



ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- ▶ *Strictly Ballroom* is a visually vibrant film which uses a range of images to convey the different worlds it explores. For example, what is the difference between the images of the competitive ballroom dancing world, and the world of Fran's family? How does the director use contrasting images to depict these worlds?
- ▶ Try writing lines from the film down on paper. You will notice that the meaning of each scene is very much dependent on the images that accompany the dialogue, rather than simply the words contained in the screenplay.
- ▶ Make sure you analyse features such as camera angles, lighting, movement, colour, music and costumes in your discussion of the images in the film. How do these techniques convey the characters and their worlds to us?
- ▶ The world of ballroom dancing is depicted in the film as a place of extreme colours, bright surfaces and gaudy clothing. What does this say about the world? Yet when Scott dances alone in the studio, he wears a simple white singlet and dark trousers. What does this kind of contrast suggest?
- ▶ There is a lot of humour in the film. How is humour depicted in the film's images? (Consider, for example, the scene where Les scolds Scott during a dance class for his unauthorised dance steps. It is not the dialogue alone which makes this scene humorous.)
- ▶ Compare the clothing, hair and make-up styles of key characters (Shirley, Scott, Doug, Fran, Barry Fife, Liz, Rico). How do these features indicate the kind of people they are?
- ▶ You could also look at the way each character dances. What do their styles of dancing reveal about their personalities? For example, look at the sadness and loneliness conveyed in Doug's solitary dances with an absent partner, to the passionate, confident Spanish dancing of Fran's father.
- ▶ What is the effect of the final images of the film (everybody coupled off and dancing) on the audience?

The Truman Show

directed by Peter Weir

About the director

Born in Sydney in 1944, Peter Weir was educated at Scots College and then studied Arts/Law at the University of Sydney before dropping out to join his father's real estate firm. Following a trip to Europe he took a job at Channel 7, where he made some short films to entertain his colleagues. In 1969 he joined the Commonwealth Film Unit as an assistant cameraman and production designer and in the early seventies he made his first feature film. This was *The Cars That Ate Paris* (1974), a black comedy about an outback town that survives on the profits of car crashes caused by misleading signposts. It featured John Meillon as the mayor and its Gothic qualities are shared by the otherwise dissimilar *Picnic At Hanging Rock* (1975), which gave Weir an international reputation. Using English actors like Rachel Roberts and well-known Australian performers Helen Morse and Jacki Weaver in minor roles, *Picnic* used different types of music (Beethoven, pan pipes) to create a haunting atmosphere. The theme of western repression and rationality versus the forces of the irrational was to recur in *The Last Wave* (1977), which had the American actor Richard Chamberlain and the Aboriginal performer David Gulpilil in the main roles.

From a society in the future threatened by annihilation, Weir turned to an event of great significance in the creation of the Australian psyche in his movie *Gallipoli* (1981). The script, by playwright David Williamson, dealt with the camaraderie of two runners from the Western Australian bush who went to war in a spirit of adventure only to be confronted by the snobbishness of the officer class, in particular the British. Mel Gibson, who had played the surviving runner in *Gallipoli*,

appeared in Weir's next film, *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1982), which again had a David Williamson script, based on C.J. Koch's novel of the same title. The setting was Indonesia during a period of political unrest in 1965 and while Sigourney Weaver had the female lead, Linda Hunt won a Best Supporting Oscar for playing a male photographer.

Weir's first Hollywood picture was *Witness* (1985) which had Harrison Ford as a policeman forced to investigate a crime by entering the time-locked world of the Amish. The contrast in values was a standard Weir theme, and although there were conventional elements with the action sequences and the romantic entanglement, there was nothing conventional about his second film with Harrison Ford, *The Mosquito Coast* (1986). Almost unrecognisable behind his glasses and long hair, Ford played an idealistic inventor who takes his family to Central America convinced that he has the solutions to what he perceives as local problems. Paul Schrader, who had earlier written the screenplay for Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), adapted Paul Theroux's novel.

A far more popular film was *Dead Poets Society* (1989) which depicted a private boys' school in the United States where an inspirational teacher changes the lives of his students but cannot prevent and, in some sense is the cause of, a tragedy. *Green Card* (1990) was a more easy-going work and marked the English language debut of Gerard Depardieu. It was followed by the disturbing *Fearless* (1993), with Jeff Bridges giving a hypnotic performance as the survivor of a plane crash who becomes convinced that disaster cannot touch him. Weir's film *The Truman Show* (1998) is an investigation into the blurred line between reality and entertainment.

His most recent film, *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* (2003) concerns a sea voyage at the time of the Napoleonic Wars.

Text analysis: images

The film begins with a close-up of the face of Ed Harris, playing the director of the television program 'The Truman Show'. His round-rimmed spectacles suggest a quality of intelligence and his beret brings to mind the standard image of the great Swedish director Ingmar Bergman during his heyday in the 1950s and 1960s. The opening sequence of Peter Weir's film takes the form of a mock-documentary in the tradition of the rock music parody *This is Spinal Tap* (1984) or the political satire *Bob Roberts* (1992). Christof (Harris) explains that audiences have become 'bored with actors giving us phony emotions'. He concedes the counterfeit quality of the world he has created but argues that there is truth in Truman.

Following this introduction we see the face of an unkempt Truman Burbank (Jim Carrey) who is also looking directly at the viewer. The difference in this instance is that he is not aware of the presence of a camera. The image of Truman's face is seen from behind a monitor and the word 'Live' in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen alerts us to this fact. Christof's commentary on the show he has created is intercut with the remarks of two of the chief performers, Hannah Gill, who plays Meryl, Truman's wife, and Louis Coltrane, who plays Truman's best friend, Marlon.

The title 'The Truman Show' appears in stark white lettering against a black background and these visuals are overlaid with the sound of a piano and a rumbling drumbeat. The shot of Truman, seen from behind a bathroom mirror, recedes further and takes on a circular shape. When he leaves the bathroom, a caption 'Day 10,909', appears and immediately afterwards a smiling Truman is seen on his balcony, waving to his neighbours. They are a black middle-class family — mother, father and child — and, as if knowing that Truman will deliver his usual joke, the photographer zooms in on him. Christof had warned us not to expect dialogue of a Shakespearean quality and Truman is certainly corny with his 'In case I don't see you —

good afternoon, good evening and good night'.

The sky is a vivid blue, there are white picket fences and everything seems idyllic. Suddenly a stage light, of the type used in film production, is seen falling from the sky. Truman hears its whine and watches it crash to the ground. He approaches it suspiciously and taps it, before looking to a street lamp and the sky above. The next shot is of a neat grid of houses, seen from a high point and we cut from this to an interior view of Truman driving his car. The camera is positioned behind the radio, which provides an oval view of Truman.

To the tune of a tinkling piano, a long-range sweep takes in the central business district of what appears to be a cheerful, bustling community. This is followed by one of the many artfully positioned camera angles — at the back of a small stand selling newspapers and magazines. Truman, in his white slacks, checked jacket and lemon jumper, is seen from a hidden camera as he walks to his office. He is stopped by a pair of middle-aged twins and forced to stand in front of an advertisement. He is vaguely aware of something odd happening, as his shoulder is pressed against the poster and he glances at it, but he cracks a joke about a 'doppel-gänger special'.

Truman's burgeoning sense of anxiety is shown by the way he stands to the side of a revolving door. He is next revealed sitting at his desk, shifting uneasily away from his nameplate to cradle a phone. He whispers into the mouthpiece an enquiry about Fiji and then a figure emerges from behind a pane of rippled glass. This person points to a newspaper headline, 'Best Place On Earth', which clearly refers to the city in which they both live. He attempts to divert Truman from finding out about the world beyond his artificially-created environment, but from a camera implanted in Truman's desk we see his look of disappointment.

The sequence in which Truman rips out an image of a girl's eyes from a fashion magazine and coughs to cover the sound of the paper tearing, owes its inspiration to a scene with Jack Nicholson in *Chinatown* (1974). When his boss appears, suddenly we see Truman from the boss's raised viewpoint and feel the central character's sense of having been almost caught.

Our next view of him is at the water's edge. An oval-shaped lens shows him approaching a ticket office, which also has a hidden camera. Then he is seen from below struggling with the sight of a sunken boat, which seems to remind him of a disturbing incident. An establishing shot of the sun glinting on the pristine roofs of the city leads to the contrasting images of Truman and his wife. He is dressed in bright red shorts and a striped top and is seen from behind as he digs in the garden. She wears her nurse's uniform and shows Truman a knife as if she was promoting a product, which is actually what she is doing.

Next, Truman's buddy does a similar thing — he displays the label on a can of beer while the two men are shown in an unusual angle due to one of the many concealed cameras. Again, Truman talks about Fiji, which reminds us that the film was made in the period between the two coups in that South Pacific country (that is, 1987–2000). Truman sits on the beach while there is a flashback to the boating accident in which his father drowned. This takes the form of sequences shown in earlier episodes of the series. The present-day Truman looks out to the water and seems to 'see' these events being re-lived. To emphasise the pathos of the moment when his father's hands eluded Truman's grasp this is filmed in slow motion. An abrupt change in mood occurs when a direct downpour of rain falls on Truman. We realise that a mistake has occurred, similar to the lamp that crashed to the ground earlier in the film. Truman is chased by the water until full-scale precipitation is brought into action.

Meryl, Truman's wife, sits in a room furnished only with rolls of wallpaper, reading a child's storybook. When she suggests that Truman and she go to bed there is a cut to two men sitting in a parking station. They are dressed in grey uniforms and they comment on the show, in particular the way the cameras do not film intimate scenes.

Cheerful piano music and morning traffic photographed from a lofty position leads to the same newspaper vendor we saw before. Truman buys another fashion magazine and walks past a dishevelled man. As soon as the man turns and is

recognised as Truman's father he is taken away by two extras. Joggers block Truman's path and when he collides with someone, his briefcase bursts open. A high level camera captures the image of papers hurtling through the air and from inside a bus we see Truman's father being dragged out of sight.

An iris angle gives us glimpses of Truman trying to explain to his mother what has happened. She does not reassure him and soon he is seen rummaging through the treasures in his chest. Meryl intrudes into his solitude and plugs another product — this time a mower. He returns to his chest and we see a map of the Fiji Islands before he takes a red cardigan from a bag. This scene is watched by two women who are working in a diner. Like the two men who offered comments, they are dressed in uniform.

Weir uses the traditional filmic device for signifying a shift in time — wavy lines. A young Truman sits cradling a brass instrument as Marlon belts out a trumpet solo. We see what Truman sees — a girl sitting on the grass with several other girls. Marlon attempts to distract him and a man crouches down near the girl, who has long hair and dark eyes. An obviously contrived accident occurs and a pig-tailed girl who apologises profusely introduces herself as Meryl. When Truman looks back to where the other girl was seated her bag is still there but she has gone.

The twangy guitar sounds of 'Twentieth Century Boy' play as Truman dances with the girl who landed in his lap. He sees a turquoise bracelet and the smiling face of the girl from the park. She is hustled away and the camera, moving amongst the dancers, conveys Truman's feelings of helplessness. From there we move to a library and a book is conveniently shifted to enable direct access to a camera. Unlike the peep-hole views, which are the shots seen by the audience, the scene with Truman and Lauren whispering is a private one. He notices that she wears a badge with the slogan 'How's It Going To End?' and we realise that this refers to the program in which he is the unwitting star.

The difference between the images seen by a hidden camera and the images seen directly through Truman's eyes is brought out when a photographer tries to follow Truman and Lauren leaving the library. A panning shot detects them running away

and the out-of-focus bushes in front of the lens signify that no closer camera set-ups are available. Therefore, the next sequence, with Truman and Lauren chatting and kissing at the water's edge must be simply what they experience. As she had predicted, Lauren is followed. She barely has time to impart the information that her real name is Sylvia (in other words that Lauren is a character she is playing) before an actor playing her father arrives.

The shaky vision of Truman and Sylvia/Lauren is a result, no doubt, of a camera placed on the clothing of Lauren's father. Truman hears from the girl that everything is fake and that his whereabouts are known by all but he does not comprehend. Lauren's father tells him that he is going to Fiji, before driving away and leaving Truman with the memento of a red cardigan.

We return to the women at the diner, discussing why Truman did not follow Sylvia. In a comment typical of the multiple levels on which this film operates, the women's employer notices the sequence they are watching and remarks that they have 'already got it on the greatest hits tape.' While Truman buries his face in Sylvia's cardigan a romantic piano concerto surges on the soundtrack. He takes out a collage from the back of a framed photograph of Meryl and attempts to piece together a facsimile of the face of Sylvia. As he does so, we see the real Sylvia watching the program. Her eyes fill with tears because she knows what Truman is trying to do.

A new morning's drive to work for Truman is signified by the lozenge-shaped view of him from behind his car radio. The flickering numbers and letters suggest that something is awry and when Truman bashes his console, the static stops. It is replaced by the sound of instructions issued to the vast crew of extras moving around the artificial city. A high-pitched noise succeeds the director of photography's voice and as Truman is affected by it he notices that everyone clutches their ears and ceases moving. Clearly, they have earplugs that receive transmitted messages telling them precisely what to do and where to go.

Truman sees a newspaper headline referring to the homeless, complete with a picture of his father,

and as he walks his expression becomes increasingly confused. He is seen from a great distance, looking suspiciously at everything around him. One image of him comes via a rear-vision mirror, which swivels to take in his shifting stance. He sits at a plaza and cameras zoom in on his face, which registers alarm at the sight of a sinister figure in a hat scurrying away.

▣ Reality dawns

Stepping in front of a bus, Truman is surprised at how immediately the driver brakes. His hands outstretched, Truman turns amongst the rest of the traffic, recognition of his special status dawning on him. Like the central figure in Weir's previous film *Fearless*, he feels that he exists in a special dimension. He rushes into a building and we notice the startled faces of the security guards and people occupying a lift. A door to a second lift opens, revealing that it has no back wall. Extras rush from view and Truman is thrown out of the building, hitting a man on a ladder in a gesture of token defiance as he goes.

He clutches his briefcase like a security blanket and heads towards the shop where Marlon works. A striking camera set-up from the back of a shelf allows us to see Truman and Marlon talking while Marlon packs objects. As Truman and Marlon rush from the shop, they are seen through the convex lens of a security mirror. Once they are seated drinking beer, Marlon comments on how perfect the sunset is. He also refers to the 'big guy', meaning God, but with applicability to Christof, the god-like director of the show.

We see a photograph album full of images of Truman. He is dressed in his characteristic conservative jumper, squeezed between his mother and wife. He is bored by the old snaps, although he notices that Mount Rushmore, site of a carving of several US Presidents, seems small. No doubt the young Truman was filmed in front of a theatrical prop, as the reaction of the two women suggests. Their desire to keep Truman on the domestic front is aided by the TV program 'Show Me The Way To Go Home' which they switch on before they leave. But as he flicks through the pages of the album, Truman notices a wedding photo of Meryl

and, with the aid of a magnifying glass, he notices that her fingers are crossed.

Next we see the immaculate rooftops of the dormitory suburbs lit by a sunrise just as perfect as the sunset that had been noticed by Marlon. The freshly-scrubbed Meryl talks about an operation she must attend but after she leaves on her bike, Truman decides to follow her. Dressed incongruously in a sports jacket over checked trousers, he rides off, seen through a curved aperture. A similar shaped lens is used when Truman reaches the hospital. The nurse he talks to is also seen through a fish-eye lens and as Truman races along the corridor we are aware of how impediments are placed in his way. The pretence of reality is carried through even to the extent of having someone lying on an operating table.

The posters at the tourist bureau Truman visits are amusing because they are directed solely at him. Their message of fear about terrorists and lightning strikes are the type of things that are inconceivable in such a setting. With his tartan suitcase and cap and his striped tracksuit top, Truman seems like a caricature of an American traveller. Failing to book a flight to Fiji, he tries to take a bus. All of the passengers stare resolutely forwards, apart from a girl who recognises Truman as the star of a TV show. The bus driver forces the engine to overheat and one of the many memorable images in this film occurs when the passengers leave hurriedly and Truman is left by himself.

A brief discussion between waiters and customers who look up to a TV screen showing 'The Truman Show' is followed by the sight of Truman's neighbour and Meryl. The neighbour clutches an empty bin, which plainly contains a hidden camera and Truman explains to Meryl what he has learnt about the world he inhabits. He realises that several seemingly random occurrences are actually people on a loop. Meryl's inanity infuriates him and he locks the car doors.

The attempt to leave the city is a visual *tour de force* (a feat requiring unusual ingenuity). At first Truman drives around a roundabout expounding on the evils of being spontaneous. Then he drives down a cobbled road, only to be blocked by the

sudden appearance of cars from every side street. It is, as Truman rightly observes, a 'beautifully synchronised' movement. Truman's erratic driving and his hysterical laughter, along with the agitated percussion beat, give an impression of barely controlled forces, and Meryl's anxiety is real, particularly when Truman forces her to steer over the bridge.

As if on cue, a sign warning of a forest fire appears. The fire itself — a burst of flame that crosses the road — is obviously manipulated by an unseen force. The newly liberated Truman cries out 'do you want to do it again?' to a frightened Meryl. The images alternate from a shot of the car from a mounted position to a view from behind the dashboard — both seen through a fish-eye lens. From the small-scale fire there is a shift to a large-scale faked disaster — a leak at the Seahaven Nuclear Power Plant. The roadblock looks genuine but Truman's suspicions that he is the victim of a conspiracy are confirmed when a state trooper he has never previously met says 'You're welcome, Truman'.

He attempts to fight the workmen, who are dressed in silver suits with face masks, which make them look like figures from a 1950s science fiction film. They have cameras implanted in their headpieces which allow the viewers to see Truman thrashing out with a stick, before he is brought to the ground.

The pressure that Truman's growing realisation of his predicament is having on Meryl is evident in the next sequence. She switches from her normal, dimpled smile, when talking to some state troopers, to a worried expression when she addresses Truman, and then to a manic look when she lapses into an advertising promotion. Both characters are seen from each other's eyes thanks to circular lenses of differing shapes. Meryl grabs a set of knives and brandishes them at a startled Truman. She then looks to a camera in the ceiling and cries out 'Do something' to the director who is watching the scene unfold. Soon afterwards Marlon opens the front door, his customary six-pack in hand. A relieved Meryl hugs him, saying 'How can they expect me to carry on under these conditions? It's not professional'.

The next scene plays on the viewer's expectations of the medium of film. Truman and Marlon sit on

the edge of a pier discussing Truman's consciousness that 'everyone seems to be in on' a ploy involving him. The music is slow and suggestive of his troubled state of mind. Marlon pauses frequently in a way that we assume results from his difficulty in finding the right word. That turns out to be the case, but not due to any sensitivity on his part but due to the fact that he is listening to lines of dialogue transmitted to his earplug, which he delivers as soon as he has heard them.

We are made aware of this when a camera pans across the faces of the director and other crew members, watching intently as images of Truman and Marlon are shown on a giant monitor. There is a chilling irony in Marlon's knack of saying the line 'The last thing I would ever do is lie to you' with a catch in his voice only moments after Christof has whispered these words. Marlon's trustworthiness seems to be borne out by his producing Truman's father. As his father walks towards Truman we hear and see Christof instruct the technicians to reduce the amount of fog. Then we are allowed in on the sort of instructions that the director of a sporting telecast must regularly issue — orders to shift from 'crane cam' to 'button cam' and so on.

The television images are observed by the two waitresses at the diner and a new pair — two old ladies sitting on a couch. Christof has a number of musicians play the regular 'fade up' music and we see the face of a tearful Truman embracing his father. Audience members in Japan and technicians in the studio also embrace and a weary Christof, wrung out from his artistic efforts, is congratulated by the show's producers.

A rapid change of mood occurs with a shot of Sylvia staring at her TV screen. As no action is being filmed at the moment she sees an image of Truman drinking coffee while an advertising slogan scrolls across the screen. This dissolves into a series of stills from pivotal moments in the show's thirty-year history. We see Truman's birth, his first steps, his awkward adolescence and his marriage. A typical American newscaster's voice is heard and this turns out to belong to the host of a weekly program devoted to analysing 'The Truman Show'.

The journalist interviews Christof, who is positioned in his production centre that also serves as the moon that hangs over Seahaven.

In answering questions, Christof's words are complemented by snippets from past episodes that demonstrate moments when the gap between reality and artifice seemed set to be exposed. He admits that he faced the difficulty of manufacturing ways of keeping Truman on the island. When teachers and snarling dogs did not succeed, Kirk's 'drowning' was seen as the best solution. It worked to the extent of engendering a fear of water in Truman, but the actor playing the father was annoyed and years later managed to break back onto the set.

Christof deals with straightforward questions about the number of cameras on the set. This allows us to be shown Truman in the womb and to be given the explanation of how this individual was chosen to be the focus of the show. Shots of sleeping newborns are followed by that of a naked child walking on the sand and a child in a cot staring at some dangling mobiles, among which is a camera. After further explanations of how the show is manufactured, Christof provides his view as to why Truman has remained oblivious to the truth until now: 'We accept the reality of the world with which we are presented'.

When Sylvia accuses him of being 'sick', Christof adopts the role of a parent convinced that he knows what is best for his child. Weir expands the scope of the film by offering us glimpses of posters in Sylvia's room as she paces backwards and forwards while talking on the phone to Christof. The posters bear the words 'Free Truman Rally' and depict Truman behind bars. The delusions of Christof are made fully explicit when he states that the world Sylvia inhabits — that is, the real world, is sick, whereas Seahaven 'is the way the world should be'. That Sylvia and Christof are locked in a fight for Truman's destiny is evident not only in their words but in the way both of them stroke images of Truman. Sylvia touches her TV screen and Christof gives a loving caress to Truman's sleeping face, as shown on a green-tinted moving image.

✘ Truman's escape

We see the sun rising over the rooftops of suburbia. Truman looks at himself in his bathroom mirror, as he had done in the opening minutes of the film. Two of the backstage workers, aware of the changes in Truman, are momentarily alarmed, until they see him draw the helmet of a spacesuit and make some funny sound effects. 'He's back to his old self again', they remark, as many hard-core Jim Carrey fans would have done at this point. Truman goes through his usual routine, waving to his neighbours and uttering his catch-phrase. However, we can discern an element of parody in the way Truman relates to the middle-aged twins and the jokes he cracks on the phone. Having heard Christof announce that Meryl is going to be written out of the show, we know that the beautiful, smiling girl Truman is introduced to is intended to be his new partner.

From a rather manic Truman mowing a patch of grass, the image shifts to the studio in the sky. One technician reads a paper, another rides an exercise bike and a third eats some yoghurt. To them there is no cause for alarm but Christof, who appears in his dressing gown, is more wary. He wanders away from the screen until a zoom to his face conveys the idea that there is something amiss. On discovering that Truman has left the basement Christof resorts to his stock solution — send in Marlon with a six-pack. Marlon races his red pick-up down the immaculate street and enters Truman's house. He rummages around the props Truman has left, which are reminiscent of the trick played in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) with a dummy and a tape recording of sleeping noises.

Marlon stands in front of a wall map of Fiji and when it retracts both he and Christof are amazed to find a tunnel they did not know existed. The convention that the actors behave as if they are unaware of the camera's presence is broken because Marlon is faced with an unforeseeable problem — the disappearance of the person around whom the show is based. Christof can think of nothing except ceasing transmission, which so shocks the waitress at 'The Truman Bar' that she drops a glass. The two old ladies are startled at the lack of pictures from the show to which they are addicted

and Christof walks among his staff, who are desperately trying to locate Truman.

The Seahaven moon is used as a searchlight to sweep the island and alarms are rung as we see the actors and extras marching twenty and thirty abreast down the streets. Their feet stamp out a sinister beat, augmenting the insistent music on the soundtrack and the harsh growl of a dog on a leash. Each performer has linked arms and they either carry a flashlight or wear infrared glasses. Marlon talks to the director of photography and one of the twins stresses the need to 'find the son of a bitch'.

Christof, becoming impatient, decides to 'cue the sun' and the unexpected light dazzles the cast. The producers express their worries and then we see the actors 'assuming first positions.' In other words, they all stand still at various points on the enormous set until told to move. Again, the camera comes closer to Christof, who understands the workings of Truman's mind. He realises that the sea is the only unexplored option and his face is seen in close-up as he stares at the bank of monitors.

Once Truman is located, transmission resumes and audience members, such as a bald man in a bath, become captivated. Bets are taken as to Truman's chances of survival and customers are told to go away from shops. The stirring sound of a string orchestra is heard as Christof switches cameras on the boat from a mast shot to a view of Truman wearing a nautical hat with his hand on the tiller. To Christof, image is everything, for he describes this as a 'hero shot', ignoring the fact that it signifies Truman's determination to leave the false world created for him. Truman unfolds the collage he has pieced together of a woman's face and as he looks at something that is very similar to Sylvia the real person sheds tears of joy.

A plan to send another boat out fails because the man we saw playing the part of the bus-driver with the grinding gears has no more luck with a different kind of machine. On being asked how Truman is to be stopped Christof does not speak but merely looks to his second-in-command. This person realises that they are going to 'access the weather program' and he searches on his computer

screen for the desired sort of weather. The storm is localised over the boat and our next image of Truman is of him saturated and tangled in the rigging as he endeavours to haul in a sail.

Christof now takes command. The view of him is head-on as he calls on bolts of lightning to strike Truman's vessel, just as King Lear called on the heavens to send lightning to his ungrateful children. Truman falls into the water and one of the camera angles is of the boat's wheel spinning uselessly. A heavy percussion beat and the plaintive sound of a soprano voice hint at Truman's imminent demise. Then, when Christof brushes aside the remark 'he was born in front of an audience' the full extent of his madness is clear.

Yet, Truman manages to scramble back on board the boat and wrap a rope around his body. Christof leaves his seat and is stunned by the mocking question, 'Is that the best you can do?' Truman is prepared to drown and, as none of the other production staff want to be involved, Christof operates the program that increases the wind. We see Truman's boat capsize and his body is photographed from under the water. Thinking that he may have killed him, Christof turns off the stormy weather and as the boat rights itself Truman is able to run a sail up the mast again. A long shot of the studio shows some fifty people watching what they must know will be the ending of the show.

Truman expects that he will sail for a long time but if we look carefully we can observe that the sky he is sailing towards is a painted one. His boat's prow crashes into the edge of the set, which we had earlier been informed is only the second man-made object, apart from the Great Wall of China, that is able to be seen from space. After Truman touches the wall a long view shows his boat against a large blue and white surface. He repeatedly smashes his shoulder and fist against the unyielding material and there is a brief possibility that the film may end like Andrej Wajda's *Kanal* (1956), in which a group of escapees come up against a grate and can go no further.

The next image, however, is of Truman walking along the edge of the set, in very shallow water. He is shown from a distance as he reaches a number of camouflaged steps. Before Truman turns the handle of a door marked 'Exit' Christof positions himself so that he may talk to his creation. He whispers to Truman, but his voice, coming from the clouds, seems like the voice of God. Christof describes himself as the creator of a television show 'that gives hope and joy and inspiration to millions'. Truman, as Christof points out, was the only real thing on the show but he tries to convince him to remain in his pretend world because there he has 'nothing to fear'.

We see the back of Truman's head as Christof, in a seemingly loving way, recounts incidents from his life, such as the episode in which he lost his first tooth. Truman's silence begins to annoy Christof and when he calls on him to speak Truman stuns him by saying 'And if I don't see you — good afternoon, good evening and good night.' He then bows before stepping into a void. An exultant Sylvia rushes downstairs, intending to go to him. The man in the bath angrily splashes his water while the people at the bar and the men at the garage are excited. The music is distinctively Philip Glass, with arpeggios (notes sounded separately in rapid succession then coming together) and chiming bells. A producer calls on a technician to cease transmission and a bereft Christof clutches a screen, which only shows flickering white on a blue background. The final irony comes in the off-hand way in which the car park attendants, who only moments before had been elated, now turn to each other and ask, 'What else is on? Where's the TV guide?'



ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- ▶ *The Truman Show* is a film which shows us how images construct reality. Truman's world is entirely constructed as a television program, and the viewers of the program have made it part of their own lives: Truman's life is constructed for them. What does this tell us about how powerful images can be in constructing what we see as 'reality'?
- ▶ What images are used to convey the perfect, clean, happy world of Seahaven in the early stages of the film?
- ▶ What purpose is served by the repeated use of a lozenge or oval-shaped lens?
- ▶ The idyllic 1950s world of Seahaven is lovingly created by Christof. He says at one point that Seahaven is 'the way the world should be'. What does the film suggest about the reality that lies behind this image?
- ▶ What kind of images are used to depict the audiences watching Truman on television? How do these contrast with the artificial world of Seahaven?
- ▶ When Truman attempts to drive out of Seahaven with Meryl, he is thwarted at every turn. How do these scenes contrast with the earlier scenes in the film? What visual techniques are used to show Truman's increasing frustration and feelings of entrapment?
- ▶ When Christof cuts the transmission after Truman disappears, how do the television audiences react? Notice the effect of the blank screen on the viewers — they are used to seeing these images 24 hours a day.
- ▶ Look at the change in Truman as he sails toward the boundaries of his artificial world. How has his appearance changed? What visual cues are we given to suggest that this is the 'real' Truman as opposed to the 'false' Truman of the television program? Compare these scenes to those when we first encounter Truman. What has changed?
- ▶ Note that a similar comparison between television's manufactured images and the reality that lies beneath them occurs in the film *Pleasantville* (1998).