

An exploration of human behavior in the truman show

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Peter Weir's film, *The Truman Show* (1998), presents a powerful exploration of ideas and opinions, providing a compelling insight into the human condition. The film embodies insights into the fundamental issues surrounding the manipulative power of the media, the overstepping of individual rights, as well as the distortion between truth and illusion. Ultimately, the film critiques the fragility of human nature when media is presented as a powerful force which manipulates human behavior.

Peter Weir's depiction of Truman Burbank in *The Truman Show* serves as a powerful critique on the media's significant role on our lives, influencing human behavior in order to perpetuate its own existence. Truman Burbank's life is represented as an extended metaphor for the manipulative power of the media. He is completely unaware that his life is being micro-controlled by a media empire and the viewers. This mirrors media manipulation in reality where society is becoming increasingly shaped by news, commercials, and the radio. In an early scene, Truman is confronted by a studio light which has fallen into the roadway outside his home. A cutaway shot shows the viewers only a lamppost and an empty blue sky. Furthermore, a radio announcer describes an airplane shedding parts, which Truman readily accepts, alluding to the ease with which the media manipulates the public. As the film progresses, certain events cause Truman to question the perception of his alleged reality in Seahaven. Christof is able to almost control his thoughts and dreams in an attempt to keep Truman locked up in the utopian world of Seahaven. The film gives the audience an impression that the media has a powerful grip on our emotions. A prime example of this is the recurring reaction shots of the 'bathtub man'. He is depicted not leaving his bathtub,

with his eyes glued to the television screen continuously. His portrayal exemplifies the manipulative control of the media, being able to fixate their consumers and exploit their attention for fiscal gain. Christof becomes so immersed in the show that his unconstrained actions cause him to break moral rights in order to trap him within Seahaven, willing to even kill him, expressed through one of the producers, " He's going to drown and you don't even care". Therefore, through observing the film as an extended metaphor for media power, we are able to perceive how our emotions can be governed by the media.

In *The Truman Show*, Weir exposes the way in which the media infringes on individual rights to privacy. Truman, being born into an artificial world, has his privacy exploited for the entertainment value of the world. Time and time again, the notion of individual rights is challenged as Christof continues to break moral boundaries in order to make financial gains. For example, a vignette shot with a matte black frame is utilized in the opening scene of the film, with Truman placed in the centre of the frame in his world. He is also situated within a mirror frame, further emphasizing the impression that he is trapped and with his individual rights infringed. By contrast, a mid-shot of the actors Meryl and Marlon is depicted speaking in full sunshine, with diegetic sounds of birds chirping, suggesting a more liberated lifestyle. Truman is often shown through a variety of camera angles, giving the viewers an impression that he is being constantly monitored. For example, a camera is hidden within the car, with a low angle shot looking up at Truman, connoting the idea that his privacy has been breached. As the film progresses, one comes to an understanding the extent to which Truman's

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individual rights have been encroached, demonstrated through Christof's statistic, given on Trutalk: " Somewhere in the vicinity of 5000 cameras". This is shown as the camera pans across to a cluttered layout of screens depicting the intrusion of Truman's life. Thus, the use of images have been employed to expose the consequences of individual rights infringement.

The Truman Show illustrates the importance of a balance between what is true and what is counterfeit, and how a distortion between the two discourses can lead to disastrous consequences on the human psyche. For example, in the travel agency, a close up shot of a poster depicting an aircraft crash is shown with the caption ' This could happen to you'. This is ironic as the purpose of a travel agency is to promote traveling, as opposed to discouraging it, thus demonstrating how simple it is to manipulate the truth. Peter Weir also illustrates the fine line between truth and illusion through the characterization of both Truman and Christof. The name Truman itself is an allusion, while the irony lies in that the world is surrounded by is the opposite of truth. Likewise, the name Christof alludes to God, with the perception that he has almighty control over Truman. This is further emphasized in the closing scene of the film, with Christof's booming voice projected from the sky, " I am the creator...", epitomizing the God-like power he possesses. Therefore, through the use of images, Peter Weir discusses how the manipulation of reality can lead to repercussions on the human condition.

Overall, Weir's film, The Truman Show, serves as a cautionary tale offering critiques on the nature of human behavior. This is conveyed through an

exploration of the repercussions of the pervasive power of the media whilst stressing the rights of the individual. Furthermore, the film warns against the ambiguity between what is truthful and eluded. The film offers key themes and opinions of its own which ultimately leads to a heightened appreciation amongst its viewers.