



Finding Your Way: The Films of Peter Weir

The Truman Show

The Truman Show

Director: Peter Weir

Production Companies: Paramount Pictures,

Scott Rudin Productions

Executive Producer: Lynn Pleshette

Producers: Scott Rudin, Andrew Niccol,

Edward S. Feldman, Adam Schroeder

Co-producer: Richard Luke Rothschild

Unit Production Managers: Richard Luke Rothschild,

Joseph P. Kane

Production Auditor: Crystal A. Hawkins

Location Manager (Florida): Andrew Ullman

Location Manager (L.A.): Christopher Trott

Post-production Supervisor: Rosemary Dority

2nd Unit Director: Micheal J. McAlister

1st Assistant Director: Alan B. Curtiss

Script Supervisor: Wilma Garscadden-Gahret

Casting: Howard Feuer

Written by: Andrew Niccol

Director of Photography: Peter Biziou

Camera Operator: Don Reddy

Visual Effects Supervisor: Micheal J. McAlister

Special Visual Effects: Inc Cinesite

Digital Compositing: The Computer Film Company

3D Matte Paintings: Matte World Digital

Additional Visual Effects: Available Light Inc,

EDS, Stirber Visual Network Inc

Boat Effects Designer: Peter Chesney

Special Effects: Larz Anderson

Special Atmospheric Effects: Bolan Jet Air

Graphic Designer: Eric Rosenberg

Computer Displays: Neil Clark

Editors: William Anderson, Lee Smith

Additional Film Editing: Kevin D. Ross

Production Designer: Dennis Gassner

Special Design Consultant: Wendy Stites

Art Director: Richard L. Johnson

Set Designers: Thomas Minton, Odin R. Oldenburg

Property Master: Douglas Harlocker

Costume Designer: Marilyn Matthews

Jim Carrey's Costumer: Robert Mata

Make-up Artist Supervisors: Ron Berkeley,

Brad Wilder

Jim Carrey's Make-up Artist: Sheryl Ptak

Hairstylist Supervisors: Bette Iverson, Hazel Catmull

Jim Carrey's Hairstylist: Anne Morgan

Titles: Cinema Research Corporation

Tru-Talk Title Sequence Design: Imaginary Forces

Opticals: Pacific Title

Original Music by: Burkhard Dallwitz

Additional Original Music by: Philip Glass

Music Editor: Bunny Andrews

Sound Design: Lee Smith

Production Sound: Art Rochester

Boom Operators: Linda Murphy, Randy Johnson

Re-recording Mixers: Phil Heywood, Martin Oswin

Dialogue Editors: Tim Jordan, Andrew Plain

Effects Editors: Rick Lisle, Peter Townend

Stunt Co-ordinator: Pat Banta

Animals Provided by: Birds and Animals Unlimited

Animal Trainer: Cheryl Harris, Tammy Blackburn

Cast:

Truman's World

Jim Carrey (*Truman Burbank*)

Laura Linney (*Meryl*)

Noah Emmerich (*Marlon*)

Natascha McElhone (*Lauren/Sylvia*)

Holland Taylor (*Truman's mother*)

Brian Delate (*Truman's father*)

Blair Slater (*young Truman*)

Peter Krause (*Lawrence*)

Heidi Schanz (*Vivien*)

Ron Taylor (*Ron*)

Film critics and preview audiences occasionally experience something extraordinary: they get to see a film absolutely cold, before it is written about, discussed, excerpted and trailed into ubiquity, before their friends feel unable to keep themselves from re-narrating the best bits. I feel extremely lucky to have walked into a preview of *The Truman Show* several months ago completely ignorant of its story. By now, most inquisitive filmgoers will already know the central conceit: Truman Burbank, to all appearances a 30-year-old insurance salesman in a superficially happy marriage, is unaware that he's also the star of a TV show. Consequently, they will be robbed of the aesthetic bliss of seeing, like Truman himself, the trick revealed piece by piece.

Despite the reservations voiced elsewhere about the film's philosophical depth, there's no denying that director Peter Weir shows his hand and conceals it with charming dexterity. The film gives it all away at the start with an opening 'credits sequence' for the series-within-the-film, but it's easy not to understand what's going on. Truman's wife Meryl (Laura Linney with sinister, apple-cheeked irony) calls Truman's existence and her own 'a truly blessed life'. The series' creator Christof (dressed all in black like a cross between a coke dealer and a kabuki stagehand) explains that, 'Nothing you see here is faked. It's merely controlled.' (This omniscience recalls the hippie-transcendent notion that 'everything happens at exactly the right time' in Weir's first feature *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, which now seems like an eerie pre-echo of *The Truman Show*.) Gradually, we realise the extent of this control and that the darkened, weirdly angled shots are not affected cinematic mannerisms from Weir and Co, but subjective views of cameras within the diegesis. By the time Meryl is extolling, with an unnatural degree of enthusiasm, the virtues of a slicing-peeling-paring kitchen gadget (which will become a comical weapon later on) many viewers tuned into the insincere, television tone-of-voice that cues product placement will already have 'got it'.

Yet even if you know *The Truman Show's* big joke, there are many lesser ones to savour. As with the kitchen gadget, the film delights in showing the hidden, evil nature of innocuous props and set dressing: the outsize moon (scale is wonderfully skewed here – look out for the gag about Mount Rushmore) is Christof's observation deck; the too-friendly, floppy-eared dog next door turns into a snarling attacker when the town goes looking for the missing Truman. Echoing the dome that encases this world, much play is made out of circles and cycles and repetitions: a golf ball is used to explain that Fiji, where Truman's true love is meant to have flown, is so much on the other side of the world that 'you can't get any further away before you start coming back.' Similarly, it's in a revolving door that Truman's rebellion begins.

Of course, a major paradoxical gag is the casting of Carrey in the lead, his character endowed with a first name that's just a bit too much of an allegorical nudge. He is an actor who has built a career on a kind of manic insincerity, which made him perfectly suited if irritating as a lawyer who's jinxed into telling the truth for a day in *Liar Liar*. Here, he's supposed to be the only 'sincere' person in his world, the only one who's not lying (although he later learns deception). And yet, with his gestures large as if he's trying to touch the outsized moon, his smile a row of blank Scrabble tiles, there's a sense even in

Don Taylor (*Don*)
 Ted Raymond (*Spencer*)
 Judy Clayton (*travel agent*)
 Fritz Dominique, Angel Schmiedt,
 Nastassja Schmiedt (*Truman's neighbours*)
 Muriel Moore (*teacher*)
 Mal Jones (*news vendor*)
 Judson Vaughn (*insurance co-worker*)
 Earl Hilliard Jr (*ferry worker*)
 David Andrew Nash (*bus driver/ferry captain*)
 Jim Towers (*bus supervisor*)
 Savannah Swafford (*little girl in bus*)
 Antoni Corone (*security guard*)
 Mario Ernesto Sánchez (*security guard*)
 John Roselius (*man at beach*)
 Kade Coates (*Truman, four years*)
 Marcia DeBonis (*nurse*)
 Sam Kitchin (*surgeon*)
 Sebastian Youngblood (*orderly*)
 Dave Corey (*hospital security guard*)
 Mark Alan Gillott (*policeman at power plant*)
 Jay Saiter, Tony Todd
 (*policemen at Truman's house*)
 Marco Rubeo (*man in Christmas box*)
 Daryl Davis, Robert Davis (*couple at picnic table*)
 R.J. Murdock (*production assistant*)
 Matthew McDonough, Larry McDowell
 (*men at newstand*)
 Joseph Lucus (*ticket taker*)
 Logan Kirksey (*TV host*)
Christof's World
 Ed Harris (*Christof*)
 Paul Giamatti, Adam Tomei
 (*control room directors*)
 Harry Shearer (*Mike Michaelson*)
 Una Damon (*Chloe*)
 Philip Baker Hall, John Pleshette
 (*network executives*)
 Philip Glass, John Pramik (*keyboard artists*)
The Viewers
 O-Lan Jones, Krista Lynn Landolfi (*bar waitresses*)
 Joe Minjares (*bartender*)
 Al Foster, Zoanne Leroy, Millie Slavin (*bar patrons*)
 Terry Camilleri (*man in bathtub*)
 Dona Hardy, Jeanette Miller (*senior citizens*)
 Joel McKinnon Miller, Tom Simmons
 (*garage attendants*)
 Susan Angelo (*mother*)
 Carly Smiga (*daughter*)
 Yuji Okumoto, Kiyoko Yamaguchi,
 Saemi Nakamura (*Japanese family*)
 USA 1998
 103 mins
 Digital 4K

With thanks to
 Peter and Ingrid Weir

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 released on BFI Blu-ray on 25 May

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the earliest scenes that he's performing for the cameras – which would be
 logical for someone around whom life had been choreographed since he was
 an infant.

What makes Carrey's self-regarding, class-clown persona so useful to the film
 is that it buttresses perhaps its most central theme: solipsism. Many have read
The Truman Show as an allegory of how television obsessively watches us, of
 Bentham-Foucault's panopticon gone digitally out of control. What's more
 poignant and haunting is that it's really about how we all secretly want to be on
 television and see ourselves as the stars of our own home-life movies; it is
 impossible to leave the cinema after seeing *The Truman Show* and not, at
 some point, wonder if the world is watching, not experience a flicker of
 identification with Truman (who has already been rehearsing different roles in
 front of his mirror every morning, before he becomes aware of the plot around
 him).

This is nothing new. Solipsism is one of the defining tropes of literary
 modernism, threading through Joyce's *Ulysses* and most of Nabokov's work,
 Borges' fiction and almost every book by Philip K. Dick. But cinema and
 television have appropriated the theme with problematic results. In a book, the
 reader is always aware that a single authorial presence is playing
 puppetmaster; writing itself is a solipsistic process. Film's collaborative nature
 tugs it into the social realm. What is more, it seldom comfortably
 accommodates purely subjective viewpoints. We gradually come to realise that
 these weird shots of Truman in the beginning are the cameras' views of him,
 but who is filming Christof in his observatory? What being watches Sylvia
 watching Truman inside her flat?

Still, *The Truman Show* is a moving exploration of creation-anxiety, of the fear
 and hope that in a post-Darwinian world the only beings with real power are
 distant public figures and malevolent unknown forces ringfencing our capacity
 for free will. Solipsism haunts us because it's both a comfort and a terror to
 think that someone, something has laid all this on for us, but in fiction like
The Truman Show characters get to make the last moves. I won't give it away
 here, but the conclusion of the film is both satisfying and chillingly ambiguous:
 Truman and the viewers get to decide – to paraphrase the series' tagline
 blazoned on buttons and T-shirts worn by the show's viewers – how it's going
 to end.

Leslie Felperin, *Sight and Sound*, October 1998