as it is in the world Weir and others have created – “not because it reflects reality, but because it is fully appropriate to the medium of television as a technology of intimacy.”\textsuperscript{67} In Kavka’s assessment, affect – that is, bare emotions that are not yet fully understood, as defined above – facilitates intimacy between television viewers and the people and situations they view on screen. Affective identification, then, is a phenomenon of social interaction that occurs between the viewer and the person depicted on the television screen when affective situations arise. Because television allows individuals to get to know each other through the television set\textsuperscript{68} and because what television does best is “the creation of intimate

\begin{footnotes}
\item[66] Ibid.
\item[68] Ibid., 10. Drawing on John Hartley’s assertion that television “has become the place where and the means by which [...] most people have got to know about most other people,” (\textit{emphasis added}), Kavka makes the connection direct: television is the place where and the means by which most people have got to know most other people.
\end{footnotes}
relations across a screen,” affect allows an individual spectator to identify and develop a social relationship with the individual on screen.

Weir’s presentation of Truman’s reunion with his long-lost father illustrates the process that Kavka describes. In this moment, the show transmits affect to position the spectator as receiver of affect through shared presence and to facilitate social integration between the spectator and the performers as well as among the viewers themselves. First, by intercutting the shots on the bridge with the production room, Weir suggests that the show engages directly and knowingly with the televisual capacity to present the perfect view that Spigel described. The production team takes it easy with the fog and switches from camera to camera to provide the home audience with the best possible view of this moment. Next, before going in for a close-up, Christof waits for the musical swell to let the moment linger and to produce an emotional reaction in the viewer to the image as well as to the sound. Additionally, the focus on Truman’s face in the long-awaited close-up reveals the raw feelings that Truman is experiencing as he meets his father again after a twenty-two year separation.

Kavka asserts that viewers identify not with “the feeling person on screen” but with the affective situation itself – this “affective identification is not a secondary, imitative or vicarious feeling, but rather an affective reality, something we are given to feel, which arises from the resonances played out across and through the television screen.” What this scene in “The Truman Show” provides for its viewers is not a model of feeling but the actual feelings themselves. The spectator is encouraged to identify with the affective situation into which the television has invited her. A key feature of affect is that it opens up a new kind of reality through which the viewer and performer can connect. Kavka argues that affect is “significant without

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69 Ibid., x.
70 Ibid., 27, original emphasis.
necessarily signifying, allowing us to wrest ‘reality’ away from its traditional alignment with rationality, cognition, signification, and ideology.” In other words, rationality may be suspended when affect is being transmitted. In *The Truman Show*, viewers do not appear to be expecting a logical explanation for the father’s absence. Instead, they appear to be content interacting with Truman by sharing in his moment of overwhelming feelings.

Throughout this sequence, Weir intercuts shots of home viewers as they react to this transmission of affect across the television screen. Viewers embrace each other, sometimes squealing with joy or wiping tears from their eyes. Even the producers embrace (but Weir does not indicate whether their happiness is the result of their “great television” transmission or because they also feel as though they have just shared in Truman’s affective situation). Kavka argues for the social unity that affect creates when transmitted across the television:

> viewers find their feelings are not quite their own because they are shared by others, hence amplified and all the more real. This strange comfort [...] involves the amplification of everyday familiarity to produce a level of the hyper-familiar. Instead of calling this intensity the affect of the social, I would say it is *affect as the social*, an experience which feels as real as any everyday interaction.\(^{73}\)

“The Truman Show” viewers embrace each other as an expression of the feelings they share with Truman but also as an expression of the feelings they share among each other. The similar reactions that Weir presents from one viewing space to another represents this connection among audience members as well. It is through affect that the experience of watching “The Truman Show” is made social. In *The Truman Show*, the television program’s use of liveness and immediacy develops an affective relationship between the viewer and the people on screen, which allows for home viewers to develop a sense of intimacy with Truman.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., *original emphasis*.
\(^{72}\) The production staff uses this language to describe their achievement.
\(^{73}\) Ibid., 28.
Dualing/Dueling Spectators

“The Truman Show” utilizes liveness, immediacy, and affect to build a relationship with its spectator, but The Truman Show ultimately asks its audience to occupy a different spectator position from the one that the television audience occupies. Though both are spectators of Truman, Weir’s audience and the show’s home viewers are given different access to Truman, which divides the film spectator from the television spectator. Just as the film itself can be characterized as a hybrid form, the spectator it imagines is a hybrid as well – a viewer of The Truman Show is somewhere between a television and film viewer. Weir engages Sylvia as a model television viewer to guide the film audience as they navigate and reconcile the spectator subject positions of both of these media, ultimately putting the film audience in a morally superior position over and against the television audience.

In her essay on double coding in representing new forms of representation, Emma Kafalenos argues that The Truman Show embeds “a real-time televised representation of a life that is on the air twenty-four hours every day, a genre that cannot at present be represented except through double coding.”74 This term, double coding, which she borrows from Yury Lotman, refers to the practice of representing texts within texts, and Kafalenos asserts that “double coding can enable representation of new forms of representation.”75 Weir’s film, like the other texts she analyzes, utilizes “the rapt attention of a personified narratee, a perceiver in the represented world, to guide and hold the attention of perceivers in our world.”76 The Truman Show, in Kafalenos’s estimation, depends on the television show’s audience members – who are “showing their emotion by jumping up and down with excitement and hugging each other, or standing in a crowded bar and cheering [and who] are intently gazing at the television screen” –

75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 28
to provide the film’s audience with an example to follow as they react to the film and the show within it.\(^\text{77}\) Double coding opens up the “possibility of portraying a character’s response as a model for perceivers in our world to emulate.”\(^\text{78}\) Kafalenos’s point here is that the home viewers of “The Truman Show” display particular reactions to the especially affective moments in Truman’s story so that the film’s viewers can imitate those reactions. In short, the film audience depends on the television audience to shape their reaction to the film and to the show within it.

The filmmakers turn to the television audience in moments of heightened affect on the show, and through reaction shots of “Truman Show” audience members the film indicates that the audience within the film is not a straightforward model for the film audience to follow. For example, Truman’s final escape from his televised imprisonment is intercut with shots of his home viewers as they intently gaze at the television screen. During Christof’s final plea to Truman to stay in his fabricated world, the film crosscuts to shots of the Truman Bar patrons, the man in the bathtub, the two elderly ladies, and Sylvia, all devoting their full attention to the television screen awaiting Truman’s decision as he discovers the truth of his existence (Figures 10-13). Through these reaction shots of television audience members, the film viewer is reminded of the constructed nature of the television show and the audience’s complicity in its subjugation of Truman.

\(^{77}\) Ibid.
\(^{78}\) Ibid., 29
Their faces display anticipation and anxiety, and once Truman delivers his last line (“In case I don’t see ya, good afternoon, good evening, and goodnight!”), most of the home viewers break their silence with cheers of triumph at Truman having “made it,” but some express anger and disappointment. Sylvia laughs with happiness and runs out to meet Truman. The majority of the Truman Bar’s patrons erupt in jubilation, though some break down into tears of sadness. The man in the bathtub splashes the water repeatedly in frustration. The two elderly ladies hug each other, one smiling, the other with a more ambiguous facial expression that may indicate sorrow. And the parking garage attendants pump their fists in excitement.

If The Truman Show’s filmmakers present this audience as a model for the film’s audience as Kafalenos argues, then the viewers of The Truman Show are left confused as to which of the home viewers’ varied reactions they should emulate. Should we cheer along with most but not all of the bar patrons? Should we pump our fists with the parking garage attendants? Or should we slam our fists onto our couches or armrests to mimic the man in the bathtub? Are we invited to choose which reaction to the end of “The Truman Show” suits us, aligning ourselves with some of the show’s viewers in opposition to others? Yes, we are encouraged to choose, but Weir makes the decision for us because he places Sylvia in a privileged position of her own, which resonates with ours and prompts us to find Sylvia’s response most appropriate.
Sylvia’s privileged positioning is evident in the different cinematographic techniques used to capture Sylvia as opposed to the other anonymous home viewers. Whereas these other home viewers are always shot head-on from the point of view of their own television sets, Sylvia is shot from many other angles and varying distances – sometimes a thirty-or-so degree angle with her television set included in the frame (as in Figure 13 above), and other times she walks around her apartment in and out of the frame (Figure 14). Weir has also shown her to the film viewer through the show’s footage in the flashback sequence mentioned above (Figure 15), and we finally see that she is the only viewer who gets up from her television set at the end of the show (Figure 16). While Sylvia immediately leaves her television set behind, the other television viewers are shown celebrating while remaining immobile in front of their televisions. As J. Macgregor Wise notes, the viewers’ happiness over Truman’s escape is a response to the satisfaction provided by an individual’s triumph over external control, as dramatized in
Truman’s survival and exit. But in spite of their emotional reactions to Truman’s successful escape, the television viewers have not changed much – they do not appear inspired to stage a revolution against the controlling apparatus of the entertainment industry.79

Whereas the personified anonymous viewing masses are looking directly at us while they watch the show, Sylvia’s viewing position is not nearly as off-putting. We are encouraged to follow her eyes to the television screen and to follow her perspective on the show’s agenda, rather than the uncomfortably empty eyes of the other viewers. Not an anonymous member of the television audience, Sylvia’s position is a hybrid one; as a former cast member on the show, Sylvia played Lauren, Truman’s illicit romantic interest, but Sylvia is now a spectator rather than a performer. Despite her vehement opposition to the show’s “sick” agenda, she still watches for two apparent reasons: first, she continues to enjoy a mediated intimacy with Truman through the television screen, and second, she watches because she is an anti-Truman Show activist. Paradoxically and perhaps a bit hypocritically, she watches the show but also leads others to say no to “The Truman Show,” as the anti-“Truman Show” paraphernalia plastering her living room walls suggests. But like us, Sylvia has had access to Christof’s behind-the-scenes production and to Truman in particularly intimate moments, making her position that much more similar to our own – again, in opposition to the blankly staring anonymous viewing masses.

*The Truman Show* presents a doubly-coded television text and blurs the line for its viewers between film and television as separate media, but the film engages further with double coding than Kafalenos indicates. Whereas she argues that the television’s home audience serves as a model to which the film’s audience can look for guidance, Weir and his team of filmmakers actually rely on the television audience to remind the film viewer that she is not watching a

television show. The film begins to blur the boundary between film and television in the opening credits: instead of providing credits to introduce his own actors and their role in the film, Weir’s opening sequence introduces “The Truman Show” and its creator and cast. It is the presence of the home viewing audience and the access to the show’s production room that reveals the film to be a project of double coding. By providing the film audience with shots of the television audience as well as shots of actions to which the television audience does not have access, Weir separates the film spectator position from the television spectator position.

As I argued earlier, the television show within the film capitalizes on affect, immediacy, and liveness in order to cause the audience to feel intimate with the actions and moments they view on television. Weir’s film also engages with the conventions of reality television to provide this intimate access for the film’s viewer, but he creates an opposition between the television show and the film when he lays the apparatus bare, and especially when he provides his viewer with access to the television viewers. This is particularly effective in two ways: first, chronicling the production of the show reminds the film viewer that Seahaven is a simulation and that the events that happen on that show are fully fabricated and ultimately arbitrary; second, and most importantly, the film viewer is constantly reminded that the television show exists so as to exploit Truman to provide entertainment to hundreds of millions of home viewers. During Truman’s attempted escape, this is made especially clear to the viewer when Christof is ready to kill Truman for the sanctity of the show – so that the seamlessness of its diegetic world can remain unbroken. Weir lays bare the nefarious motives of Christof’s regime and the home viewer’s complicity in that regime. As Craig Hight argues, the viewers of “The Truman Show” appear wholly unaware that they are complicit in Truman’s imprisonment, but Weir

80 Hight, “‘It isn’t Always Shakespeare, but it’s Genuine,’” 46. Hight insists that The Truman Show suggests “that it is really the programme’s viewers who are captives of the show, rather than Truman.
incorporates the home viewers into his film in order to make sure that the film viewer recognizes their complicity. The film’s viewer cannot help but judge the viewers that Weir depicts. In this way, the show’s audience does not serve as a model for the film viewer’s reaction to Truman’s escape. Instead, the film’s viewer reacts to Truman’s escape in the same moment that she reacts to the show’s audience as well as its creators.

The show’s viewers are encouraged to believe that they have the closest access to Truman, but Weir’s film provides a more omniscient perspective for its own viewer. While Truman is lost to the show’s cameras, he is also lost to the film viewer, meaning that Weir does not show Truman when Christof’s cameras are not present, but Weir’s camera shows Truman to us from angles that Christof’s cameras could not possibly achieve. As Simone Knox explains in her example of the scene in which Truman sits alone on the beach, the camera captures Truman head on as he faces the ocean. Other camera angles in this scene show that there are no objects upon which a hidden camera could be mounted directly in front of Truman. Because of these additional vantage points and because Weir’s film includes shots of the show’s viewers and the world outside the show, the film viewer is provided with a privileged viewing position throughout the film. By showing us the television show through the three subject positions I scrutinize in this essay, Weir prohibits his viewer from aligning too closely with any of the three. If there is one sequence in the film that reinforces this point more than any other, it is the last six seconds. The two parking garage attendants ask each other “What else is on?” and “Where’s the TV Guide?” This complete lack of interest in the person they’ve spent thirty years watching on television contrasts with the emotional investment that Weir has elicited from the film viewer.

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over the previous ninety minutes. The show’s viewers may be irreverent, but we are not. Whereas they value the television show, we – like Sylvia – have come to value the person it exploits. They may not know they are complicit in Truman’s imprisonment, but we do. They do not serve as a model for the film spectator’s reaction to the show-within-the film because they are a fundamental part of the film’s portrayal of the show. In the media culture that The Truman Show dramatizes, the home viewers of this mass media text are excoriated as irreverent, exploitative, and hypnotized by their television sets, and the film viewer is allowed to feel superior to them with Sylvia as our revolutionary guide.
SECTION III
THE PERFORMER: MEDIATIZED SUBJECTIVITY AND THE PROCESSION OF SIMULACRA

While Section I examined how the creator develops the show as reminiscent of 1950s television, pointing toward a utopia in the past that never existed, Section II proposed that the omnipresent show engages the television spectator in a relationship of intimacy with the individuals on screen. Shifting focus to those individuals on screen to examine Meryl and Truman as performers – both in terms of their relationship to the television show and to The Truman Show’s dramatized media culture – reveals the third angle through which Weir articulates his criticism of the television medium and its power in American culture.

Throughout The Truman Show, Weir develops performers who relate to and exceed available categories of mediatized subjectivity, both challenging and building on such concepts as mediated personhood, star persona or star image, and television personality. Misha Kavka’s concept, mediated personhood, refers to individuals whose image permeates a media culture, and the omnipresence of these images develops the illusion of an intimate relationship between that real person and the fans who consume her image. Much like Baudrillard’s simulacrum, the image stands in for the “real” person who ultimately remains unknowable and who becomes “superfluous to the point of dissolution.” The image is all that is known and is what becomes invested with significance. Princess Diana of Wales serves as Kavka’s case study:

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82 I use the term “mediatized” following on Philip Auslander’s definition of the term, which abridges Baudrillard’s definition. Auslander “[employs] the term ‘mediatized,’ admittedly somewhat loosely, to indicate that a particular cultural object is a product of the mass media or of media technology.” (Auslander, Liveness, 5. See also: Jean Baudrillard, For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, trans. Charles Levin [St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981]: 175-176.).

83 Kavka, Reality Television.

84 Dyer, Stars. My use of the term “image” here builds on the definition that Dyer puts forth: the image is not “an exclusively visual sign, but rather a complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs” that are manifest in “all kinds of media text[s]” (34).

85 Bennett, Television Personalities.

86 Kavka, Reality Television, 42.
though Diana was a real person, media images of her caused her adoring fans to feel as though they had a close relationship with her, making her death personally tragic. The second of the categories is the star persona, which Richard Dyer characterizes as “real people” who play characters. We can know these individuals “only as they are to be found in media texts.”

Similarly to the mediated personhood, a star’s “real” identity appears to be visible through the characters that she plays – which give the “illusion of lived life” – as well as through other media representations of her life outside the roles she plays. Television personality, the third category of mediatized subjectivity, refers to individuals who appear on television playing themselves. James Bennett proposes that performing as oneself on television emphasizes “the continuousness and authenticity of [one’s] ordinary persona.” These three variations of celebrity inform the present analysis of mediatized subjectivity in *The Truman Show*, but Weir’s presentation of Meryl and Truman blurs the lines between these categories. Truman and Meryl combine and exceed the concepts of mediated personhood, star persona, and television personality.

In the case of Meryl, I will outline a concept of televisual womanhood that relies both on her portrayal of herself as a fetishized object of nostalgic pleasure as well as on an apparent conflation of the individual with the character she plays. Truman, the unknowing performer, combines and challenges these categories, but Weir’s presentation of Truman’s subjectivity as wholly determined by the show-world within which he has grown up also proposes an unmediatizable interiority upon which Truman’s identity truly rests. The television viewers’ underwhelming reaction to and their lack of reverence for Truman’s reclamation of independent

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88 Ibid., 105.
89 Bennett, *Television Personalities*, 1.
90 Ibid., 2.
interiority put Weir’s project on display. Ultimately, what *The Truman Show* dramatizes is an extension of Baudrillard’s precession of simulacra: whereas Baudrillard emphasizes the mutability of simulacra and the omnipresent process through which images precede the things themselves, *The Truman Show* dramatizes a procession of simulacra,91 in which images – even the ones in which we invest the most time and sincerest interest – become arbitrary and immediately replaceable as they follow on each other in an endless series.

*Televisual Womanhood*

Laura Linney’s two characters in *The Truman Show* reflect and resist the existing categorizations of mediatized subjectivity. While Hannah Gill plays a character, suggesting that she is an example of Dyer’s star persona, her individuality is constantly conflated with her character throughout the film.92 Because the home viewers see her as Meryl almost as often as they see Truman as himself on television, “The Truman Show” also presents her as a form of television personality. What Meryl’s character embodies, however, is a much more complex concept of televisual womanhood. Part of a long tradition of female characters in this domestic medium, Meryl represents a nostalgic return to the 1950s. Ultimately, Meryl presents a fetishized pleasure that lies in her wholesome domesticity reminiscent of 1950s sitcom wives and mothers.

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91 In my research on turning “precession” into “procession” in this discussion of Baudrillardian simulacra, I stumbled upon an online magazine article on Baudrillard’s “Precession of Simulacra” “Translated from English into American” that warned its readers: “Note: it’s not the PROCESSION OF SIMULACRA—that’d be a parade of photocopies marching down the goddamn street.” And that is – figuratively at least – precisely what I mean in using the term. Many images serve the same purpose, providing the illusion of intimacy with the photographed individual, and one image follows another, one after the other, endlessly. Sean Joseph Patrick Carney, “‘The Precession of Simulacra’ by Jean Baudrillard, Translated from English into American,” *continent*. 2, no. 2 (2012).

92 I will return to this conflation of Meryl and Hannah on pages 57-58.
Similar to the mediated personhood concept, Meryl’s image is omnipresent in the world that watches “The Truman Show,” and this presence encourages fans to feel as though they know the “real” person behind them. Throughout Weir’s film, we see images of Meryl – always in character – in the background of shots that show the world outside of Seahaven. The specific contexts in which Weir’s set director has placed these images of Meryl support this notion of her image becoming part of everyday life. Her image is present in a collage of family photos in a viewer’s kitchen (Figure 17). Her image is framed next to the bathroom television set that the man in the bathtub watches throughout the film (Figure 18). She is projected on jumbotrons in Times Square and at a large festival site (Figures 19-20). Her image appears in public and private spaces,

Figure 17. Images of Meryl are scattered throughout the collage on the left of the frame.

Figure 18. Meryl's photo is framed next to this viewer's bathtub television.

Figure 19. Footage of Meryl and Truman's wedding.

Figure 20. A massive crowd gathers to watch the wedding.
including photo collages and individually framed photos in viewers’ homes as well as in the Truman Bar. In some cases it holds the center of attention, and in others her image blends in with images of other people. While the public projections, such as on the jumbotrons, suggest a spectacular event that is not necessarily part of ordinary life, these other placements of her image in the film’s mise-en-scène clearly support the idea that Meryl’s image is a part of the ordinary lives of the show’s home viewers. It is through these images that Meryl becomes part of the everyday. The placement of photos of Meryl near other photos of the viewers’ friends and family members suggests that they feel the same closeness to Meryl as they do in their everyday relationships.

Meryl presents a particular brand of womanhood that “The Truman Show” suggests is essential for her success. Meryl is mediatized specifically as a conception of womanhood that returns to the idyll of domesticity depicted on 1950s domestic situation comedies. Weir’s imagined television program constructs Meryl as a figure who exists as an object of visual pleasure, but the visual pleasure Meryl projects displays wholesome wifeliness, representing the nostalgic turn to the 1950s in “The Truman Show” and its desire to recreate the televiral culture of the postwar period. In its portrayal of Meryl, Weir’s film develops a mediatized subjectivity that relies heavily on images of women presented in 1950s domestic situation comedies. Returning longingly to the aesthetic and moral values exhibited on television in the postwar period, Meryl’s physicality includes retro feminine costumes (always a dress or skirt, never pants), make-up (including lipstick and blush), and hairstyle (pulled back in a wavy bun or swept up in a barrette on the side of her head). This presentation of her body is consistent throughout the film – and in the images of her that permeate the world outside of Seahaven – and reminds the film viewer of June Cleaver or Margaret Anderson. This return to the postwar moment
expresses a nostalgic desire consistent with neoconservative rhetoric that understands the 1950s as a time of prosperity and family-based fun that should serve as a benchmark against which to measure other decades.\footnote{Caputi, \textit{A Kinder, Gentler America}, 3.}

Not only is Meryl the image of 1950s domesticity, her visual presence also stops the plot allowing her physicality to be contemplated as a fetishized object.\footnote{This argument has roots in Mulvey’s seminal essay “Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema,” but the visual pleasure of this television blond rests on nostalgia and commodity fetishism rather than the psychoanalytic questions of the male gaze and desire that Mulvey’s work raises.} First, Meryl strikes poses that put her body on display, which, on the one hand, highlights the beauty of her physical form, and, on the other, shows off her clothing as a mode of product placement (Figure 21). In the instant captured in Figure 21, Meryl walks down the stairs, turns to switch on the light, rests her arm against the handrail, and splays her feet like a dancer all in one fluid, practiced move. A few moments later, she steps forward closer to the camera and raises her arms above her head, and it is from this position that she tells Truman, “I made macaroni!” (Figure 22). Though these pauses only last for a moment, they suggest that Meryl is constantly on display. The second way that Meryl stops the plot occurs in her direct-to-camera product placement pitches. In these moments, Weir frames Meryl with a

\begin{figure}[h]
  \centering
  \includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Figure21.png}
  \caption{Meryl strikes a pose.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
  \centering
  \includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Figure22.png}
  \caption{Meryl strikes another pose.}
\end{figure}
medium close-up shot to perfectly include her smiling face and the product she endorses (Figure 23). As she describes the Chef’s Pal, the plot stops for a moment. Meryl becomes the face of a product, engaging the fetishization that her self-presentation encourages in order to sell other fetish objects. The profits that the show gains through these product placements – which Weir reveals and emphasizes in Christof’s interview on TruTalk – clearly indicates that the home viewers are watching these moments where the narrative of the show is paused in a spectacular display of objects for sale.

Meryl’s character manifests signs of a patriarchal ideology that has persisted into the 1990s and beyond – her role in the show is to take care of Truman and his home as demonstrated on the fictional sitcom that Truman watches on his own television. She appears to work outside the home as a nurse, but her traditional nurse’s uniform functions to place her back in time. Because of these ways that the television show places her in a position of Truman’s caretaker, the physicality and subjectivity that Meryl enacts reflects the pleasure still found in a woman’s subordination within the domestic sphere.

On rare occasions, Meryl is also a sexualized object. She attempts to use sex to distract Truman from his plans to leave Seahaven: when her rational motherly discourse about their financial and social responsibilities fails to convince Truman to forget about his desire to leave Seahaven behind, she tells him to come to bed with her. But the television show hides their sex

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96 The falsity of this is revealed to the film viewer when Truman follows her to the hospital.
life from the viewers (by showing instead a fluttering curtain, as the parking garage attendants explain), which follows logically from the wholesome image of Meryl that the show provides. Sexuality can be hinted at but the viewer’s gaze must be diverted – Meryl and Truman share a bed as one brief shot of them waking up indicates, but their hidden sexuality connects their relationship to the television couples who slept in twin beds for decades before them.

Throughout *The Truman Show*, Meryl’s character presents herself as a conception of womanhood tailored for 1950s television. As explained in Section I, the nostalgia found in “The Truman Show” emerges not from an actual historical moment in American culture, but instead comes from representations of the post-World War II period. The televisual womanhood that formulates Meryl’s subjectivity on the show and outside of it represents a patriarchically-motivated mode of presenting women on the small screen. As I will discuss next, this concept of televisual womanhood requires no specific woman, but rather engages a series of women who easily replace each other.

*Procession of Simulacra*

Whereas Baudrillard emphasizes the precession of simulacra, the mediatized subjects in *The Truman Show* turn to a procession of simulacra where one specific mediatized image follows on another in an endless series of replacements. Meryl’s televisual womanhood exemplifies this trend in two ways: first, through the actress Hannah Gill’s constant conflation with the character Meryl, and second, through Meryl’s departure and replacement with a new televisual woman, Vivien.

Weir introduces the double characters that Linney plays in this film through an interview with *The Truman Show* character Hannah Gill. In this talking head interview, Hannah explains
how she does not have a life outside of her professional involvement in “The Truman Show”:

“Well, for me, there is no—there is no difference between a private life and a public life. My—my life is my life is ‘The Truman Show.’ ‘The Truman Show’ is a lifestyle. It’s a noble life. It is...a truly blessed life.” That Linney delivers the repetitive phrase “my life is my life is ‘The Truman Show’” without pause is particularly significant. This statement recognizes that

Hannah’s life as a professional actress is inseparable from her life as Meryl on “The Truman Show.” Weir introduces this person and the character she plays through the opening credit that reads “Hannah Gill as Meryl” at the beginning of the film, and this character is never again referred to as Hannah Gill. In fact, the actress’s name is never spoken aloud in the film. When Christof refers to her in his interview with Mike Michaelson on TruTalk, he states, “Meryl will be leaving Truman in an upcoming episode.” Hannah Gill only exists for her audience as Meryl Burbank – her individuality is effaced in favor of the personality of her television character. This life that Hannah refers to blends her individuality and her character.

But her character’s forced conformance to an ideology of televisual womanhood is what ultimately causes Hannah to leave the show. In a dramatic display of increasing paranoia, Truman holds the Chef’s Pal to Meryl’s throat when he suspects her to be in on the plot against him. Hannah – clearly breaking character – shouts, “Do something!” and Marlon immediately stops by with a six-pack of beer. Marlon’s presence diffuses the tense moment, but Hannah runs to him and exclaims, “How can anyone expect me to carry on under these conditions? It’s unprofessional!” When her role of being Truman’s constant source of comfort and explanation for the odd things that happen in Seahaven becomes too much to bear, Hannah is no longer willing to submit to the conception of televisual womanhood that Christof and the home viewers expect from her. In spite of her professional success on the show – the impact she has had
through the show is made clear in the lucrative success of the product placement spots and in the omnipresence of her image outside of Seahaven – Hannah refuses to remain in the unprofessional working conditions of the televiual woman.

As in Kavka’s argument, the actual person behind this televiual womanhood becomes “superfluous to the point of dissolution.” In Weir’s film, this superfluity of the individual is made clear through Hannah’s departure and her replacement with another woman. Christof’s statement that I referred to above makes this move for us: “Meryl will be leaving Truman in an upcoming episode, and a new romantic interest will be introduced.” This statement provides no pause – within a single breath, Christof explains that Meryl will leave and a new woman will take her place. In presenting her replacement in this way, Weir suggests that Hannah Gill is insignificant. Her image may have saturated the media culture surrounding “The Truman Show,” but the individual person behind the image does not really matter since her character can leave the show, only to be replaced by a new woman to engage Truman in the same ways that Meryl has.

The immediate replacement of Meryl’s televiual womanhood with another reflects the procession of simulacra developed here. Meryl’s mediatized subjectivity displays a return to an idealized, nostalgic vision of 1950s domesticity, and Vivien’s introduction dramatizes how easily one placeholder can be exchanged for another. As long as the new mediatized subjectivity signifies in the same way as the one who proceeded her, nobody really seems to mind the transition. Dramatizing this process violently and memorably, a 2008 South Park episode, “Britney’s Got a New Look,” is uniquely enlightening for the replacement of women in The Truman Show because it also directly addresses the role of images and mediation in this procession. In this episode, the boys attempt to help Britney Spears escape to the North Pole to

\[97\] Kavka, Reality Television, 42.
free her from the media attention that begins to destroy her. By the episode’s end, Stan and Kyle learn that Britney is being ritualistically sacrificed as part of a broad American tradition. The method of human sacrifice has changed only slightly from ancient times: as one bystander explains, “The only difference is that now Americans like to watch people put to death through magazines and photographs.” In accordance with South Park’s classic grotesquery, Britney does indeed die for ritualistic “harvest,” as the participants put it. In the end, Britney – like Princess Diana before her – is finally killed by the mob’s flashing cameras that bear down on her (Figures 24-26). Then, the episode’s closing moments introduce images of the next sacrifice: “Hannah Montana’s Miley Cyrus – though only fifteen years old – is already on her way to being a major superstar,” states the television newscaster (Figure 27).  

Matt Stone and Trey Parker’s approach to mediatized subjectivity reflects Kavka’s notion that the individual behind the images “becomes superfluous to the point of dissolution” and demonstrates the power of images in rendering that individual superfluous. In this *South Park* episode, the images are what matters, not the individual depicted in them or even whatever particular talents she may have. The individual is easily replaced as long as the new subject of the image can be presented as the same type of mediatized subject that existed previously. In *South Park*, the mediatized subject is developed as such so that she may be sacrificed for their harvest. Likewise, in *The Truman Show*, Weir suggests that the individual actress who plays Truman’s love interest does not matter as long as she presents the proper image of domesticity. Lauren/Sylvia could not be Truman’s love interest because her motives run contrary to the show’s mission. In other words, she fails to assimilate herself into the desired incarnation of televisual womanhood.

Meryl’s character – rather than presenting a singular individuality – is founded upon her ability to connote wholesome wifeliness mixed in with a proper amount of wifely sexual interest, so she may easily be sacrificed and replaced by another individual who can produce a similar image.

What we have in *The Truman Show* – and in the *South Park* example – is not only a precession of simulacra. Instead, one simulacrum in the form of a mediatized subjectivity makes us feel as if we know that person, then another mediatized subjectivity makes us feel as if we know *that* person; one image blends into the next in a procession of simulacra.

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**Truman’s Mediatized Subjectivity**

Characteristics of the television personality and the mediated personhood apply to Truman’s subjectivity as presented in the film. Because he only ever plays himself, and because he is the only person on “The Truman Show” who is not playing a character, he appears to be the most authentic individual on screen. The omnipresence of his image in the media culture that *The Truman Show* dramatizes elicits the type of intimate relationship that Kavka’s mediated personhood prompts, as Section II also described, but Truman’s refusal to submit to that mediation sets him apart from these categories of mediatized subjectivity. Weir’s presentation of Truman as the “world’s most recognizable face”\(^\text{100}\) also reveals that Truman’s subjectivity has been determined by the world of the show. But through Truman’s exit from the soundstage – and the home viewers’ reaction to this departure – Weir’s film proposes that his subjectivity is insignificant to the media culture that has invested so much in the show’s presentation of this true-man.

Truman’s entire existence has been mediated for an audience, and much like Princess Diana, he exists for his fans only via media representations. Although most of Truman’s mediation happens in real time on the television broadcast, Weir’s set designer has placed photos of Truman throughout the film’s mise-en-scène, indicating that still and moving images of Truman are a constant feature in his viewers’ everyday lives. A home viewer may have framed photos of Truman hung throughout her home, but she may also “leave him on all night for comfort,” which many viewers do, as Christof explains at the beginning of the film. The televisual mediation of Truman as well as his photographic mediation makes him spatially and temporally present to his fans. Through this constant access to Truman’s mediated personhood, fans are able to forget the physical distance that divides them from Truman. Because Truman’s

\(^{100}\) Paul Giamatti’s character describes Truman in this way.
image is ubiquitous in Weir’s fictional world (Figures 28-29), he is present to the world even when their television sets are powered off. Nevertheless, the relationship that exists between Truman and his fans is one that has always been and will always be mediated by one camera or another.

The film also presents Truman as individually insignificant, illustrating Kavka’s point that the individual behind the image becomes “superfluous to the point of dissolution.” As Christof’s interview reveals, the individual who is now Truman was only selected to become Truman because of the timing of his birth. Because the image of Truman Burbank was conceived before his birth as the future face of reality television, *The Truman Show* portrays Truman’s subjectivity as a version of Baudrillard’s precession of simulacra. In Baudrillard’s words, “the map precedes the territory.” Since he does not know that he is performing on television, Truman supposedly is not performing at all, making his presentation on “The Truman Show” appear to be “the reflection of a profound reality”; but as Weir reveals the construction of the show’s set and script, it becomes clear that the mediation of Truman is not fully accurate – it “masks and denatures a profound reality.” Eventually, however, we realize that the mediation

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Figure 28. Baby Truman's image captivates the world.  
Figure 29. Truman's image reaches the world.
actually “masks the absence of a profound reality.”103 The reality of the walking, talking person
with unique DNA and consciousness named Truman Burbank is preceded by the television show
which cannot truly provide a portal to the subjectivity it pretends to simply put on display.
Truman’s role on the show precedes his subjectivity, and that subjectivity has always been
wholly constructed by its mediation and has never existed without that mediation. The televised
image of Truman “has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.”104

The show’s audience perceives Truman as a subject through his mediation on “The
Truman Show,” but surprisingly his subjectivity in which they become invested is not
particularly interesting. Most of “The Truman Show” broadcast consists of moments of the
everyday: Truman works in an insurance office, mows the lawn, watches television, and hits golf
balls with his childhood friend. Kavka notes that for serial viewers, moments of boredom on
reality television shows reflect familiarity rather than emptiness, a perception “upheld by the
pleasure of knowing someone through and through.”105 Through his performance of the everyday
on the show, Truman’s viewers are encouraged to believe that they know him through and
through, but the subject they think they know has been fully determined by the world of the
show.

The Truman Show makes its audience feel as if Truman gains agency and independent
subjectivity by the film’s end – he becomes aware that the world he perceived as real is actually
a soundstage that has been manipulated for entertainment and decides to leave that world behind
in favor of the unknown. But even the awareness and agency that he gains are not the result of
his own actions. Other scholars have conjectured that Truman’s character in Weir’s film is
completely unbelievable because, they argue, there is no way it would take a person thirty years

103 Ibid., 6.
104 Ibid.
105 Kavka, Reality Television, 95.
to make Truman’s discoveries.\textsuperscript{106} While this viewpoint has merit (as the film reveals during the TruTalk interview, several infiltrators have directly told Truman that he is on television), Weir’s final sequence indicates that Truman has always been the subject of a world that controls him. It might be difficult to believe that Truman never questioned his world before the last three days of the show, but Weir clearly shows here that everything Truman has ever done was secretly sanctioned by the show’s production team. Whenever Truman has questioned his world or expressed an interest in leaving it, Christof or his proxy quickly provides an explanation to return him to their control. In the end, Truman decides to sail away and thereby exercises what little agency he has, but he is ultimately \textit{allowed} to escape. This is not a great triumph of individual will – Truman survives because Christof decides not to kill him. As this last struggle between Christof and Truman reinforces, Truman’s existence and the subject he has become are wholly dependent upon the things that happen to him. His subjectivity has never existed outside of its mediation.

At the film’s end, however, Truman reclaims an independent subjectivity based on an unmediatizable interiority. In response to Christof’s assertion that he knows Truman better than Truman knows himself, Truman proclaims, “You never had a camera in my head.” While his fans feel that they know Truman through his images, Weir indicates that Truman believes that his consciousness is still unknowable. Truman’s reclamation of an unknowable interior selfhood is essential for him to “[step] outside of his media-created and -controlled womb,” and through this move, “the film imagines the possibility of an auto-genetic self, a self capable of repudiating the social structures that have so thoroughly constructed it.”\textsuperscript{107} While the show’s cameras can bring the home viewer into Truman’s bathroom and into his basement, sharing his most intimate

\textsuperscript{106} See: Hight, “‘It isn’t Always Shakespeare, but it’s Genuine,’” 243.
moments in his most privates spaces, the image cannot bring the home viewer into a truly close relationship with the person because the image cannot show his interiority.

Weir leaves his film viewer wondering what will happen after Truman escapes and the show ends. Denying his viewer any access to Truman beyond what is available for the show’s viewers within the film, Weir does not show Truman’s entrance into the “real” world. With this, Weir suggests that there is no world, no way to imagine a world, beyond the fictionalized world that Truman has inhabited. Slavoj Zizek voices this idea in The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema where he expresses disappointment that the Wachowski Brothers’ 1999 film The Matrix poses reality as a truly possible opposite to illusion. For Zizek “the choice between the blue and the red pill is not really a choice between illusion and reality. Of course the matrix is a machine for fictions, but these are fictions which already structure our reality; if you take away from our reality the symbolic fictions which regulate it, you lose reality itself.”

In The Truman Show, Weir’s choice not to depict Truman outside of the Seahaven matrix suggests that there is no world outside of the illusion. There is no waking up from the symbolic fictions that regulate the world in Seahaven because the same symbolic fictions also regulate the world beyond its walls. If The Truman Show audience hopes that Truman’s character will go on to enjoy a life free from manipulation for entertainment, they are hoping for a triumph of the individual that Weir’s film explicitly denies. Any such hope about Truman’s triumph is quickly rendered meaningless by the film’s last frame – the two parking garage attendants, who have been captured watching the show raptly throughout the film, ask, “What else is on?” Just as Meryl was merely one image in a procession of simulacra, so too is Truman. “The Truman

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Show” may end, but there is always another equally empty simulacrum into which the television viewer can invest familiarity, intimacy, and meaning.
This thesis has proposed that *The Truman Show*’s engagement with the three subject positions of creator, spectator, and performer illuminates Weir’s criticism of television culture. Section I argued that Weir’s portrayal of the creator subject position illuminates the power of controlling impulses in the television culture industry that aim to return to the mythical post-World War II moment in American history which is remembered through television texts. Section II proposed that Weir’s film portrays the home viewers within the film to separate the film’s spectator from the television spectator, discouraging the film viewer from merely emulating the television viewer as we all watch Truman’s story unfold. While the television spectator is engaged in a relationship of intimacy through the show’s liveness, immediacy, and affect, the film spectator maintains a position of judgment predicated on the privileged relationship she feels with the film’s protagonist. Section III asserted that the performers, Hannah/Meryl and Truman, are presented as replaceable mediatized subjects whose constant mediation via images encourages the adoring fan to feel as though she has developed an intimate relationship with the individual subject behind the mediation. No matter the depth of the investment that mediation promotes, the media image and the individual behind it are rendered wholly insignificant, and in Weir’s dramatization, the television spectator merely wishes to move on to the next mediated individual or media text.

Because Weir allows his film viewers to mercilessly judge the diegetic viewers, he places film in a superior position above television. I would not be the first to question Weir’s motives in making this argument about the superiority of film over television from his privileged position in Hollywood, and Weir isn’t the first Hollywood director to criticize television, but Weir’s larger
project here is to encourage individuals to question our media culture and the structures that dominate it. For this reason, The Truman Show remains one of the most important films about television of the twentieth century.

Since The Truman Show’s release in 1998, television – and reality television in particular – has continued to dominate American cultural consumption, and the increase in cases of the Truman Show Delusion is symptomatic of this increasingly common trend. Reality television programming is a staple on nearly every cable television network from TLC (formerly known as The Learning Channel), to the History Channel, to MTV. Even internet television distributors are beginning to develop their own reality television programming (see Hulu’s Behind the Mask, a documentary series on the lives of sports team mascots). Paramount, the production studio that owns the rights to The Truman Show, appears in the news in April 2014, announcing its plan to turn existing content into new television series. What’s most notable about this is that The Truman Show appears as the example cited in a long list of articles and blog posts about Paramount’s next move. Though Paramount has not yet stated whether The Truman Show will become its own television series, this interest in the prospect of a new drama or comedy series about reality television suggests that The Truman Show’s call to cultural consciousness is more relevant than ever.

In the dramatization of Truman and Sylvia’s rejection of the media text, The Truman Show does not seek to incite a revolution to overthrow and dismantle the television industry, but it does call for a contemplation of the ease with which television texts turn conscious individuals into a mass of passive viewers. Weir’s film makes a Jamesonian suggestion that our age is

unable to think historically due to television’s deluge of ever-replaceable images, moments, and texts, and his film encourages a rejection of the perpetual presents found on television. As discussed at the end of Section III, Zizek argues that the expectation that a mediatized world of illusions can be rejected in favor of a world that’s truly real is disingenuous at best. But by excoriating television’s encouragement of the endless procession of simulacra, *The Truman Show* voices the urge for something more meaningful.

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