

**“In case I don’t see ya, good afternoon, good evening, and goodnight!”**

**Synoptic Surveillance and Contemporary Viewer-Audience Relationships in  
*The Truman Show***

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## **Introduction**

Throughout history, surveillance has functioned as a mechanism for reinforcing existing power structures by enabling continuous monitoring and control. Since the publication of George Orwell's 1949 dystopian novel *1984*, usage of the term *surveillance* has grown exponentially as scholars have tried to navigate how watching and being watched are shaping our societies. Merriam Webster defines surveillance as a, "close watch kept over someone or something" (Merriam Webster), a definition which frames surveillance as a one-directional process where a subject is watched by a physical and deliberate entity. Peter Weir's 1998 dystopian film *The Truman Show* realizes what would happen if surveillance worked in both directions, where both the subject and entity watched each other.

In this thesis I aim to analyze how two-sided surveillance, or synoptical surveillance, works in *The Truman Show* between the show within the film, and its audience, examining the power dynamics between the two sides. I then argue that *The Truman Show* works as a criticism of real world synoptical surveillance relationships between texts and their audiences, ultimately critiquing how both texts and audiences survey and exhibit power over each other.

*The Truman Show* (TTS) follows the character Truman Burbank throughout his daily life as an insurance salesman in the fictional setting of SeaHaven Island, a picturesque coastal American town. We watch Truman as he goes about his daily routine from his morning commute, to the newspaper stall, to his place of work, and back home. As time goes on however, we slowly realize that not everything is as it seems. He's being watched. From his car stereo, and pencil sharpener; to his wife Meryl, and his best friend Marlon, Truman is being surveilled for some unknown reason.

As the film progresses we soon find the source of this surveillance. Truman is the star of one of the most watched television programs ever *The Truman Show*. Through an inter-connected network of thousands of cameras, Truman's life is broadcast to the world 24/7/365, to an audience of millions of people, all without his knowledge. This is made possible through a nearly complete control of his world and life. Seahaven Island is located in an artificial biosphere soundstage, and everything within it is fabricated. Every relationship in his life, his parents, his friends, and his wife have all been hand selected actors all with the same directive: Keep him in his world, and in the illusion.

*The Truman Show* serves as a strong text to examine surveillance, and synoptic surveillance relationships, through its inclusion of the *diegetic* audience, or the audience of the show itself. Through both the show and this diegetic audience, it is possible to both examine the synoptic surveillance relationship between a text and its audience. This text-audience relationship functions as a strong model to then criticise synoptic surveillance relationships between modern texts and their viewers, as this relationship has become stronger in the wake of modern medias such as social media, where both a text and audience work to survey each other for the generation of revenue, and desired content.

The significance of this examination and critique is that we might better understand how texts and their audiences hold power over each other, and influence one another. In the past century the concept of surveillance has undergone many changes as advanced surveillance technology has gone from science fiction to reality. By examining surveillance in terms of its two-sided synoptical capabilities we might better understand modern texts and audiences.

Chapter 1 focuses on the historical context of *The Truman Show* and the surveillance technology that makes its synoptic surveillance relationship possible. Chapter 2 explores the existing theory behind both surveillance, and synoptic surveillance. Chapter 3 examines the relevant literature on *The Truman Show* and its inclusion surveillance. And Chapter 4 serves as my analysis of *The Truman Show* as a synoptic surveillance narrative, and critique of modern text-audience relationships.

This thesis encourages readers to examine synoptic surveillance not only in the context of *The Truman Show*, but in their own lives as well. How are we surveyed? How do we survey others? This is the basis for my research, a reciprocal pattern of surveillance that involves the majority of modern texts and their viewers. I argue that the success of modern text-audience relationships lies in their ability to survey each other, and that through this mutual watching texts rely on the gaze of their audiences to shape and respond to their expectations, and audiences depend on the gaze of these texts to interpret and make sense of the world around them.

## **Chapter 1: History of *The Truman Show* & Surveillance Technology**

*The Truman Show's* simultaneous portrayal and critique of the two-sided synoptic surveillance relationships between a text and its audience begins through both authorship and technology. By looking at the history of the authorship and technology of *The Truman Show* film, I hope to explore one side of the synoptic relationship, being the text and production of the text, and the bridge between the two sides of the synoptic relationship, technology of control. In examining both the authorship and technology, I hope to explore how the filmmakers built *The Truman Show* as a synoptic narrative text that is facilitated through technology, ultimately using my analysis to explore the full scope of this dynamic.

*The Truman Show* film derives from the collective work of two primary figures being writer Andrew Niccol and director Peter Weir. Niccol, a New Zealand-born screenwriter, producer, and director, (b. 1964), has come to specialize in sci-fi, and technology based thrillers, and dramas (“Andrew Niccol - Biography.” *IMDb*). His breakthrough came in 1997 when he wrote and directed the dystopian sci-fi film *Gattaca* (1997). That film, set in the near future, focuses on human genetic modification and the discrimination to which it leads. His other notable works include *Simone* (2002), which he wrote and directed, in which a computer generated actress is created to replace a real life star and instantly becomes the world's most sought after talent (“Andrew Niccol - Biography.” *IMDb*), and *In Time* (2011), a film where people stop physically aging at 25 but are then forced to work for time, a new form of currency, in order to survive (“Andrew Niccol - Biography.” *IMDb*). All of these films are thematically dark, painting a bleak future where technology is leveraged by the powerful to exploit the powerless. Although *The Truman Show* too functions as a dark future

narrative which leverages technology as a form of power, it is however different, in that its surveillance driven narrative was already actively at work at the time of its release in 1998.

Of the writing process on *The Truman Show*, Niccol offers, “It was an interesting process. I call it ‘interrogating it for the truth’. The idea was bulletproof, but there were just so many different ways you could go. The original was so much darker” (Thomas). In Niccol’s original draft, set in a crime ridden New York City, Truman’s life takes a darker turn as he faces addiction, and social disengagement from the world around him. Although the final script ultimately took a lighter approach, the use of surveillance, and two-sided surveillance, in the film presented an almost darker, or bleaker, image of a world at large. Its primary mechanisms of power were, and still are, heavily at work as they are used against people every single day. Although Niccol highlights the darker, more technologically out of reach route that *The Truman Show* could have followed, similar to his other films, this turn to a lighter seeming image using the underlying mechanism of power, surveillance, can be attributed to the addition of Peter Weir to the project.

Weir, an Australian-born writer, director, and producer, (b. 1944), has engaged in a variety of genres but is perhaps best known for intelligent emotional dramas. His filmography includes *Dead Poets Society* (1989), a drama about an English teacher who inspires his students to chase their dreams; and *The Way Back* (2010) a survival drama about Siberian gulag survivors who travel 4,000 miles to freedom, and many other films. Weir’s work covers a broader scope than that of Niccol’s, as he mainly has focused on historical, or contemporary narratives, not future dystopian ones. Working with

Niccol created a significant clash during the development of *The Truman Show* as Niccol stayed on as the writer, and Weir came on as the director.

The contrast between Weir's and Niccol's artistic perspectives would ultimately be pushed in a more positive direction through the addition of the lead actor, Jim Carrey. Carrey, a Golden Globe award winning actor for an array of film, and television, appearances was a wild card pick for the lead role of Truman Burbank. For the most part, Carrey had played comedic roles in his career. Before *The Truman Show*, his most notable works were *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective* (1994), *The Mask* (1994), and *Dumb and Dumber* (1994).

Niccol says Carrey has a significant effect on the film's development. "I think once Jim came on board he almost dictated the tone of it and Peter had his own sensibilities," the screenwriter says, "When you're not directing something you've got two choices as a writer: you can wash your hands of it or you can grab hold of it and still try to influence as many decisions as you can. I chose the latter, obviously" (Thomas).

Production of the film began in 1993 after producer Scott Rudin purchased the script from Niccol for \$1,000,000. Rudin then partnered with Paramount Pictures as the distributor and producer. After signing Weir to direct and casting Carrey as the lead, the production paused while Carrey completed *The Cable Guy* (1996) and *Liar Liar* (1997). This allowed Weir and Paramount additional time to plan the production. During this time Wendy Sites, an AACTA and BAFTA award winning costume and production designer and Weir's wife, suggested to her director-husband that the film could take place on site in the community Seaside, Florida. Seaside was a master-planned walkable mixed use residential and commercial housing development, designed and built in the early 1980s. The community featured a mixture of Victorian,

modern, and postmodern architecture, and was privately owned, allowing for zoning, and overall planning, to be self governed.

As he shot the film, Weir was influenced heavily by television commercials. “We took a lot from the current vogue for extreme wide-angle lenses in commercials, where characters often lean into the lens with their eyeballs wide open.” he said, “we borrowed our high-key, somewhat glossy lighting approach from commercials and situation comedies” (Gordon). The wide angle lenses, and high key lighting, are found throughout the film. Weir adds by saying: “We began to adopt a combination of imaging styles from the bold graphic framing of television commercials to the more obvious, somewhat menacing feeling of surveillance, using static, long-held angles.” (Gordon). Here, Weir’s choice to include more surveillance-esque shots throughout the film, helps connect authorship to the two-sided narrative found within the film, as it creates the illusion that Truman is being watched by someone, bolstering one side of the surveillance narrative.

The surveillance narrative was further used not only in press interviews, but also the film's main theatrical trailer. In the trailer rhetorical questions are interposed over select images from the film:



**Figure 1:** Still frame from TTS trailer

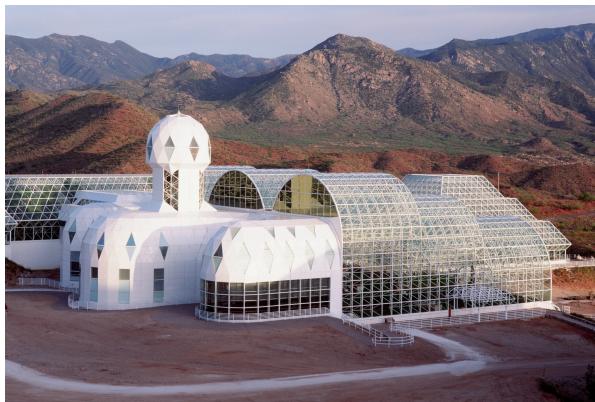
In **Figure 1**, images from Truman's life are mixed together, with the questions: "What if your world was make believe?" and "What if you watched?" These two rhetorical questions introduce the film, by both alluding to the artificial nature of Truman's world, and more importantly the second side of the two-sided surveillance narrative, being the audience itself. By using images from the show, in conjunction with questions in bold text with red outlining, this still image from the trailer is teasing the sinister questions and critiques that it aims to argue around the text, audience, and two-sided surveillance, mainly being the morality of fabricating a world and life, and the subsequent viewing and enjoyment of such a world. In *The Truman Show* this bridge between the show as the text, and its fanbase the audience, is made possible through the use of technology, and in particular surveillance technologies.

Technologies of surveillance and control in *The Truman Show* are pivotal to establishing a two-sided power narrative, which both watches and controls Truman, and subsequently watches and controls his viewing audience. The primary technologies upholding this power dynamic are biosphere and weather manipulating technologies, and surveillance camera/listening technologies. Authorship of the film, and technology, work in unison to help bridge the two parts of the two-sided surveillance dynamic. Authorship has worked to establish the creation of the text, and technology will serve as a mechanism, or vehicle, to connect to the audience. In the analysis section of this thesis I will return to the audience, and its role in the two-sided surveillance narrative.

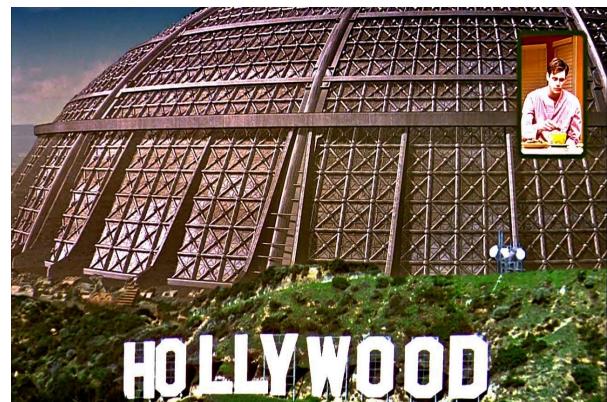
Biosphere and weather manipulating technologies have existed in one form or another since the 1950s, and have served various purposes since their inception. The term "biosphere" refers to "relatively thin life-supporting stratum of Earth's surface"

(Thompson). However, biosphere technology is an artificial, man-made, replication of the earth's biosphere in a controlled environment. There have been a few instances of complete artificial biospheres, most notably the Biosphere 2 experiment. Biosphere 2 was funded by the University of Arizona, and was a fully enclosed 13,000 square foot complex, which aimed to replicate earth's biosphere, with its own atmosphere, plant, and crop production. The first experiment spanned from 1991-1993, and aimed to see how humans could replicate earth on other planets. Like Truman's world, Biosphere 2 was a completely man made structure mimicking earth, and its environment. Below

**Figure 2** shows Biosphere 2, and **Figure 3** shows the "Omnicam EcoSphere" in *The Truman Show*.



**Figure 2:** The Biosphere II complex



**Figure 3:** The Omni-cam Escosphere in TTS

The biosphere technology depicted in both Biosphere 2, and the Omnicam EcoSphere are both technologies of control, designed to enable specific conditions, and mainly experiment with humans. The Omnicam Ecosphere works to keep Truman in his illusion, and in-turn enable his continued surveillance in the two-sided power dynamic.

Human weather manipulation is crucial to the film's plot, and control of Truman, as it is leveraged against him towards the film's climax. Since the mid 20th century humans have attempted to control, and manipulate earth's weather. In 1954 the

government of Thailand sponsored programs and initiatives for the creation of artificial rain and precipitation in order to boost the country's agricultural production. This gave way to the process known as cloud seeding, where specialized chemicals including silver iodide are dropped by plane onto existing clouds in order to increase their moisture carrying abilities, and in turn yield more rain. **Figure 4 & 5** detail human weather manipulation in real life and *The Truman Show*:



**Figure 4:** A cloud seeding airplane at work



**Figure 5:** Advanced weather computer in TTS

Although more advanced in *The Truman Show*, with fog, rain, wind, and wave manipulability, cloud seeding offers a very similar ability for humans to control and manipulate weather patterns. The significance of this technology in the show is that it serves as another technology of control, one which upholds the two-sided surveillance dynamic, as it bridges the gap between Truman and his plans to escape, and the viewers watching the show. By including this in the film it grounds the text in a real technology of control, one that could in a sense be used to control us almost as much as it controls Truman.

Surveillance technology, and specifically video surveillance technology, has long served as a tool and mechanism of power. Video surveillance began with early CCTV systems in the 1940s. The first systems were implemented towards the end of World

War II as a way to surveil and monitor prisoners. CCTV popularity rose into the 1960s and 1970s, as the technology both advanced and became more available. Advances such as VCR recording, and network accessible surveillance, allowed for new possibilities in documentation and remote surveillance.

Similarly, audio surveillance technology became popular in the mid 1950s through the creation of surveillance transmitters which boasted solid state memory, allowing for silent audio recording capabilities. This technology has been used in one form or another for recording conversations in person through devices such as wires, and remotely through devices such as wire taps. These technologies are what make *The Truman Show* possible, as this audiovisual surveillance of Truman is the basis for the show and film. **Figure 6** depicts a real world example of an in-car surveillance camera from the show *Bait Car*, **Figure 7** depicts *The Truman Show* where Truman is being watched as he drives to work:



**Figure 6:** A man caught in a *Bait Car* episode



**Figure 7:** Truman driving to work

Here, audiovisual surveillance in *The Truman Show* mimics real life surveillance through the application of in car surveillance. This is significant as it, like the previously mentioned technologies, works to bridge the gap between a text and its viewers. In using real world technology it can then be applied beyond the film itself to our own lives. The

use of this technology also functions as a form of control since surveillance, as I will detail in the following literature review and theory sections, has the power to enable a two-sided power dynamic between a text and its viewer, one which is powered by both the influence of authorship, and real world technology.

Authorship and technology have worked to not only generate *The Truman Show* text, but also establish two of three parts to a two-sided, or synoptic, surveillance relationship. They have worked as one side and the bridge, which ultimately will connect with the final part, the audience. *The Truman Show* is a combination of the authorship of Andrew Niccol and Peter Weir and the technology of the time, which has come together to emphasize and criticize the relationship between audience, and text.

## **Chapter 2: Theory**

*The Truman Show (TTS)* harbors many potential sociological, political, and rhetorical theories throughout its narrative structure and composition. Looking at the concept of two-directional synoptic surveillance, and specifically the surveillance relationship between a viewer and text, I aim to explore theories of surveillance and the surveillance of television and film. In particular, I want to focus on the presence of a two-directional power dynamic between television and film texts, and their viewers, and how they work to survey each other.

There are opposing ideas as to how surveillance works, especially through visual media such as television and film. Using Michel Foucault's theory of the *panopticon* and *panoptic surveillance*, as well as critiques and additions to his theory, such as Thomas Mathiesen's synopticon, I create a critical lens to analyze how two-directional surveillance is utilized and criticised in *TTS*.

In 1975, Foucault published his acclaimed text *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, which grounded his theoretical concept of the *panopticon* in the social underpinnings of modern western prisons through the idea of visible and non-visible power dynamics. Foucault built his theory off of the 19th century British philosopher Jeremy Bentham's original design of the *panopticon*, a circular prison with a central guard tower, which introduced the possibility for constant surveillance of its inmates by just one prison guard. Key to this design was the fact that the inmates couldn't tell when they were being watched, or who they were being watched by. According to Foucault, this then promoted the idea of self-regulation, and self-discipline, by the prisoners as they were being watched not only by the guards, but other prisoners as well. Foucault argued that this extreme level of visibility had the power to alter an individual's

behavior, since just the knowledge of being watched was enough for prisoners to regulate and police themselves.

Foucault expanded Bentham's work and chose to shift the focus from the panopticon being used as a physical mechanism for discipline and reform, to looking at how the panopticon functions in our modern day society as an invisible self-surveilling power. According to Foucault the panopticon causes the prisoner or subject to enter in a "state of consciousness and permanent visibility" (Foucault, 201), a state that according to him, "assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 201). This constant self-surveillance, according to Foucault, does not just exist in an institutional setting such as a prison, it exists throughout our society and works automatically.

Foucault posits, "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power" (Foucault, 202-203). Here, the idea of a prisoner or subject knowing that they are visible and potentially being watched is important to Foucault's theory. Without the knowledge of their surveillance, he argues that the subject would not be self-disciplined since they would have no reason to believe they were being watched or surveyed in the first place.

Surveillance is at the heart of Foucault's arguments, however Foucault only looks at surveillance in terms of a one-sided narrative. According to Foucault in the context of discipline, "it is the subjects who have to be seen" (Foucault, 187), and through this visibility of the subjects it, "assures the hold of power that is exercised over them" (Foucault, 187). Here, Foucault's emphasis on the subject's visibility is crucial when looking at Foucault's work, and he mainly focuses on surveillance relationships in the context of a one-directional surveillance, not a two-directional one. By only addressing one side of two-directional surveillance, Foucault is omitting another just as the power

side of surveillance. Visibility of the subject remains central to his development of the power dynamic found in panoptic surveillance, since surveillance works as an omni-present power.

Sociologist Kevin D. Haggerty argues heavily against Foucault mainly through the ideas of self-awareness, where he argues that a subject doesn't need to know that they are being watched in order for panoptic surveillance change their behavior; and the role of the viewer, where he argues that Foucault omits the role of the viewer in regards to his one-sided panioptic model, thus leaving it incomplete. These arguments are important to seeing *TTS* as a two-sided surveillance narrative. Although Haggerty does criticize Foucault's work, he does rightfully identify that the panoptic model "is easily the leading scholar model for analyzing surveillance" (Haggerty, 23). However, Haggerty goes on to deem the panopticon "to be of limited relevance for appreciating the contemporary model of surveillance" (Haggerty, 24), a statement that is both true and false.

In terms of the self awareness of surveillance Haggerty believes that although Foucault emphasized that the subject, "must be conscious that they are under scrutiny" (Haggerty, 34), in order to achieve a, "soul training" (Haggerty, 34), he believes that many significant and prominent surveillance networks, regimes, and structures can "achieve their goals without fostering such self-awareness" (Haggerty, 34). Here, a subject under surveillance without knowledge of their own visibility is a harsh contrast from Foucault's idea, where a subject must know of their surveillance in order for the panopticon to achieve a 'soul training'. This poses a question in the face of two-directional surveillance being: How can surveillance work without consciousness of

it? Haggerty doesn't expand beyond that claim, and doesn't elaborate as to which surveillance networks work without the subject's knowledge of their surveillance.

Haggerty recognizes a key omission made or lack of recognition on the part of Foucault, being the role of the viewer. Haggerty believes that, "In either case the panoptic model provides no sustained account of the role or importance of the watchers" (Haggerty, 33). Here, Haggerty both confirms and refutes Foucault. He recognizes that the panoptic model does partially address the role of the viewer, however, it doesn't address it consistently. This is true as Foucault states, "the gaze is alert everywhere" ... "a body of militia" ... "a town hall" (Foucault, 195-196). This gaze functions as an ambiguous surveillance entity, but still doesn't define who the viewer is. Haggerty refutes this ambiguity by emphasizing how Foucault fails to address the importance of the other side of surveillance, identifying the bias Foucault implicitly creates through omitting it.

Author Thomas Mathiesen defines the two-sided surveillance narrative that Foucault loosely alludes to as the *synopticon*. Mathiesen believes both the panoptic and synoptic theories of surveillance, "developed in intimate interaction" (Mathiesen, 223), and that, "institutions have often been panoptical as well as synoptical" (Mathiesen, 223). This claim by Mathiesen that both panoptic and synoptic theories have developed together supports Haggerty's criticism of Foucault, since he directly addresses the viewer in this two-sided relationship through the creation of the synopticon, unlike Foucault who doesn't directly address the role of the viewer.

According to Mathiesen "synopticonism" can be described as a situation where a mass of many people can see "the few" (Mathiesen, 219), which is the opposite of a panoptic system where only a few can see the many. He continues labeling a potential

synoptic world as, “a *viewer society*” (Mathiesen, 219). This *viewer society* as defined by Mathiesen is different from Foucault and Haggerty, as it is a fully fletched application of synoptic theory, a theory which can be applied not only to *TTS*, but the real world as well.

Mathiesen applies the synopticon and *viewer society* in a real world context through the media of television. He writes, “The basic synoptical character of the media was in a fundamental way enhanced by television” (Mathiesen, 221), emphasizing not only the ability for hundreds of millions of people to see recorded programs, and events, but also the ability for live broadcasts to now be shown to the masses (Mathiesen, 221). Here, Mathiesen moves away from Foucault's original application of the panopticon, the prison model, through his use of television. This shift however, still maintains the theme of institutionalization encompassed in the panoptic model, since like the prison application, the synopticon theory when applied to television utilizes the social power of the television as an institution in order to enact change.

By applying his synopticon theory like Foucault, Mathiesen manages to leverage his application as a critique of Foucault highlighting Foucault's own oversight. He writes, “Foucault fails to take into account all of the major waves of synoptical development” (Mathiesen, 221), and believes that, “Perhaps he would not foresee the developments in the 1980s and 1990s, but the major trends were certainly visible in 1975” (Mathiesen, 221). Here, Mathiesen's critique digs into Foucault's omission and lack of recognition for mass media and television as power structures themselves. By failing to recognize television as a power structure, one that could certainly be seen in the panopticon theory, Mathiesen calls out Foucault for this omission, whilst simultaneously filling in the theoretical gap by addressing television as a social power.

What, then, is the significance of Mathiesen's *viewer society*? According to Mathiesen the importance of synopticonism is that "modern mass media and television" (Mathiesen, 230), work to, "control and discipline our consciousness" (Mathiesen, 230). This control and discipline of ourselves is possible through the two-dimensional synopticon, and works through self discipline influenced by mass media, and television. Mass media and television work to survey their audiences' minds by influencing what they want in life, creating a social construct that supports those fabricated wants. Mathiesen writes, "Well aware of 'the intersecting gazes' of panopticons, but unable to point contently to them – this is the nature of their secrecy – we arrange our affairs accordingly, perhaps without being fully aware of it" (Mathiesen, 229). This simultaneous awareness of 'intersecting gazes', and lack of awareness as to where they might be coming from works to heavily control, and influence, how we function. We absorb what we see in the media, watch on television, and know that we are being subverted, but don't know or see how the mechanisms are at play.

Author Hillie Koskela presents a similar, but different, concept to Mathiesen's 'intersecting gazes' through her concept of 'the other side of surveillance'. Koskela believes that in "The other side of surveillance": people do not submit to the passive role of 'the observed' (Koskela, 175), and that they, "Instead, play various active roles in surveillance" (Koskela, 175). Koskela departs from Mathiesen by choosing to assign people or viewers with agency over surveillance rather than helplessness. This framing of the viewer as an empowered participant in the surveillance process is crucial, especially to a two-sided synoptic narrative, as viewers are more than an agencyless gaze, they are empowered individuals with voices, who can speak up and voice their opinions, and make decisions as to what they are watching or consuming.

Author Jean Baudrillard continues the conversation around surveillance and the idea of mass media, and television. Baudrillard believes that “In the image of television” (Baudrillard, 20), that our world, society, and even “our very bodies are turning into monitoring screens” (Baudrillard, 20), monitoring screens which we come to internalize. He expands by emphasizing that the “simple presence of television” (Baudrillard, 24), has the capacity to change how we act and socialize in what he calls, “a vestige of human relations” (Baudrillard, 24). This then goes back to the idea of self-surveillance by mass media and television, which conditions our minds to want a certain way of life.

Like Haggerty, Baudrillard is particularly interested in the idea of visibility and awareness and believes that the world is moving towards a state of visibility, in what he describes as the concept of ‘the obscenity’. He describes ‘the obscenity’ as a state when there are no more “spectacles”, “stages”, or “illusions” (Baudrillard, 27), where everything is “transparent, visible” (Baudrillard, 27), and where there is no more doubt or secrecy. Where everything is “entirely soluble in information and communication” (Baudrillard, 27). The obscenity is an amalgamation of all of the previously mentioned theories, as it encompasses every theory in that it subverts them to the point where we can no longer tell that they are even there. Influence from mass media and television goes completely unnoticed. Every theory and its derivatives become muddled in subverted realities.

Baudrillard continues saying, “It is no longer the obscenity of the hidden, but that of the visible, the all-too-visible, the more-visible-than-visible” (Baudrillard, 27). The ‘more-visible-than-visible’ that is described here is what I believe to be the synopticon, a

perfectly concealed two-sided surveillance, that transcends just a one directional surveillance, and controls our own lives and actions with or without our knowledge.

*The Truman Show* is ‘the obscenity’ as a film. It encompasses all of these theories in one war or another, containing them within its own obscenity, the show itself. From the panopticon to the synopticon; the panoptic model, the synopticon, ‘soul training’, ‘the viewer society’, ‘the other side of surveillance’, and ‘the obscenity’ have all worked towards developing a lens suitable for analyzing the effects of a two-sided surveillance in *TTS*. Theory is continuously changing, and evolving, generating new and insightful perspectives especially in the context of surveillance. Baudrillard recognizes this stating: “Theory is at any rate, destined to be diverted, deviated, and manipulated. It would be better for theory to divert itself, than to be diverted from itself” ... “This is why writing exists” (Baudrillard, 81). This is what I hope to do, divert this theory into my own lens, and use it to write and analyze *The Truman Show* film, the show itself and its audience.

## **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

*The Truman Show* offers various perspectives on how the power of surveillance can be enacted both in the film, and in the real world. The surveilling gaze of an audience, government, or televisionary can alter how characters such as Truman and ourselves behave in our worlds and societies. Looking at the literature surrounding *The Truman Show*, TTS, I aim to put perspectives on surveillance and the relationship of the diegetic and extra-diegetic audience into conversation. The goal of this is to explore existing research with the ultimate goal of forming an analysis around how two-sided synoptic surveillance exists both in the film, and the real world, and how it serves as a critique of modern media consumption.

Surveillance acts as a form of control, which impacts the individual agency of those being watched. According to author Macgregor Wise, surveillance in the context of TTS is “essential to the situation” (Wise, 35), as the plot revolves around a constant, pervasive, surveillance of Truman. He argues however, that Truman doesn’t know that he is being surveilled and therefore he is living in a “control society rather than [a] discipline [society]” (Wise, 35). The difference between a control and discipline society is that a control society uses a more subtle approach to surveillance and subversion, and a discipline society uses a more obvious institutional approach. The significance of this control society is that it enables a constant surveillance society, one that can allow for unnoticed surveillance. Author Sébastien Lefait agrees stating that the TTS is pertinent to studies of surveillance because of the way that it illustrates that "permanent watching" is critical to “a reality altering process” (Lefait, 97). Like Wise, this idea of permanent watching is a component of a control society, and it enables unnoticed surveillance. Unlike Wise, Lefait connects this permanent surveillance to the two-sided

surveillance model. He believes that the ‘permanence’ of surveillance within the film allows Weir to show how “synoptic surveillance affects the real lives of mass media audiences” (Lefait, 97). This connection of permanency and the synoptic model is critical to analyzing *TTS* as a criticism of text-viewer surveillance relationships, as it established the conditions required for the power dynamic to exist.

While surveillance is a core function in *TTS*, synoptic surveillance and the relationship between the text and audience appear more throughout discussions of the film. Lefait describes the film’s portrayal of the show and its audience within the film as “a diegetic and extra-diegetic surveillance narrative” (Lefait, 100), which he adds is, “an essential link between reality TV and synoptic surveillance” (Lefait, 100). This labeling of diegetic and extra-diegetic establishes the basis for which the film later leverages its critique of texts and their audiences, since by differentiating between the audience of the show within the film, and the audience of the film, a comparative critique can be made about how texts and media are consumed and interpreted.

Wise also addresses this diegetic-extradiegetic relationship by applying it to *TTS*. Wise believes that through watching the film “we are watching ourselves”, and that through the first half of the film we watch “Truman’s life as television viewers” (Wise, 43). He adds that by the second half of the film we “pull back our view” (Wise, 43), and see the fictional audience that watches Truman. This fictional audience then prompts us the film viewer to “question our own viewing practice” (Wise, 43), and “the fun we’ve been having at Truman’s expense” (Wise, 43). This application of the diegetic-extra-diegetic relationship between the show and film’s audience is important to analyzing the film as both a synoptic surveillance narrative and critique, however it’s not without its faults. By homogenizing the extra-diegetic audience, the viewers of the

film, it assumes that everyone who watches the film is viewing it the same way. This is inherently untrue as any one viewer can view the same text in many different ways.

Author Keith Moser, like Wise, focuses on the extra-diegetic audience, and further homogenizes them. Moser believes that the extra-diegetic viewer is left to “ponder” (Moser, 1) whether or not they are in “a ubiquitous realm of simulated hyper-reality” (Moser, 1), which according to Moser is “composed of empty signifiers” (Moser, 1), that stand in for the real world. In a sense, this homogenizes the extra-diegetic audience, and assumes that they will all believe that they are in a hyper-reality. Although homogenizing, Moser's emphasis on the hyper-reality, or the collapse of identification between the real world and a simulation, is crucial to understanding and applying the synoptic surveillance model, as some suspension of disbelief is required in order for it to function. This idea of hyper-reality is pivotal to using *TTS* as a critique of the synoptic relationship between a text, and its viewers, as the loss of distinction between what is real and what is simulated leads to a state of confusion.

Lefait identifies this confusion saying that *TTS* reveals how permanent surveillance “creates a confusion between illusion and reality” (Lefait, 99), a confusion which exists in both the character of Truman and his diegetic audience (Lefait, 99). Permanent surveillance then has the ability to blur the boundary between reality and simulation, enabling the previously mentioned hyper-reality. The effect of this hyper-reality is that it again homogenizes the collective experience of the audience, as it assumes that the audience does not know the difference between reality and simulation. Simultaneously, it also reinforces the idea of a synoptic surveillance narrative, as both sides, the text and audience, are confused about what is real, and what isn't. This

confusion, I believe, can be used to counter the homogenization of the audience, since although it assumes both parties are interpreting things in the same way, the collective belief is uncertain, which inherently discredits this homogeneity.

While Lefait helped identify this confusion between reality and simulation amongst diegetic and extra-diegetic audiences, author Dusty Lavoie posits that this blurring of fiction and reality generates a sense of paranoia between the diegetic and extra-diegetic audiences. Lavoie believes that as the extra-diegetic audience notices the diegetic audience's "fixation with *watching* as one wholly our own" (Lavoie, 62), that 'we' the extra-diegetic audience get uncomfortable. This discomfort then leads to lines of paranoid questioning, such as "Is Weir implicating us? Are we being lectured? Is there a "message" we should derive from such re-presentation?" (Lavoie, 62)". Again the problematic nature of homogenizing the diegetic and extra-diegetic audience is that it assumes that both audiences are reading *TTS* text in the same manner, which isn't once again true. Especially in the case of the extra-diegetic, every viewer will see the text in a different light. What is of interest in this claim is that it identifies how *TTS* can be read in a critical light, and as a criticism of the relationship between a text and viewer. By reading the text as a potential source of criticism like Lavoie, we can start to see how the film can be read as not only a synoptic surveillance narrative, but also as a critique of those same narratives.

Moving away from the confusion of hyper-reality and surveillance in *TTS*, I aim to examine the criticism of those same topics within the film. Author Alex Fitch believes that the film offers a "satirical take on the television audience" (Fitch, 9), and that through the repeated representation of the television audience throughout the latter half of the film, it is actively trying to criticize modern television audiences. He claims that

they, the diegetic audience, are “living their lives vicariously through him” (Fitch, 9), and similar to how modern television audiences live through real life stars (Fitch, 9). Satirization of the diegetic audience is crucial to understanding the *TTS* as a criticism in general, and in terms of the synoptic surveillance model, since through satirization the film is able to make real work comparisons and critiques. Author Peter Marks adds on the satirizing of the diegetic audience in *TTS* that “the real thrust” (Marks, 228), of the satirization is lost unless the extra-diegetic audience “recognize themselves as equally complicit” (Marks, 229), after watching the film. Once again, the idea of the film as a criticism of the synoptic surveillance narrative seems to be a fundamental take away from the film. In using the diegetic audience, the film aims to level a critique of the extra-diegetic, regardless of the homogenous implications that are attached with it.

Author George Kateb offers a satirical take on the diegetic audience. In his writing he questions if the diegetic audience are adults, if they are being manipulated, if they are “forever children” (Kateb, 282), who are so entertained through their synoptic surveillance dynamic that “they cannot progress to eruptive adolescence” (Kateb, 282). He coins this perceived adolescence by the diegetic audience as “a simulacrum of adulthood” (Kateb, 282). While satirical in that it infantilizes the diegetic audience, negating them of all responsibility and accountability of their own actions, it is worth exploring this idea especially as form of critique, since when applied to extra-diagetic audiences it could be said that the same ‘simulacrum of adulthood’ occurs in the real world as it does in *TTS*. The diegetic audience do still have responsibilities, and accountabilities as do we, like us however, they choose to watch or surveil others for entertainment. Why do we as the extra-diagetic audience watch the film, engage in other forms of media, and choose to exert our own agency to view others.

## **Chapter 4: Analysis**

*The Truman Show* functions as a synoptic surveillance critique that works to criticize the way modern texts and audiences survey each other. In this analysis I will apply and expand on my history chapter, looking at how the *TTS* is situated as a synoptic surveillance text through the show itself, which is then bridged by the technology of Truman's world, and ultimately connected to the show's audience, which then works to criticize the relationship between modern texts and their audiences in the real world.

### **Chapter 4.1: The Show as a Text**

I will refer to the show within the film as the text in the context of analyzing the film's two-sided synoptic surveillance narrative. The role of the show is that it serves as an allegory for real world television and film texts. I believe that it does this by framing the show within the film as a classical Hollywood narrative, which includes a three part structure of setup, confrontation, and resolution. It is through this structure that the filmmakers use Truman and his show as a criticism of modern text-audience relationships. This will serve as an analysis of the first of three parts of the two-sided surveillance dynamic.

Looking at the beginning of the film we see Truman's life in the show. In the opening sequence we first see a title card which reads, "Day 10,909", which is shortly followed by Truman leaving his house and greeting his neighbors with his signature phrase, "In case I don't see ya, good afternoon, good evening, and goodnight" (00:02:46). We then watch Truman as he goes about his daily routine. We see his commute to work, interactions with coworkers and vendors, and his relationship with

his wife and best friend (00:13:00). This sequence emphasizes the text itself, being Truman and the show, as well as the power that the show has amassed. Although seemingly mundane and normal, Truman's life has fostered almost 29 years of continued entertainment and has generated revenue throughout that time. This structure of documenting Truman's daily life and every move made it possible for the synoptic surveillance dynamic to exist, at least up until the events of the film. This documentation of Truman's life functions as a parallel to real life television shows and texts, particularly reality shows, which utilize either real or staged moments from a person's life as a form of entertainment.

The majority of the events in the film follow Truman as he breaks out of the synoptic surveillance dynamic in which he had been living for his whole life. By looking at this break from his world in the text it serves as an allegory by the film makers, in that it reflects the classical Hollywood narrative structure, particularly the part of confrontation.

The sequence that best captures Truman's break from his world in the text is when Truman tries to leave for Fiji. In this sequence we follow Truman and his wife Meryl as they argue about Truman's desire to travel to Fiji, and leave Sea Haven Island. As they are sitting in their car Truman locks the door and takes off. Truman recklessly drives around a round about, and decides that they will instead drive to Atlantic City. This moment serves as an allegory to confrontation in the traditional Hollywood narrative sense, as Meryl is forced to confront Truman's conflict about leaving his world. As they turn off to leave, a sudden traffic jam occurs and Truman and Meryl argue, "Blocked at every turn. Beautifully synchronized. Don't you agree", "You're blaming me for the traffic?", "Should I" (00:49:50). While this sequence does continue with Truman

continuing his attempt at escape and subsequently reaching roadblock after roadblock, a forest fire, nuclear melt down, etc., this moment is the most important. Here, Truman confronts his suspicions against Meryl by directly asking if she should be to blame for the events unfolding around him. Truman and Meryl's argument is crucial as it both serves as the confrontation in the classical Hollywood sense, helping to solidify the show within the film as a classic Hollywood narrative text.

Lastly, in regards to the *TTS* as a classic Hollywood narrative text, the film reaches a predictable resolution. Classical Hollywood narratives have resolved or happy endings and *TTS* is no different. In the final moments of the film we watch as Truman literally sails through the fourth wall, from his world to the “real world”. In this scene he defiantly challenges the creator of his world, the not so subtly named Christoff or Christ figure of the film. This scene ends with Truman exiting through the fourth wall into the unknown, ultimately resolving the film's main conflict, Truman's confinement (01:30:00-01:35:00). Here, both the film, and the show within the film, are neatly resolved as Truman makes his exit. The significance of this is that it frames both the film and show as complete classical Hollywood narrative texts, texts which we can then examine in the synoptic surveillance dynamic between a text and its viewers, which I will return to at the end of this analysis.

#### **Chapter 4.2: Technology as the Bridge:**

I will refer to the technology in the show and film as the bridge between the text and audience in the synoptic surveillance narrative. The role of technology is that it serves as the mechanism which connects the text and audience in the synoptic power

dynamic. This section will serve as an analysis of the second of three parts of the two-sided surveillance dynamic.

The surveillance technology exhibited in the film serves as a mechanism that links the text and audience. As previously mentioned in the history section, technology in *TTS* is primarily exhibited through surveillance technology and biospheric technology. These technologies enable both the show's existence, and the synoptic surveillance relationship within the film.

Surveillance technology is present throughout the film, as we watch Truman move about his world. This technology becomes most apparent to us, however, in the latter half of the film as the camera is pulled back to reveal the inner workings of Truman's world. A little more than halfway through the film after Truman is reunited with his long lost, assumed to be dead father, we see the full nature of Truman's world and the surveillance technology that supports its existence. As the camera is pulled back we watch the show within the film as if it were being broadcast on television and we watch an interview with the show's creator Christoff. In this sequence we see images of Truman's large scale surveillance with hundreds of different camera angles, television monitors, button cameras, switch boards, and staff members all with the expressed purpose of surveying Truman and broadcasting his life to the world.

(01:01:22-01:06:01). Here, the full scale of Truman's surveillance works as the bridge between the text and its audience in the synoptic surveillance relationship. In part, this surveillance technology allows the show to survey its audience, and its audience to survey the show. Without the surveillance technology present in the film, the synoptic relationship could not exist, as Truman would no longer be surveyed by the show's viewers and creators, and the audience would no longer be able to survey Truman.

The biosphere technology which makes Truman's world possible enables Truman to exist in a space that does not privy him to his own surveillance, yet bridges the text and the audience, allowing for both to survey each other. Like surveillance technology, we see the biosphere technology that surrounds Truman throughout the film, yet we don't understand the full extent of it until the latter half of the film. Throughout the second half of the film we learn that Truman lives in a biosphere which mimics the real world and differs in that it allows for the complete control and manipulation of the weather and climate within it. This level of control of the biosphere allows for the show's creators to weaponize this technology against Truman. We see this when Truman first goes missing from surveillance, which leads to an all out search for him by the cast and crew of the show. During this search the biosphere's time is altered for the purpose of trying to locate Truman, as Christoff turns night into day (01:20:10). In this scene, the technology of the biosphere is used to ensure the functioning of synoptic surveillance power through the bridge between the audience and the text, as its power is enacted in order to try and keep Truman under control in his world and viewable by his audience.

Similarly, the rising action during which Truman steals a sailboat in an attempt to leave SeaHaven Island offers another example of the biosphere technology working as a bridge between the text and audience. Here, Christoff and his team manipulate the biosphere by creating hurricane-like conditions with the intention of stopping Truman from escaping his world and discovering the truth, almost killing him in the process (01:23:45). Here, the utilization of the biosphere technology is used in a last ditch effort to maintain the synoptic surveillance dynamic between the show and its audience, and functions as a mechanism for upholding the existing synoptic power structure.

### **Chapter 4.3: The Viewers as the Audience:**

I will refer to the viewers of the show within the film as the audience in terms of its two-sided synoptic surveillance narrative. The role of the audience in the film is that it serves as an allegory for real world television and mass media audiences and consumers. The audience is significant as they make an active decision to survey Truman and the show, contributing to its continuation throughout the years through advertising revenue and the consumption of show related merchandise. This section will also serve as an analysis of the third of three parts of the two-sided surveillance dynamic.

The audience represented in *TTS* appears in the latter half of the film at the same time we see the synoptic surveillance technology be introduced in the film. Amongst this audience there is an array of different people from various identity categories, occupations, and locations who all survey Truman through their television screens. The importance of this surveillance is that it fuels the other side of the synoptic surveillance perspective, in that it allows the audience to not only support Truman and the show through their viewership, but also support the system of power that controls him being the show creator.

The audience within the film takes two main forms being home and work viewers. These two audiences work to surveil Truman at all hours, and from all corners of the world. Firstly, looking at the home audience there are two main examples:



Figure 1:



Figure 2:

Looking at **Figure 1**, the home audience consists of a mother and her two daughters. In this image both the mother and the eldest daughter are watching the show, whilst simultaneously ignoring the younger daughter's cries in the background. Here, their gaze and decision to watch the show was greater than their need to take care of the younger daughter, and in-turn assigns a greater meaning to the show than to the support and attention of the young child. This viewership also actively works to support the existence of the show, since through their viewership the show continues to generate revenue and new episodes.

Looking at **Figure 2**, the home audience consists of an international family with a generational viewerbase. In this image a family dynamic is seen where each respective person is wearing Truman merchandise in the form of pins, sweatshirts, and other memorabilia. Here, their gaze and decision to watch the show is significant since they are watching the show from across the world, and are actively choosing to survey Truman and support the show not only by watching him, but by also buying the show's merchandise. This level of support again helps the show continue production and maintain its power structure.

Secondly, looking at the work audience there are two main examples:



Figure 3:



Figure 4:

Looking at **Figure 3**, the work audience consists of a bar and grill establishment built entirely around the show's existence. In this image employees are serving customers food and beverages, whilst also running gambling rings around what is happening in the show at the time. Like the home audiences, all eyes are on the show in this image. Here, this collective audience have chosen not only to support the show through their viewership, but have actively sought out a show specific third space to watch it. This is similar to sports bars and similar establishments that cater to an audience of sports fans, especially with the inclusion of gambling. The significance of this is that there is enough support from the audience of the show to support not only the show, but also adjacent venues and establishments, highlighting the power the audience holds through their viewership, as they support an entire infrastructure in and around the show.

Looking at **Figure 4**, the work audience consists of two parking lot security officers and an annoyed customer. In this image the annoyed customer bangs on the window to try and get the two employees' attention, as they choose to watch the show and ignore the customer. Here, the employees' choice to ignore their responsibilities at work and watch the show places an emphasis on the importance of the show over

personal responsibility. This importance assigned by its audience gives the show power, as the audience's viewership again helps fund the show and continue its existence.

These four different examples of the audience in *TTS* have worked to represent and allegorize real world viewing audiences and their viewing habits. The audience of the show has served as the third and final part of the synoptic surveillance dynamic that is incumbent of the film, which then leaves one important question. So what?

#### **Chapter 4.4: The Synoptic Surveillance Critique of *TTS*:**

The inclusion of a synoptic surveillance narrative within the film serves one important function, being a critique of modern viewer-audience surveillance relationships. I believe that by including all three components of a synoptic surveillance relationship, the text, bridge, and audience the film is trying to criticize the way that modern film and television texts survey their audiences, and vice versa.

By emphasizing the classical Hollywood style of the show and film, the film is emphasizing how the show as a text is working to survey or watch its audience and give them what they want, which is Truman's life on camera. This is done through the creation, support, and surveillance of Truman's world through the surveillance and biosphere technology. This then met with the other side of surveillance being the surveying audience, which reinforces the show through their watching and support of the show or text. This relationship gives both the text and audience power over the other through surveillance, as both survey the other.

This surveillance dynamic serves as a criticism of modern viewer-audience relationships, since through its implementation it argues that modern texts couldn't exist without both their own gaze and the gaze of the audience. Contemporary texts need

the gaze of their audiences to cater to their wants and needs, and contemporary audiences need the gaze of the text to understand the world around them. Without this mutual surveillance from both sides neither the text nor audience could maintain the synoptic relationship, and in turn would revert back to a panoptic single-sided relationship where the text would try to cater to its audience without knowing their wants and needs.

Since the films release the importance of this modern synoptic viewer-audience relationship has only increased as television and film texts, and their respective audiences, have increasingly relied on the gaze of the other in order to curtail content, and ultimately sell more media to more people. Audiences also demand more from television and film texts as they look for representation, ideologies, and messages that align with their own needs and wants.

Modern media demands a synoptic relationship between texts and their audiences so that both sides can enact power over the other. *TTS*'s inclusion of a synoptic surveillance relationship in its forefront is indicative of the growing need for two-sided surveillance in modern media, and signals the shift from panoptical media models to synoptic ones. Audiences and texts are evolving in a world that is conducive to mutual watching, a world which runs in a recursive feedback loop where texts survey their audiences, and audiences survey their texts.

## Conclusion

*The Truman Show* (1998) is an alarming piece of late 1990s future technology theorization, that with time has only become more relevant, and accurate, to our own world. Through my analysis of *TTS*, the text has served as a criticism of the relationship between a text, and its audience, through the use of a synoptic surveillance dynamic where both the audience and the text surveill, and in-turn, influence each other. Through its use of a subtle pan-out to the larger ‘diegetic’ audience of the show, the film allows its audience, the ‘extradigetic’, to critically reflect on their own viewing practices. This coupling of synoptic surveillance, and self-criticism of how media is consumed, is, in my opinion, the strongest argument that the film makes.

The film’s ability to conceal its diegetic audience for more than half of its run time, and then reveal them, allows the extradiegetic audience to position themselves within the movie, and resonate with the diegetic audience. It then poses the question of not only why is the diegetic audience so interested in surveilling Truman, but also why are we so interested in surveilling Truman, or any other person for that matter, through media, film, etc.?

Through the diegetic audience we also see a synoptic surveillance between them and Truman, a relationship that can then be compared or overlaid to any viewer, and any text. This power dynamic between text and viewer, as seen through Truman and his audience, is one of immense synoptic surveillance power. Truman exercises power over his audience, albeit through the influence and labor of the Omni-Cam Corporation and Christoff, through his promotion of products, his way of life, and importantly his overall identity. His audience exercises power over him through their continued viewership of the show, which in-turn supports the Omni-Cam Corporation, in-turn holding Truman

in his world. This synoptic dynamic is one that was not only relevant at the turn of the 21st century, but even more relevant today.

Today, like *TTS*, synoptic surveillance power structures, and dynamics, can be seen anywhere and everywhere. Between the film's release in 1998, and today 2025, laws and regulations surrounding surveillance, both private and public, have changed drastically. After the events of September 11th, 2001, and the anthrax attacks of the same year, the United States Congress passed the USA PATRIOT Act, or Patriot Act, into law. The Patriot Act expanded government surveillance capabilities, surveillance that could oftentimes be conducted without the need for a warrant or any other prior authorization. Importantly it also updated, and adapted, laws to apply to modern day technology and communications, such as email and similar programs, which allowed for 'roving' searches which followed a person's whole communication rather than a specific source or phone line. The result of this was a synoptic surveillance state capable of surveilling every communication you make, whilst at the same time promoting self-regulation and control out of fear for who could be watching.

The Patriot Act would not be exclusive to email and other digital communications of the time; as technology developed and advanced so would the surveillance. Today surveillance has taken many different forms, many of which are almost invisible, or are utterly ignored by most people. One of the most, if not the most, prominent forms is through the advancement of cell phones and social media. Between the film's release and today our relationship, and usage, of cell phones and social media, has multiplied exponentially. Cell phones have gone from calling and SMS texting, to advanced video capable computers in just two decades. Social media has undergone a similar

transformation as it has expanded from something purely bound to computer towers and chat rooms, to now available anywhere at any time in so many different forms.

Cell phones and social media today work as their own form of synoptic surveillance in our own lives. As we survey social media we feed into a positive feedback loop similar to that of Truman's. As we survey content and media, we support those creating that media as they are paid for having an audience; and like Truman they, content creators, use their platforms on social media to then sell products, and ultimately their lifestyle, and their identities to us. People create their own 'brands', in turn commodifying themselves and their identities for the whole world to see. This commodification, especially in the United States, has had the power to influence their viewers, and audiences, lives becoming their own celebrities, or model people for whom children and adults alike aspire to be like. This synoptic dynamic all works to ultimately sell more, and generate more wealth for those involved, whilst simultaneously surveilling all those who choose to engage with it as they are either physically surveilled, or are mentally surveilled.

Additionally, through both cell phones and their subsequent commoditization, advanced tracking and advertisement through tools such as 'cookies' or 'device fingerprinting' has allowed for a synoptic relationship between a consumer, and company, as they both survey each other. As a viewer scrolls through the internet they go from website-to-website looking at different products, services, etc., and in the process their every move is being watched and tracked by companies and ISPs (Internet Service Providers) who are then able to sell that same information to advertising agencies. Here, both consumers, and companies, are feeding into a commodity driven

synoptic relationship where each party has the capability to surveil, and hold power over the other through their respective gazes.

As mentioned previously through the introduction of the Patriot Act this surveillance isn't limited to private companies looking to commodify yet another aspect of daily life; governments are equally involved. Today through the advancement of CC-TV technology, facial recognition, and law enforcement technologies such as license plate readers, and other forms of physical, and digital, government surveillance establishes a synoptic relationship between itself and the general population. Citizens of any modern surveillance country go about their days with the knowledge that they could be watched, tracked, or otherwise seen, as their governments actively track where their faces have been, where they have traveled to in their own vehicles, and every minute detail of their lives they can. This synoptic relationship as detailed here, coupled with cell phones and social-media, is endemic of a total surveillance state, a state where mind and body are seen, and patrolled.

Lastly, the biggest difference between *TTS*'s release and today is the introduction of AI powered surveillance, and its expansion into every previously mentored application of surveillance, and surveillance technologies. AI was only theorized in the late 1990s through films such as *The Matrix* trilogy (1999-2003), the *Terminator* franchise (1984-2019), but it wasn't fully realized or implemented into people's daily lives until the 2020s. AI has come to occupy many aspects of these previously mentioned synoptic surveillance relationships such as automation, decision making, and recognition, which are all absorbed and taken over by AI technologies. The effect of this technological development is an almost seamless surveillance, one that can function on its own, whilst still participating in the synoptic surveillance relationship with

humans. The potential implications of this is a movement towards a world surveilled not only by each other, but by computers.

That's not to say that computers will be taking over all forms of surveillance, and will subsequently control us, but I also wouldn't say it's totally out of the realm of possibility. I would argue that as alarming as the future possibilities portrayed in *TTS* are, of a man trapped in a surveillance prison broadcasted to the whole world for entertainment, I believe that the future we have found ourselves in today is actually *more alarming* and *worse off* than Truman's world. Today it's not just one person being watched, *everyone* is watched, despite their internet usage or preference. Everyone in a sense is like Truman and his audience, everyone is both the subject, and the viewer, everyone is in a synoptic relationship with the world, and each other.

This study of a synoptic world isn't, however, without its own limitations. In examining *TTS* through this ultimately synoptic lens this research fails to fully examine other forms of power being executed. The main omission would be the study of intersectionality in the film mainly between ideas of race, sexuality, and gender. *TTS* offers many compelling depictions and representations of identity categories, family structures, and more; all of which are worthy of their own structure and analysis. Another limitation is how the synopticon idea has evolved since both its theorization, and the creation of the film itself, through the previously mentioned technological advancements made in the past 30 years. With the advancements in technology the full scope of synoptic surveillance could not have been developed to account for such advancements as AI and other technologies, especially those which can function outside of direct human control. This isn't to say that it doesn't apply, but it is to say that it was

created at a time with significantly different technological capabilities, which leaves some interpretation and application to be needed.

Thinking towards future research there is a reason that *TTS* continues to be relevant even 30 years after its production. *TTS* has become exceedingly more applicable and it will stay that way as we continue to develop and advance surveillance technologies, and apply them to our lives. While this study has looked at how two-sided surveillance can be applied not only to the film, but also how people consume media, similarly *TTS* can be used in the future to examine other forms of surveillance and our relationship with them. While we might not exactly know what that may look like as technology continues to advance, I believe that parallels will still be able to be drawn to *TTS*.

*The Truman Show* hasn't just proven to be an alarmist take on the future of surveillance; it serves as a mechanism to see that surveillance. Its emphasis on the audience text relation pulls back our own surveillance, criticizing it in the process. This visibility of surveillance is what I believe will help us continue to combat and challenge it as time goes on. As surveillance continues to move to an almost invisible level we can pull back the layers, leaving not only our own criticism of this power, but our own solutions and approaches on how to address it going into the future, and beyond.

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