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Final Portfolio

Denise McCory
dmccory@bgsu.edu

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Master of Arts in English Capstone Project

Denise Michelle McCory
dmccory@bgsu.edu

A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in English
with a specialization in English Teaching

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Dr. Chad Iwertz Duffy, Portfolio Advisor

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Introduction/Analytical Narrative

I enrolled in the Master of Arts in English Teaching program at Bowling Green State University with the goal of teaching English composition and basic English at the community college where I work. I was interested in the program because it focused on pedagogy, which is not stressed enough in postsecondary teaching. After completing a Master's program in Adult Learning and Development in 2012, I enrolled at BGSU in search of a strong pedagogy-based program that would prepare me to teach adult learners.

The program helped me reflect on my experience as a learner, teacher, and community administrator and how they inform my teaching philosophy. In the Teaching Literature course, I developed a framework for my teaching philosophy, which is grounded in motivation theory. I believe that motivating students starts with creating a positive mindset. From my research and experience, I learned that motivation and other non-cognitive factors are equal to, if not more important than academic preparation. Motivating students begins with understanding and appreciating their unique perspectives and the ways that they view the world and experience the learning environment.

In the Anti-Racist Pedagogy course, I learned how to facilitate an inclusive learning environment that embraces diversity. It is important to recognize that students come with backgrounds and experiences that will shape their emotions, perspectives, and how they learn. With that in mind, my classroom will be a safe place to discuss diverse viewpoints and tackle uncomfortable subjects. I would invite students to respectfully challenge assumptions and popular perspectives, including my own. Finally, I will empower students through collective decision-making. This means that students will be invited to negotiate class activities, ground

rules for discussions, and the grading rubrics. These practices promote self-efficacy and a sense of belonging.

Finally, the Composition Pedagogy class taught me to help students understand how the skills that they gain from their writing classes are transferable to other academic and professional settings. It was in this course that I discovered growth mindset theory, or the belief that people can grow through consistent efforts and application of their learning, despite having varying levels of talent, aptitude, and ability. With that in mind, I will encourage growth mindset by sharing my educational journey with students—highlighting not only my accomplishments, but my failures and how I learned from them. I will also prioritize *process* over *product*—teaching students to write by journaling, drafting, revising, and peer review. Furthermore, I will apply growth mindset to my own development and continuously examine my teaching practices to make them more effective.

The Master's Portfolio Projects

This portfolio contains two projects. The first is a research and analysis project from ENG 6070, which was Theory and Methods of Literary Criticism with Dr. Lapinski. The 21-page paper is an analysis of *The Truman Show*, which is an American comedy film from 1998. The paper discusses the film's themes of control, discipline and hyperreality using the perspectives of postmodern theorists Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault. The second paper is a teaching-based project from ENG 6040, which was Graduate Writing with Dr. Hoy. The 7-page paper demonstrates how composition instructors can use multimodal texts to teach academic argumentation. The selected projects reflect the variety of research-based knowledge, critical thinking skills, and writing skills that I acquired in the MA program.

I chose *The Truman Show* analysis as my research example for two reasons. First, the

Literary Theory course was the most challenging course in the program. The reading was very dense and the concepts were very complex. I am particularly proud of how I was able to interpret and apply Foucault's and Baudrillard's theories and integrate sources to support my argument. Secondly, this was a very enjoyable project, as it allowed me to analyze one of my favorite films. Since it was such an interesting project, I welcomed the opportunity to revisit this paper and add a fresh perspective.

The second project, which is on teaching multimodal composition, is an area of interest that I would like to do further research on in the future. The project reflects my teaching philosophy, which is to facilitate an environment that caters to diverse learners. This statement by Palmeri (2012) best summarizes the goal of multimodal instruction, which is to allow space for personal expression and to promote inclusive pedagogy:

If we wish to create an academy that values the diverse literacies and knowledge of *all* students, we need to make room in our courses for students to compose with multiple modalities—room for students to construct and share knowledge that cannot adequately be conveyed through print alone (84).

The multimodal composition project taught me how to help students learn in a variety of ways, including oral and visual presentations, media, and peer collaboration.

I revised the two projects using the feedback from my instructors and peer reviewers. For the first project, *The Truman Show* analysis, Dr. Lapinski suggested that I make some connections between the themes in the film and current society. My peer reviewers thought the paper was interesting and they appreciated how well I summarized the film in a way that people who have not seen *The Truman Show* are able to follow the analysis. The reviewers provided useful examples and suggested some minor edits to make the paper clearer and more interesting.

Having a fresh set of eyes was very helpful, because even though I had read the paper over a dozen times, there were typos and unclear sentences. After carefully reviewing all of the feedback, I made the suggested edits and incorporated current events, as suggested by Dr. Lapinski.

The second project on multimodal composition received very little feedback, which was not surprising because this project was a lot less complex. Dr. Hoy made one suggestion, which was that I provide source introductions. My peers agreed with Dr. Hoy's recommendation and I followed their suggestions and incorporated elegant ways to introduce my sources.

The revision process benefited me in three ways. First, I learned a systematic process for peer review (Describe-Assess-Suggest-Reflect) that I had not been exposed to in my previous courses. I plan to use this process when I teach composition. Second, I found that the suggestions I received from Dr. Hoy on the multimodal composition paper was also applicable to the *Truman Show* analysis. As indicated by Dr. Hoy, incorporating source introductions added professionalism and sophistication to the discussions. Finally, reading my peers' work exposed me to different techniques that I can apply to my own writing. The following texts demonstrate the knowledge and skills that I gained from the revision process as well as my growth as a scholar in the Master of Arts in English Teaching program.

Works Cited

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Denise McCory

Dr. Piya Lapinski

English 6070

6 December 2021

Control, Discipline, and Hyperreality in *The Truman Show*

The film *The Truman Show*, released in 1998, was the start to a period of American culture obsessed with voyeuristic reality shows like *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, and the *Real Housewives* franchises. The film features Truman Burbank, played by Jim Carrey, as the star of a reality TV show, simply named *The Truman Show*. Born on TV and legally adopted by an unseen genius producer, Truman's perfectly ordinary life is broadcasted 24 hours-a-day with the help of over 5,000 hidden cameras controlled from above his town of Seahaven. Truman has never ventured beyond Seahaven, which is not really a town, but a giant show set built under a monumental dome. For clarity, this discussion will refer to the film as "The Truman Show" and the reality television program as "Truman TV."

While most reality shows are completely fabricated and the actors know they are being watched, Truman is oblivious to his role as the star of *Truman TV*. Truman does not know that his surroundings are fictional. Everyone in Truman's life is an actor, including his family, neighbors, and co-workers. Truman's life is scripted into "episodes" that are watched by millions of fans across the world. Although everything about Truman's life is carefully crafted, Truman cannot help but ponder the significance of his existence, and he starts to notice inconsistencies in his mundane life that cause him to search for answers. After numerous unsuccessful attempts by show producers to prevent him from discovering the truth, Truman finds out that his entire life

has been fabricated and he chooses to leave Seahaven and enter the real world beyond the studio set.

The film uses satire to ridicule aspects of postmodern society and the human condition. It can be said that *The Truman Show* demonstrates humans' desire to free themselves from control and a culture of discipline, but it also raises questions of whether Truman's life in Seahaven is more or less real than life beyond the studio. This paper will examine *The Truman Show's* themes of control, discipline and hyperreality using the perspectives of two French postmodern theorists—Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault.

Baudrillard's Theories on Hyperreality

The Truman Show highlights America's strange obsession with faux-reality—a phenomenon that was studied by French sociologist, philosopher, and postmodern theorist Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007). Baudrillard wrote the 1981 philosophical work *Simulation and Simulacra*, in which he discussed the relationship between reality, symbols, and society. In the book, Baudrillard presents his theories of hyperreality, which Tiffin defines in “The Hyperreality Paradigm” as the “inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality” (27). Furthermore, Baudrillard defines simulations as signs and symbols that imitate the real world, “threaten[ing] the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real,’ and the ‘imaginary’” (*Simulation and Simulacra* 1). *Truman TV* is set in a technologically advanced society where Truman is surrounded by simulations that trick him into thinking that his life is real.

Simulations can be layered and replicated so that it is impossible to distinguish reality, a situation known as a simulacrum. In *Simulation and Simulacra*, Baudrillard uses the analogy of a map to demonstrate this:

Today abstraction is no longer that of a map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that preceded the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the existence of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. *The desert of the real itself.* (1).

As with the above example, simulacra make it impossible to know what came first, the depiction of reality (the map) or reality itself (the territory). There are four stages of simulacra—the first being a faithful copy of reality. The second stage is a perversion or masking of reality. The third stage masks the absence of reality, with no sign of the original. In the final stage, which is stage four, signs refer to other signs, with no relation to reality whatsoever. This marks the ultimate collapse between the real and the imaginary, and simulation is no longer possible. In an article titled "Hyperreality as a Theme and Technique in the Film *The Truman Show*," Susee Bharathi and Ajit discuss Baudrillard's stage four, also known as *hyperreality*, describing it as "condition in which what is real and what is fiction are seamlessly blended together so that there is no clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins" (1).

One example of hyperreality is social media. Traditional print and broadcast media are being replaced by platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, and these are the primary ways that people receive news. However, according to Morris, author of "Simulacra in the Age of Social Media: Baudrillard as the Prophet of Fake News," social media is less about trying to uncover the way the world really is, and more about entertaining consumers or portraying the

world as participants desire it to be (323). On social media, we present an idealized view of ourselves and make judgments or comparisons based on a small snippet of information people choose to share, which in most cases is only the most positive parts of their lives. This is what Baudrillard would call the hyperreal—or the “order of sorcery,” where it is no longer possible to tell the difference between what is real and what is counterfeit (*Simulacra and Simulation* 6).

In his book *America*, Baudrillard discusses how America is a hyperreality that is real and pragmatic, but also the “stuff of dreams” (28). Baudrillard says that Americans have no sense that they are experiencing a simulation. It is belief in greatness that makes America great, not its material characteristics like “natural resources, technologies, and arms” but “the realization of everything the others have dreamt of—justice, plenty, rule of law, wealth, freedom” and the fact that “others have come to believe in it too” (83). According to Baudrillard, it is the belief (helped along by the media) in America’s ability to make dreams come true that makes the country great.

Simulations maintain belief in the real. Using law and order as an example, Baudrillard says that a *simulated* crime would be more dangerous than a *real* one because the simulation would threaten our perception of law and order. Because of this, Baudrillard says that the purpose of the real is to “devour every attempt at simulation, to reduce everything to some reality” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 20). Essentially, the *belief* that law and order exist is what is important—whether or not it is actually true. Belief that law and order exist is what maintains our faith and trust in the system.

In addition to maintaining belief in our systems, simulations can provide a comfortable distraction from the real world. An example is the theme park Disneyland, which Baudrillard describes as an “imaginary effect concealing that reality no more exists outside than inside the bounds of the artificial perimeter” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 14). Baudrillard says that the

world outside of Disneyland is not real, but a simulation—a caricature. Furthermore, he describes the surrounding city of Los Angeles as “an immense scenario and a perpetual pan shot [that] needs this old imaginary like a sympathetic nervous system made up of childhood signals and faked phantasms” (*Simulation and Simulacra* 13). Baudrillard surmises that Disneyland is not a magical fantasyland because of its material characteristics (decor, rides, characters), but because it reinforces the notion that there is both a real and an imaginary world.

The idea of real versus imaginary is central to the *The Truman Show* plot. The irony of *Truman TV* is that the producers take painstaking measures to provide the audience with an authentic subject, yet everything in Truman’s life is completely fabricated. Christof, the *Truman TV* creator, criticizes typical reality TV, claiming that audiences have become bored with watching “phony emotions...pyrotechnics and special effects.” Christof admits that Truman’s world is counterfeit, but that there is nothing fake about Truman himself; his lines and his reactions are unscripted and genuine. Presumably, Truman as a character is more authentic because he is not aware that he is “on,” yet the lines that Truman’s co-characters give him are scripted, so Truman is not engaging in real dialogue or real interactions. Also, the *Truman TV* audience knows that the show is at least partially scripted, yet they are still captivated by Truman’s idyllic life and refreshing authenticity.

Truman appears to have the perfect life, but everything is simulation that resemble bits and pieces of life outside of the studio. Although the audience watching the show is living in the 1990’s, Truman’s home is reminiscent of 1950’s suburban America—a pristine little beachfront town with cookie-cutter modular houses, immaculate yards, picket fences, friendly neighbors, and perpetually perfect weather. He enjoys a quiet, insulated life that is free of worry. Truman’s world may seem like an exaggeration, but it is indicative of what Americans consider to be the

ideal life.

The film signals that the perfect, idyllic life to which we aspire has no relationship to the real. This happens as the studio's carefully managed system begins to fail and Truman is exposed to his real circumstances. This breakdown of Truman's reality leads to the end of the show—similar to an example in *Simulacra and Simulation*. In the book, Baudrillard describes the Louds, which was the first family to be featured on reality television. He describes them as a “typical ideal American family” bearing a statistical perfection that “dooms it to death” (28). Baudrillard concludes that the 1970's show fell apart because the idyllic lifestyle that the Louds perpetrated on TV was not real and therefore unsustainable. The idea is that the breakdown of Truman's and the Loud family's circumstances can be attributed to the pursuit of a perfect life. According to Baudrillard, this pursuit is not only futile, but counterproductive, as it leads to a warped sense of reality and inability to distinguish the material world from hyperreality.

Media and Hyperreality

The Truman Show demonstrates that media is a main driver of hyperreality. In the film, media are used to manipulate Truman and convince him that he lives an ideal life in the best place in the world—Seahaven (see Fig. 1). Media create simulations that prevent us from seeing the world as it actually is, and it mimics reality to the point that reality no longer exists. In our media-laden culture, we experience what Baudrillard called the “death of the real,” where we connect more with television shows, video games, and other simulations than we do with reality. In social situations we can observe people who are physically adjacent but not engaged. Instead, they are glued to screens, immersed in digital platforms. Instead of face to face interaction, they connect with other humans using emojis and avatars (simulations). This immersion warps reality by controlling the “mutation of events from the real into the hyperreal” (*Simulacra and*

Simulation 30). And these mutations affect nearly every aspect of pop culture, from news, to music, to movies—manipulating our emotions and intelligence (Susee Bharathi and Ajit 3).



Fig. 1. Newspaper Headline Reporting Seahaven as the Best Place on Earth (0:05:45).

Media tells us what reality looks like, which is obvious in *The Truman Show*. At the beginning of the film, Truman witnesses a studio camera fall from the sky (see Fig. 2). He does not understand what the studio camera is or why it has suddenly landed in his front yard. However, the incident is explained by a radio story of a plane breaking apart over Seahaven. Of course, the plane incident never happened, but the story is effective in that it prevents Truman from being suspicious of the camera he saw earlier. The film shows how we can be easily manipulated by the media because we do not witness events for ourselves; instead we rely on reports of events (simulations), which may not be accurate. This keeps us in a state of hyperreality.



Fig.2. Truman Finds a Fallen Studio Camera (0:03:42).

As another example, Truman encounters a man on the street who he thinks is his father, which was a mishap, as Truman's father was supposed to be deceased. To remedy the situation, Truman is made to believe that what he actually saw was a homeless man. This is helped along by the local newspaper, *The Island Times*, which on the very next day features a story about cracking down on the homeless, with a photo of a man resembling Truman's father. It is clear that the homeless story, just like breaking aircraft story, have no connection to reality; they are simulacra—completely fabricated for the purpose of controlling Truman's perceptions.

Finally, when Truman visits a travel agency to book a trip to Fiji, he encounters a poster on the travel agency wall that warns against terrorists, street gangs, wild animals, and disease, which implies that these are dangers of traveling. There is also a picture of a plane being struck by lightning (see Fig. 3). All of these messages are designed to deter Truman from leaving Seahaven. As an audience, we know that these kinds of media would not be posted in a business that promotes travel, so their real purpose is to call our attention to “media's obsession to control and neatly package reality” (Susee Bharathi and Ajit 2). In satirical fashion, the film shows how media surreptitiously shapes consumers' perceptions and behaviors.



Fig.3. Plane Disaster Poster in Travel Agency (0:42:50).

Consumerism and Hyperreality

In addition to the media, *The Truman Show* pokes fun at hyper-consumerism. In the article “It's Merely Controlled”: The Truman Show in the Age of Surveillance Capitalism,"

Wong discusses how *Truman TV* is inundated with “over-the-top, unnatural enthusiasm for products” which are poorly integrated into the characters’ scripts (4). Since *Truman TV* is on 24 hours a day without commercial interruption, these random advertisements generate huge revenues for the show producers. From Baudrillard’s perspective, this degree of consumerism is symptomatic of a culture that lacks realness and substance, asserting that “what every society looks for in continuing to produce, and to over-produce, is to restore the real that escapes it” (23). *The Truman Show* demonstrates how hyper-consumerism drives the capitalist machine and perpetuates a state of hyperreality.

In the film, there are no limits to consumerism; everything can be bought and sold, including human life. Truman is unaware that his life is an ongoing commercial, as he consumes “Mococoa” (see Fig. 4), in addition to hundreds of other products from the show’s sponsors. Even more, Truman himself is a commodity, having been purchased by a television network and exploited for profit. Christof says that everything on the show is for sale, including the actors’ wardrobes, food products, and the homes they live in. There is even a “Truman Catalog” from which fans can purchase replicas of what they see in *Truman TV*, which are simulations of reality. In “Mapping the Culture of Control: Seeing Through The Truman Show,” Wise discusses how this aligns with the hyper-consumerist culture observed by Baudrillard: “everyday life becomes commodified, even our symbolic life (so that we are reduced to uttering commercial catch phrases to each other over our fast food” (35). *Truman TV* sponsors capitalize on the postmodern human’s need for fulfillment, selling products that help fans feel validated and more connected to Truman.



Fig. 4. Truman Advertising “Mococoa” (1:01:10).

Foucault’s Theories on Discipline and Control

In addition to hyperreality, discipline and control are essential themes in *The Truman Show*. The concept of a disciplinary society was introduced by postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1934). Foucault developed theories of governance that involved disciplinary techniques to control and regulate individuals. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses two types of power—sovereign power (enacted through physical punishment of the body) and disciplinary power (through training, exercise, and supervision). Over the years, there was a shift from disciplining people through physical harm to more efficient and effective ways of exerting power—through control of the mind. This is a process that Foucault called the “genealogy of the modern soul” (29). According to Foucault, discipline can make individuals into docile bodies for economic utility and political obedience (181). While discipline can be perceived as something negative that breaks, dominates, or oppresses, it can also be subtle, efficient, and productive.

It is important to recognize that Foucault’s concept of power is not exclusive to a ruling class, and it is not necessarily top-down; it lies in social structures and the relationships between citizens. Foucault would argue that the goal of modern society is to produce rule-following, docile, useful subjects to carry out the will of the powerful. This type of power and control is not

obvious because it is in enmeshed in every organization and system in society, including schools, prisons, hospitals, and the military. This is a central message in *The Truman Show*, that although Seahaven is a fictional town, it features the same insidious and subversive controls that exist in the real world. This is how producers maintain Truman's unwitting participation in the show.

According to Foucault, a body under control, or a docile body, may be commodified and exploited for economic and political gain. Truman was a docile body from the time of his birth, purchased so that he may be "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (136). Because of Truman's economic value, Christoff is motivated to ensure that Truman does not leave Seahaven. In "It's Merely Controlled": The Truman Show in the Age of Surveillance Capitalism," Wong notes that "Christoff did not just make a studio, then allow Truman to roam free. He watched Truman's behavior, disincentivized him from leaving Seahaven Island, and profited from his perpetually staying on the air" (10). While Christof uses some physical interventions to prevent Truman from leaving the show, most of his strategies involve mental manipulation, which reflect a three-part approach to discipline, as introduced by Foucault. The next sections of this paper will describe how Foucault's three spheres of discipline—surveillance, normalization, and examination—are executed in *The Truman Show*.

Three Spheres of Discipline

Foucault believed that surveillance was a key strategy in discipline, as having knowledge of individuals can be used to shape their behaviors. Tian, author of "George Orwell's 1984 and Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* Under the perspective of Michel Foucault," defines surveillance as the "monitoring of behavior and activities with the purpose of influencing, managing, directing, or protecting people" (50). In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses how the concept of surveillance is inspired by a prison structure called the Panopticon, which is a

building with a central tower from which one can observe every cell. In this structure, each prisoner can be seen, but they have no idea if they are being watched by the person in the tower. According to Foucault, conditions like these—where people think they are under constant surveillance—make them adjust their behavior to the point that it becomes unconscious and normalized. Foucault uses the Panopticon as a metaphor for the discipline that is imposed on society; it is power that “insidiously objectifies those on whom it is applied” (209). Surveillance is an efficient disciplinary tactic because it is internalized so well that people comply with a rule or norm, even if there is no evidence that their actions can be seen.

Surveillance is used to manipulate and control Truman. Truman’s world is contained in a giant dome, which resembles a large panopticon. He spends his entire life under surveillance, not only for the audience’s entertainment, but so that the show’s managers can control Truman’s behavior. Truman’s every move is watched from above (see Fig. 5), and unpredictable behavior is reported to Christof so that it can be immediately corrected. When Truman starts behaving erratically, his cast-mates work together to re-direct him. This is another important message in the film, which is that modern society is a panopticon, and everyone participates in monitoring and correcting each other. In that sense, we all play the role of prisoner and warden in various societal contexts.



Fig. 5. Christof Gazing at Seahaven from the Control Room (1:02:43).

The last two spheres of discipline are normalization and examination. Normalization produces ideal conduct by imposing rules and regulations, whereas examination combines the techniques of surveillance and normalization for the purpose of comparing or analyzing subjects, resulting in rewards and punishments. Foucault calls examination a highly ritualized and “normalizing gaze—a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish” (184). Surveillance, normalization, and examination function together to systematically control individuals, creating docile subjects.

Foucault noted that the spheres of discipline have been repeated, imitated, and blueprinted across different contexts—particularly in the workplace. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses the dynamics of a factory, which he compares to a prison. Foucault describes the factory as a walled fortress where guards would open the gates every day to let in workers so that they could complete their shift under the watchful eyes of supervisors. At the end of the work day, the gates would open once again so that the workers could leave. According to Foucault, the purpose of this system is to “derive maximum advantages,” “neutralize inconveniences,” and “master the labour force” (142). In the factory, we see the disciplinary tactics at work—the routine activities of the work day (normalization), and the scrutinizing, evaluative gaze of the supervisors (surveillance and examination). The system is designed so that employees feel intense pressure to adhere to a certain standard of behaviors.

In modern society, we can observe Foucault’s spheres at work in countless settings and contexts. We operate in a world of ubiquitous surveillance, with cell phone cameras, closed circuit cameras, and even time clocks and devices that monitor time on task. We also engage in normalizing behaviors—maintaining rules and protocols that dictate what is proper behavior, dress, and discourse. Finally, as a way of reinforcing desired behaviors, we institute rewards and

punishments, such as team player awards, evaluations, performance bonuses, demerits, and improvement plans. Foucault believed that these dynamics are built into every aspect of society, and as citizens, we all participate to some extent. Since Truman's world mimics modern society, his seemingly carefree life is actually one of control and oppression. Lavoie, author of "Escaping the Panopticon: Utopia, Hegemony, and Performance in Peter Weir's *The Truman Show*," argues that the way Truman is managed reflects Foucault's spheres of power: "Truman can be read as a conflation of Foucault's spheres of panoptic power: He is institutionalized, under the gaze of the asylum's two-way mirror; he is admitted, as if a diseased specimen to observe; he is incarcerated, enclosed, imprisoned; he is employed...and he is enrolled" (63). The film cautions that as citizens, we are manipulated in the same ways as Truman, as we are "incentivized to stay within the sphere of profitability" (Wong 11). Essentially, we are kept in a system designed to yield maximum productivity. We are docile bodies, used for the benefit of those in power.

The control that is imposed on Truman is more mental than physical. As a docile subject, Truman is manipulated to function in a "normal" life and meet the expectations of a responsible citizen. He is provided with a suburban home, a stable job, and a wife—the quintessential American lifestyle. Structure and routine are part of Truman's everyday life. For example, he is reminded by his wife that he will be late to work—indicating that he is tied to a schedule. When Truman tells his wife that he wants to travel the world, she talks him out of it, telling him that they cannot abandon their mortgage, car payments, and other obligations. When he slacks off on his job at the insurance company, Truman's co-worker mentions that the higher-ups are making personnel cuts, which immediately motivates Truman to fall in line. When Truman questions if he is satisfied with his career, he is told how lucky he is to have a desk job. Finally, when

Truman says that he feels generally unfulfilled, he is reminded that he is fortunate to have a stable, secure life. Truman is made to believe that his situation is not only normal, but ideal, and he is pressured to maintain his lifestyle. *The Truman Show* signals to the audience that Truman's lifestyle is normal, so that those norms can be internalized and perpetuated throughout society.

Truman's Escape to the "Real"

The culmination of the film is when Truman finally realizes that he is in a TV show and he chooses to leave his fabricated life for the "real" world (see Fig. 6). In a final effort to convince Truman to stay, Christof warns Truman that the outside world is full of misery and decay and that the same lies and deceit he encountered in Seahaven exist outside the studio. Yet, Truman chooses to leave, to the delight of his viewers. But when we examine Truman's escape from Baudrillard's and Foucault's perspective, we question what leaving Seahaven really means for Truman.



Fig. 6. Truman Leaving the Seahaven Set (1:35:08).

First, the audience cannot help but celebrate the fact that Truman escapes to a place where he will presumably enjoy more freedom, privacy and agency. Truman's escape likely provides comfort to the audience because it means that there are limits to the culture of control. This is perhaps why Susee Bharathi and Ajit describe the film as "a celebration of human spirit which desires to leap over restrictive, invisible boundaries" (2). Similarly, Tian says that Truman "breaks with his current life" and "goes beyond the control of the power group, transgressing the

mirage of the water boundary set between the fictional and the real” (61). However, another perspective is that Truman only swaps one culture of control for another. If we apply Foucault’s perspective concerning the ubiquitous power dynamics in society, we should expect that Truman will be subjected to the same hegemonic gaze of authority as he had in Seahaven, as suggested by Lavoie (65). Thus, like the rest of us, Truman will continue to be trapped in a system of control.

Next, there is the question of the realness of life outside of the Seahaven set. As suggested by El Moncef, author of "Life After ‘Truman?’ TV Imagination and the Symptomatic Eruption of the Real in Peter Weir's *The Truman Show*," the premise of the film is that reality exists for everyone but Truman, but it is also the case that the audience watching the show is so obsessed with Truman’s world, that they fail to find to realize that they are trapped in their own “mediatized experience” (123). Baudrillard would argue that Truman’s hyperreal existence in Seahaven is all that can be attained, since “it is the real that has become our true utopia - but a utopia that is no longer in the realm of the possible, that can only be dreamt as one would dream of a lost object” (*Simulacra and Simulation* 123). Therefore, Truman does not escape to reality because reality is out of grasp.

Finally, we can consider a couple of messages in *The Truman Show* that have broader implications for modern society. First, it may be that we willingly subject ourselves to the gaze of authority and systems of control. Second, we may purposely maintain a hyperreal state as a comfortable distraction from reality. These are ideas that Foucault and Baudrillard seem to gloss over in their characterizations of postmodern society. In many ways, humans are complicit in their oppression and delusion, as mentioned earlier with social media. With news media, we use it to validate our personal views and perspectives, sometimes deliberately engaging in

confirmation bias because it is comfortable. Additionally, we willingly participate in the hegemonic gaze and systems of control. An example is the COVID-19 pandemic, where citizens monitored each other's compliance with masking and social distancing mandates, and reported people who did not comply. Essentially, we are not only aware that control and hyperreality exist, but we leverage them when it is convenient in order to secure our place in society.

The idea that we willingly participate in an oppressive system is alluded to in *The Truman Show*. Christof argues that deep down, Truman accepts his circumstances, saying “we accept the reality of the world with which we're presented” and that Truman “prefers his cell.” According to Lavoie, this may indeed be the case, since “no one ever says to Truman ‘this is real,’ because Truman himself actualizes his own oppression” (64). Some would argue that Truman is a prisoner who finally frees himself at the end, but the film prompts this lingering question: outside of Seahaven, is there truly free will and agency, or are we just as imprisoned as Truman?

Conclusion

The Truman Show uses comedy to highlight numerous issues in modern society. It pokes fun at the clichés of reality TV, starting with an ironic statement by Truman's best friend Marlon: “It's all true. It's all real. Nothing here is fake. Nothing you see on this show is fake. It's merely controlled.” The film uses satire to bring attention to issues of control, discipline, and hyperreality. When we examine these using the perspectives of Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault, we discover that the dynamics in the film mirror off-screen reality, and we must question if the escape that Truman desires is truly possible.

Control and discipline are major themes in the film. Truman is subjected to what Foucault calls the three spheres of discipline— surveillance, normalization, and examination—

which function together to make Truman into a docile subject. Truman is manipulated to fit into a normal life. First, he is watched so that his every move can be managed (surveillance). Second, Truman is made to follow an established structure and routine (normalization). Finally, Truman is subjected to examination, where he is rewarded or punished according to how he meets society's standards. The control mechanisms in *The Truman Show* seem extreme, which is the point of satire, but they are indicative of what Foucault believed to be the underlying dynamics of postmodern society.

The third theme that was discussed in this paper is hyperreality. Truman is surrounded by so many simulations that have no connection to reality, that he functions in a hyperreal state. The media report fictitious events (simulations) that Truman believes to be true, and he reacts accordingly. The media also facilitates control and discipline. Throughout the film, media are used to influence Truman's decisions, curb his desire to leave Seahaven, and ultimately keep him under the control of the producers.

Finally, there is the question of Truman's escape from his fictitious town of Seahaven to a more real existence outside of the studio. Until this point, every aspect of Truman's life was carefully crafted and directed. What is interesting is that one of the show's mottos is "How's it going to end?" —as if Truman is in charge of his own destiny. From Foucault's perspective, when Truman leaves Seahaven, he simply swaps one culture of control for another; he is no freer outside of the studio than he was in Seahaven. Moreover, Truman exchanges one hyperreality for another since Seahaven and the world it mimics are just caricatures, bearing no resemblance to reality. When we examine the film through the lens of Baudrillard and Foucault, we realize that *The Truman Show*, though comedic and entertaining, is an indictment of an oppressive and media-fabricated culture.

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Denise McCory

Dr. Cheryl Hoy

English 040

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Using Multimodal Texts to Teach Argumentation and Rhetoric

If you ask composition instructors about the most challenging concept to teach, many will say that argumentation and rhetoric are near the top of the list. This is likely due to the abstract and nuanced nature of academic argumentation— which students often confuse with opinions or debate. Even though students are constantly exposed to arguments, whether implicitly or explicitly, they may struggle to present and support their own. There are numerous ways to help students understand argumentation and rhetoric, but one tool— the multimodal text— can help students engage with these concepts in a way that is familiar and engaging. Multimodal texts integrate written, aural, or visual modes to relay messages, and they are used in TV commercials, print ads, memes and many other texts that students use every day. Composition instructors can use multimodal texts to help students understand academic argumentation and broaden their definition of writing.

English composition is popular course for first-year students and a requirement at most American colleges and universities. As a prerequisite to courses in the liberal arts, social sciences, and natural sciences, English composition introduces the fundamentals of writing and prepares students to write in throughout their college and professional careers. The course may include activities such as rhetorical analysis, research processes, arguments, and reflections. Many teachers accomplish these objectives by focusing strictly on alphabetic texts; however, there is an opportunity to enhance students' understanding of writing concepts using multimodal

texts as well.

Teaching with multimodal texts is a practice grounded in Charles Judd's theory of generalization, which indicates that learning transfer occurs when a student learns a general principle from one situation, then applies that principle to a new situation (432-433). In accordance with Judd's theory, teachers can leverage students' informal experience with multimodal texts to help them understand and apply similar techniques in their academic writing. This paper will discuss how using multimodal content that is relatable and familiar to students can provide essential context, demystify the conventions of rhetoric and argumentation, and teach them how to process texts that they will encounter in an increasingly multimodal world.

What Are Multimodal Texts?

With the prevalence of digital media, multimodal texts are becoming increasingly essential to literacy. Multimodal texts combine two or more semiotic (also known as linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, or spatial) items to create meaning. According to Antsey and Bull in "Helping Teachers to Explore Multimodal Texts," these may be delivered via different media or technologies, and examples include picture books, web pages, and live dance performances (n.p.). Today's composers work with many modalities, often combining several at a time, to include alphabets, layout, photographs, charts, tables, video, and sound. Integrating modes can enhance a text, as images may be used to show things that take too long to read, while writing may describe things that would be difficult to show. Furthermore, color may be used to highlight aspects of the overall message. These items work together to relay powerful messages, often more effectively than exclusively alphabetic texts.

Multimodal Texts and Learning Transfer

When we discuss multimodal composition, it is important to note that all meaning-

making is multimodal, and that students have been engaging in multimodal composition all their lives. In their article titled “A Multimodal Pedagogical Approach to Teach a Foreign Language to Young Learners,” Liruso et al. discuss that even the youngest children are “natural decoders of images” since they read books with illustrations and play with puppets to enhance their understanding of stories (146). Moreover, according to Liu, author of “Visual Images Interpretive Strategies in Multimodal Texts,” students are already adept at consuming multimodal information in the form of computerized images, graphic novels, textbooks, magazines, and advertisements that require readers to simultaneously employ written text, visual images, and design elements to make meaning (1259). Also, with little coaxing, students strategically use underlining, color coding, capitalizing and highlighting— visual cues that help them learn. Thus, multimodal resources are already natural and essential ways for students to process information.

In an article titled “Show Me What You Are Saying: Visual Literacy in the Composition Classroom,” Wright asserts that composition instructors should consider teaching multimodal communication as “interwoven rhetorical processes” rather than discreet units (i.e. a written paper, an oral speech, a visual project) (43). This is because, according to Crovitz and Devereaux, authors of *Grammar to Get Things Done: a Practical Guide for Teachers Anchored in Real-World Usage*, the “weaving” together of information is how humans learn (25). Furthermore, in “Understanding Writing Transfer: Implications for Transformative Student Learning in Higher Education,” Moore and Bass assert that learners can take that new knowledge and apply it to different contexts, a phenomenon known as learning transfer (11). Tapping into students’ already-existing knowledge of multimodal composition can open the door to understanding and applying more sophisticated concepts. From everyday exposure, students have

developed inherent knowledge of how multimodal texts facilitate communication; teachers just need to connect this knowledge to traditional writing contexts.

Support for Multimodal Instruction

There are any reasons why using multimodal texts makes sense for writing instruction. First, in addition to facilitating learning transfer, which was previously discussed, teaching with multimodal texts increases student engagement and provides a more inclusive learning environment (Blaine 185; Palmeri 84; Yancey 4). Furthermore, multimodality spans the curriculum, so there is even more opportunity to facilitate learning transfer, perhaps by coordinating with other disciplines like interpersonal communication, visual arts, and theater. Writing teachers could work with these departments to establish learning communities or interdisciplinary projects around rhetoric and argumentation. In an article titled “Teaching Multimodal and Digital Literacy in L2 Settings: New Literacies, New Basics, New Pedagogies,” Lotherington and Jenson mention that despite the increasing importance of multimodal literacy, mainstream composition instruction and educational policies tend to treat multimodal texts as optional or secondary to their traditional, alphabetic counterparts (239). However, for students to gain the competencies that they will need as future professionals, composition curriculum should include reading and writing multimodal texts.

Using Multimodal Texts to Demonstrate Rhetorical Effect

We know that multimodal texts can enhance the composition classroom, but how do we use them to make important connections for students, particularly around rhetoric and argumentation? One approach is to help students analyze rhetorical effect in posters and other familiar multimodal texts. Figure 1 is a voting poster, which is a type of multimodal text that students would likely encounter in their communities. Instructors can lead students in a

discussion about the grammatical components in the text, such as the sentence fragments and parallelism, and how they are used to keep the reader’s attention. During a discussion about audience, students may say that the text is targeting younger people because of the language and cultural references that are used. In discussing visual elements like color and contrast, students may point out that the contrasting black background not only makes the message stand out, but it gives the poster a serious tone. Furthermore, the word “vote” being in larger font, with no other text surrounding it, gives it prominence and impresses upon the reader that it is the most important information on the entire text. Finally, the class can discuss the goal and the overall effect of the poster—meaning, does it motivate the reader to vote? There are numerous semiotic elements and rhetorical aspects that the instructor can explore in this single example, and this will help students understand how they contribute to the overall meaning and impact of the text.

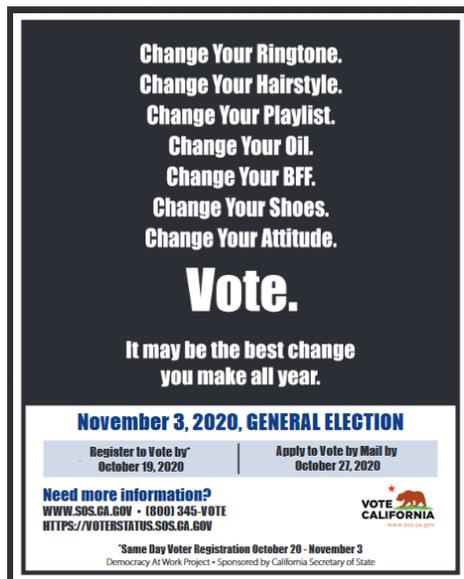


Figure 1. Vote Poster for Rhetorical Analysis Activity

Source: <https://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/outreach/democracy-at-work/change-your-ringtone-poster.pdf>

Another approach to teaching with multimodal resources is to analyze texts with which

students are already familiar. Teachers can use popular TV commercials and campaign ads to demonstrate how effective they are at convincing students to purchase or subscribe to the product. A commercial's impact can be discussed in terms of logos, ethos, and pathos and how well those appeals are executed in the piece. Also, students can bring in their own examples and discuss why they are effective. To make a more explicit connection between the multimodal texts and students' argumentative writing, a teacher can ask "what makes this piece effective?" and "what elements here can you adapt to your own writing to make it equally effective"? The assessment section of this paper will outline in greater detail some techniques for helping students make deeper connections between multimodal texts and their own written works.

Changing modes or semiotic elements is another way to demonstrate rhetorical impact. Teachers can use a well-known text, such as Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and examine its rhetorical components. Students can read the alphabetic version of the speech and then listen to the audio version of Dr. King's delivery. Next, teachers can lead a discussion on how the impact changes between the two versions. Additionally, students can explore how different speakers (whether in the classroom or beyond) would affect how the speech comes across, and how visual cues could enhance or detract from the overall impact. According to Palmeri, author of *A History of Multimodal Writing Pedagogy*, these types of analysis activities help students "develop a more nuanced understanding of the unique affordances of visual, aural, and alphabetic forms of communication" which they can use to construct their written arguments (47). In addition, visual and physical arrangements—using spacing, bolding, underlining, asterisks, etc.— can enhance students' arguments; these are multimodal elements that Hayot, author of *The Elements of Academic Style*, would refer to as "unvoiced metalanguage" (128). Another approach is to have students engage in remediation from print to multimodal texts, and

then from multimodal to print texts, a process called *remixing* (Palmeri 23). Remixing texts and manipulating modes are activities that develop students' "linguistic dexterity" (Crovitz and Devereaux, *Grammar* 21) and helps students understand how complex writing concepts apply to numerous settings.

Navigating the Potential Pitfalls of Using Multimodal Resources

Choosing Appropriate Multimodal Resources

While multimodal resources are plentiful, not all of them work well for the teaching setting. In "A Visual Approach to Teaching Grammar," Pfothenhauer cautions that when selecting resources for class, it is important for instructors to recognize that in most cases, visuals and other modes cannot serve as stand-alone instructional tools; they must be paired with or complemented by traditional instruction (3). Furthermore, teachers must discern what texts will be effective and appropriate for their teaching context and students' developmental level. When using a visual, for example, students must have enough background knowledge to articulate what is being communicated. Furthermore, teachers should be aware of the social context and ensure that these tools do not create a distraction or do more harm than good. Essentially, multimodal texts should enhance, not distract from the learning experience.

Helping Students Identify an Argument/Thesis Statement

One challenge with analyzing multimodal texts is that students may have trouble identifying the thesis statement. In a study titled "Understanding Modal Affordances: Student Perceptions of Potentials and Limitations in Multimodal Composition," Alexander et al. found that students struggled with the multimodal text not having an explicit thesis, which is something they associated with good writing (21). This was even more evident for arguments, where alphabetic texts were deemed more convincing than multimodal ones because the thesis was

explicit. The authors recommended that instructors expand the concept of a thesis to include multimodal texts, with specific instruction on how to create assertions, arguments, and claims, and how design elements contribute to an argument (21). A lesson on thesis statements may involve having students analyze multimodal texts to determine the main idea or the “so what?”, and how this is made evident in the piece. Instructors can also lead discussions on how the design decisions an author makes can help or hinder the thesis (22). Similarly, an instructor can show students still images and have them create a written argument about the image (23). These exercises will help students understand theses and arguments outside of explicit, written form.

Multimodal Assessment Strategies

How do we gauge the effectiveness of the multimodal texts that we use in our classes? How do we measure what students have learned? Assessing what we learn from multimodal texts is a slightly different process than that of strictly alphabetic texts. To assess multimodal learning, the literature consistently points to rhetorical reflection as an effective approach. According to Asha, author of *Teaching Visual Grammar in the Context of Digital Texts*, the process is called *meta-interpretation*, where students closely examine the text creator’s choices and the effect on the reader (344). Meta-interpretation allows readers to take a more critical reading position—interrogating and challenging the components that are used in the text and how they contribute to the meaning. This involves examining all of the semiotic elements, asking questions like “what do we notice?”, “what does it mean?” and “what are the implications?” (Asha 344). Furthermore, in “Visual Images Interpretive Strategies in Multimodal Texts,” Liu discusses how instructors can also help students explore how different semiotic devices interplay socially, culturally, and in other ways that surpass the text’s literal meaning (1261-1262). Meta-interpretation is particularly useful because students often struggle to identify implicit messages and elusive

arguments or thesis statements, as discussed earlier.

Students can critically reflect on multimodal texts in the same way that they reflect on written ones. According to Ball et al., author of “Genre and Transfer in a Multimodal Composition Class,” composition instructors usually have students conduct a rhetorical analysis of a text, which is a method of describing audience, purpose, and context, in addition to determining the *who, what, when, where, and why* behind the writing (37). However, there is a more nuanced inquiry for multimodal texts. As an example, the following is a list of questions that students can ask when examining a magazine cover:

1. Describe- (What do you see- color, image, text, etc.?)
2. Analyze- (What are the repeating visual and textual patterns?)
3. Interpret- (What do these visual and textual patterns suggest together? Do they have messages or a narrative?)
4. Evaluate- (Who is the intended audience? What is the rhetorical purpose of these messages/narratives? How/what do they persuade the audience to think/feel/believe? Whose interests are served (or not) in these messages?)
5. Engage- Make an argument for or against the messages you have derived from these magazine covers. Use evidence from what you see to support your claims (Wright 35).

This approach can be applied to numerous media— not just magazine covers. As discussed, posters, TV commercials, and the “I Have a Dream” speech can be analyzed using a similar meta-interpretation process. This type of formative assessment may be performed as whole-class activity, small group activity, or an individual assignment. According to Moore and Bass, authors of *Understanding Writing Transfer: Implications for Transformative Student Learning in*

Higher Education, when students engage in meta-interpretation, they develop problem-solving strategies that they can apply to future contexts, thus, facilitating knowledge transfer (11). These reflections deepen students' learning by helping them understand the "why" and "how" behind their actions, resulting in more deliberate and effective rhetorical choices.

Conclusion

Given our increasingly digital and multimodal world, new media scholars urge us to expand our thinking around literacy, which has traditionally been focused on alphabetic texts (Bartels 90; Wright 25). Keeping with this goal, composition instructors can incorporate multimodal texts in their lessons to broaden students' concept of writing. This is particularly useful for teaching rhetoric and argumentation, where students often struggle to identify elements of a persuasive message. Multimodal texts can demonstrate artistic appeals in a way that is more relatable than using simple alphabetic texts. Students can engage in remixing, mode manipulation, and meta-interpretation to demystify the conventions of rhetoric and argumentation. This inclusive pedagogical approach is well-suited for diverse classes, where the students have a broad array of backgrounds, ages, and developmental levels. Using multimodal resources to teach argumentation and rhetoric will not only enhance students' writing skills, but it will increase engagement, facilitate knowledge transfer, and prepare them to communicate in multimodal world.

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