



SCREEN ARCHITECTURE, FILM THEORY, AND EMOTION CUING

*Sea, Sun, Small Town USA in *The Truman Show**

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In this paper, I propose to examine different tools that can be used to study screen architecture, and I will focus on the representation of an American small town, Seahaven in *The Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998). My main tool is recent research on the emotions by cognitivist film theorists. Film cognitivists work on the links between emotions and structure, yet for them 'structure' means the architecture *of* the film rather than *in* the film. They study narration and how films evoke emotions in audiences. In other words if, as I believe, film cognitivism can be used as an inspiration for my research on screen architecture — because it opens fascinating vistas — I need to adapt it to my needs and customize it by combining it with other methods.

Filmic Emotions

Cinema studies have long neglected emotions as a topic of study, but they were not alone as, from the fifties to the seventies, few academic disciplines gave real attention to this topic. Interest in cognitive theories of emotions gained momentum in the 1980's and these theories inspired reflections in the field of cinema. Within the last ten years or so, in the English-speaking world, a number of books and articles have been written on the subject of 'film, cognition and emotion' by cognitivists such as — to name some prominent scholars in the field — David Bordwell, Noël Carroll, Torben Grodal, Greg M. Smith, and Ed S. Tan. 'Cognitivism' is a mix of psychology and philosophy. Carroll writes :

Throughout the eighties, [...] there was an attempt by people like me and David Bordwell to field an approach to film theory that offers an alternative to the psychoanalytic-Marxist-semiotic theory which has been disseminated most notably by Screen and which is, especially when amplified by Lacanian feminism, the dominant approach to film theory in the English-speaking world today. This alternative approach has been labeled 'cognitivism' because of the emphasis that it places on the efficacy of models that exploit the role of cognitive processes, as opposed to unconscious processes. (TMI 321)

'Filmic emotion' is a difficult notion to define. First of all, whose emotion are we talking about? The viewer's (this is mostly what the cognitivists are concerned with), or the emotions expressed by the characters, — or even, as has been argued, the emotions of the film itself?¹ Personally, to study the filmic representation of the town in *The Truman Show*, I find it necessary to focus *both* on shots concerned with architecture and see how they affect the viewer, and on the protagonist's emotions in so far as they are linked to the urban setting and shed light on it.

Secondly, what exactly is an emotion? Various definitions can be found, frequently opposing an 'emotion' to a 'feeling'. The main distinctions between emotions and feelings are often made in terms of duration and intensity: emotions are briefer and more violent than feelings. In *L'Expression du sentiment au cinéma*, Gilles Menegaldo provides a helpful definition of both notions, stressing their differences.² Dominique Sipièrè for his part draws a typology of active, passive, positive and negative emotions, and explains that emotions occur in a context where the mind loses control over the body.³ Cognitivists, like Grodal, include yet another characteristic:

The terms are used to distinguish between object-directed and non-object-directed qualities. Feelings are often non-object directed (I feel sad, happy, and so on), whereas emotions often have an object-directed quality; strong emotions like love, hate, or jealousy are often object-directed, but romantic feelings are often non-object-directed (MP 4).

Adding a pinch of salt, Carroll, for one, does not make a distinction between 'emotion' and 'feeling' and uses the terms interchangeably; he speaks of 'affect' where everyday speech might talk of 'emotion' and reserves the term 'emotion' for a subclass of affects, namely 'cognitive emotions', i.e., affects that include cognitive elements (FEG 21). For him 'suspense' is also an emotion (FEG 42-46). As for Tan, he thinks of emotions as action-tendencies, and to him the central emotion in film viewing is 'interest' (ESNF). Despite those differences in definitions, what is ultimately

¹ In "Larmes du cinéma", Jean-Louis Leutrat speaks of dissolves as the tears of cinema, that is capable of crying. In *L'Expression du sentiment au cinéma*. Claude Murcia & Gilles Menegaldo (eds.).

² Menegaldo writes: « Le terme 'émotion' implique étymologiquement l'idée d'un mouvement, d'une réaction face à des circonstances empiriques, un objet concret. L'émotion a un caractère explosif ou incontrôlé et signale une relative inadéquation du sujet par rapport à la situation qui la fait naître. Elle peut se caractériser par des manifestations physiques qui fonctionnent comme symptômes : la rougeur ou la pâleur d'un visage, la sueur, le tremblement des mains, les cheveux hérissés, etc. Le sentiment suppose des mécanismes plus diversifiés et subtils et peut se définir comme un état intérieur souvent intense mais qui ne se traduit pas nécessairement dans des manifestations extérieures visibles, d'autant qu'il suppose parfois (c'est le cas du fantastique) une certaine confusion de la conscience, une perception problématique, incertaine du monde, mais aussi du sujet lui-même. (...) [L]e sentiment implique un processus plus ou moins rapide, et il s'installe dans la durée alors que l'émotion est sans doute plus fugitive, plus immédiatement rattachée à un objet précis » (*ibid.*, 138).

³ « Comme la ligne qui sépare les émotions des sentiments reste un peu trop floue, il est possible de limiter le terme 'émotions' à ce qui provoque des effets physiques lisibles en nous grâce à des symptômes tels que le rire, le cri, l'érection, les frissons (ou la transpiration, etc.) et les larmes. Bref, on dira qu'il y a émotion quand le corps parle au delà de ce que nous lui avons demandé d'exécuter ». In « Émotions de la politique, politiques de l'émotion »

important to bear in mind is that today, in a cognitive perspective, emotions are not anarchical feelings but on the contrary structured states of mind.

Architecture and emotions

The two climaxes of *The Truman Show* are the father-son reunion [56' 20], and the extended storm at sea followed by Truman's rescue and his realization that the sky is, literally, the limit [1h 20' 00]. The musical leitmotifs play a major part in the emotional appeal of these segments and would deserve an in-depth study which is beyond the scope of this paper. The two sequences perfectly exemplify different cognitivist theories, for instance what Tan calls 'sentiment' or 'sentimental emotion', i.e. 'an emotion characterized by an urge to cry or a state of being moved with a strength in excess to the importance we attach to its reason. (...) [It] mostly occurs as a response to the fate of others. (...) [It has] a certain measure of gratuitousness' (SFV 49). Tan identifies three major emotional themes that are particularly conducive to provoking sentimental emotions, and the *separation-reunion theme* is one of them. To him, these themes appeal to 'possibly idealized, paradisiacal childhood memories of being completely accepted or being part of some absolute, uncorrupted purity, or at least desires for such a state' (SFV 49). This corresponds to what Freud in *The Future of an Illusion* calls the 'oceanic feeling'. The separation-reunion theme is central to both climaxes: Truman finally meets his two 'fathers', first his missing genitor, and then Christof, the creator of the television show of which he is the unwitting star.

In the first climax, the reunion occurs on a foggy bridge, at night. Visually, this piece of architecture is a mere background, a nondescript structure which is part of an almost abstract landscape where the two figures stand; at the same time, the bridge plays a most significant role as what I would call an 'emotional prop' that symbolically 'condenses' the meaning of the scene. Indeed the dream-like atmosphere invites us to analyze the segment like a dream sequence where, in Freudian tradition, the bridge literalizes the emotional link and — thanks to the moving musical score — the overwhelming joy uniting father and son. The editing, which consists in a cross-cutting between the meeting and the television crew filming and watching it, alternatively constructs and deconstructs the landscape, thereby introducing a distance which further invites the spectator to analyze his or her emotions in front of a show.

In the second sequence, what seemed an outdoor location (the sea and the sky) reveals itself as nothing more than a TV studio (the sky is a painted wall which functions as a *trompe-l'oeil*) and, when Truman finally bows his way out, it turns into the stage of a theater. Because of the presence of a constructed set, we could speak of architecture here too, even though in a loose sense. It would be interesting to analyze Truman's facial expressions and his bodily gestures when he hits the wall in the terms of Tan who distinguishes 'F emotions', i.e. film-elicited emotions, responses to the fictional world that consist mainly of 'witness emotions' (they are 'empathetic emotions') from 'A emotions' which are evoked by admiration of the film as a film, as a man-made artifact (SFV 52) — which is the case

here. In this sequence, indeed, Truman's world is shattered when the setting is literally deconstructed and reduced to a set: the ship's mast pierces a hole in the sky which is nothing but a partition that breaks like an egg shell. The protagonist's silent cries, his faces and dramatic gestures underscored by the accents of the musical leitmotiv evoke a pantomime; what we witness is artificial/artistic despair — A emotions — choreographed for the stage and filmed, alternatively in close-up and long shot, by a camera.

In these two climaxes the setting (which is in fact a set) is used as a backdrop. This seems contrary to what happens in the rest of the film, where architectural structures (like houses or bridges) are quite prominent visually but where the emotional appeal on the viewer is weaker. This would suggest that strong emotions in the spectator do not coexist with the representation of architecture — at least not in *The Truman Show* since other examples can be found, like the house in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), where architecture is precisely the *locus* of strong emotions.

To study the relationship between what, in the rest of the film, amounts to the representation of US small-town architecture, I propose to turn to Greg M. Smith, a cognitivist film theorist who offers what he calls a 'mood-cue approach' (FSES). To prepare the ground, let me first have a look at the American small-town movie and focus on Seahaven.

American Small-Town Movies

Kenneth MacKinnon opens Hollywood's *Small Towns: An Introduction to the American Small-Town Movie* with the discussion of a puzzling quote from Leslie Halliwell's *Filmgoer's Companion*:

Small towns were for many years the staple of the American cinema. Most audiences were small-town folk, and wanted to see slightly idealized versions of themselves. Thus the popularity of the happy families, the Hardys and the Joneses: thus *Our Town*, *The Human Comedy*, *Ah Wilderness*, *The Music Man* and *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*. The darker side of small-town life was shown in *The Chase*, *King's Row*, *Peyton Place* and *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (...). (5)

Halliwell's explanation for the popularity of small-town movies — movies attracting mostly small-town audiences — seems rather debatable, to say the least. To take the example of the seventies, some of the most commercially successful films of the decade — *American Graffiti* (George Lucas, 1973), *Carrie* (Brian De Palma, 1976) and *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978) — were small-town movies, but it is dubious that their international success had much to do with the rural origin of their audiences.

Another, more convincing explanation for the attractiveness of these films could be found in the feeling of nostalgia for a somewhat idealized American past that pervades them. 'Idealized past' should be specified since, obviously, the small town, both in reality and in its representation, is a place of contradictions; is at the same time a shrine of fundamental American values — the ideal New England village in the wilderness that was designed by the English settlers with a church at its heart, a homogeneous

community based on principles of egalitarianism, modesty and simplicity — and a place of conformism and hypocrisy, where lack of tolerance for one's neighbors helps fill the emptiness of provincial life. In his essay, « La 'petite ville'. Une nostalgie américaine », Jean Kempf, writing about photography, mentions that the heyday of the American small town corresponds to the years 1890-1910; he explains that in the 1920's and 30's the small town was in full decline and that simultaneously a nostalgia for the small town appeared in the field of representation (92, 89). Nostalgia can be found in other art forms, such as the theater with, for instance, Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town* (1938), and obviously in cinema, where the most famous example of an ideal small-town community is undoubtedly Bedford Falls in Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946).

After the Second World War a number of small towns were swallowed up by cities and became suburbs. In the late sixties and early seventies, as part of a back-to-the-land movement, small towns became popular again, but this comeback was minor (MacKinnon 5). Overall, the 20th century has witnessed what looks like the slow death of the small town yet, judging by the number of novels, plays, television series or films on the topic, this demise seems to have *fed* rather than *affected* the American imagination.

The *Truman Show* is yet another film that feeds on small-town nostalgia (it would not exist without it), however I would argue that it does not indulge in it. It is not a nostalgic film, contrary to *Pleasantville* (Gary Ross), also dating from 1998, in which the eponymous setting is a recycled black-and-white fifties TV-sitcom town which contrasts with the contemporary world shown in color — a film whose interest lies precisely in the gap between past and present, fiction and the real world that can be bridged thanks to what could be called 'visual metalepses'. There are no such devices in *The Truman Show* in which two separate worlds co-exist — Christof's TV studio, and the town of Seahaven.

Postcards from Seahaven / Seaside

The film was shot on location in Seaside, Florida. We see the setting very well in the opening sequence (which will be dealt with further down), and also in a series of quick long and extreme-long shots (lasting 2 to 5 seconds) that punctuate the film. Six of these shots (out of a total of eight) are static establishing shots, aerial views showcasing the architecture of Seahaven (the seventh shows a sunset on the beach, and the last one is a crane shot revealing the moonlit town and beach when Truman and Lauren are escaping to the beach).

Here is a description of these master shots which provide the spectator with a sort of guided tour of Seahaven. I have added two segments that show the heart and the periphery of the town and contribute to its 'mood'.

1. [08' 44] Long shot. Sunrise. This is an aerial view of some houses by the sea in soft pink, blue and cream colors. The point of view is from an

elevated porch. Birds are chirping away. A feeling of beauty, peace and harmony prevails.

2. [09' 13] Long shot. Day. It is an aerial view of Truman's neighborhood with trees in the foreground. Truman's pale yellow house is in the middle of the frame. The shades of grey and white, the pastel hues are soothing to the eye. The protagonist is mowing the lawn. The noise of the motor dissolves into one of the musical themes. Sound bridge to the reunion sequence featuring the bridge. Seahaven is shown as an organic and harmonious town that breathes between the greenery and the sky.

3. [11'05] Extreme long shot. Aerial view of Seahaven, the beach and the sea at night. A large moon is shining in the sky, its light reflected on the water's surface. The revolving beam from a lighthouse adds another source of light. There are only diegetic sounds: the tide and a screeching night owl. The mood is mysterious and somewhat ominous.

4. [13'50] Dawn. Extreme long shot. Aerial view of the town with the sea in the foreground. It can be seen as the reverse shot of 3, completing our view of the site of Seahaven. Spectacular clouds move in the sky (matte shot); the colors are blue, pink and grey. Mozart's *Piano Sonata # 11 in A Major*, 3rd Movement "Alla Turca". Seahaven and its beaches are shown as a paradise by the sea. Carefree and joyful mood.

5. [37' 38] Long shot. Sunrise in fast motion. Aerial view from an elevated porch revealing a panorama of towers and rooftops. It can be seen as the reverse shot of 1, completing our architectural overview. The hues are pink and grey. Mozart's *Horn Concerto #1 in D Major* mixes with ebullient bird song. Cheerful, perky mood.

6. [1h 07' 06] Long shot. Sunrise over the rooftops by the sea with a weather-wane dolphin. It is similar to shot 5 in its point of view from a porch and its colors. Piano chords (from Chopin's *Piano Concerto in E Minor*, Opus 11, 2nd Movement "Romance - Larghetto") can be heard mixed with the sound of chirping birds. There is an atmosphere of sweetness, peace and harmony. The shot acts as a transition and a sound bridge between the preceding sequence where Christof is stroking a screen with a giant image of Truman asleep, and Truman in his bathroom.

7. [1h 09' 02] It is a scene of dialogue between Truman and the twins in the town's center. Truman appears in front of a poster advertising 'Carlton Fine Colonial Homes'. In the last (high-angle) shot the three characters are standing and talking on either side of the poster which is in the center of the frame. It can now be seen in its entirety. It shows a row of beach cottages with high porches similar to the ones in Seahaven. *Mise en abyme* and, retrospectively, entrapment of the protagonist.

8. [40' 49] Truman has decided to leave Seahaven. The scene at the travel agency opens on a poster warning would-be adventurers of potential dangers and advising them to take out insurance against 'terrorists, disease, wild animals, street gangs'. The caption reads: 'Travellers Beware!' This dissuasive poster is the companion piece to another one which catches Truman's worried eye and adds to the tension. It shows a plane in mid-air

struck by a flash of lightning, and bears the inscription: 'It could happen to you'.

The first six shots depict the town at different times of day and night. They have a narrative function — they help break up the story into a number of sequences, corresponding to different days, and they mark the beginning (1, 3, 4, 5, 6) or the end (2) of each episode — and also, above all, they have a descriptive function. We are faced with tourist panoramas. Some of the shots are totally still and look like photographs or postcards (1, 6); others are animated by movements within the frame that reinforce the links between the town and nature: the small figure of Truman mowing the lawn (2), the revolving beam of a lighthouse over the sea (3), fast-moving clouds (4) or a speeded up sunrise (5). Diegetic sounds like the twittering of birds, as well as classical scores, together or separately, contribute to turn these shots into beautiful, timeless clichés.

We see what looks like generic small-town architecture: out-of-time wooden-frame cottages with elevated porches overlooking the sea. There is no monument that would distinguish this town from any other town by the sea. While these shots portray the fictional town of Seahaven, they also advertise the real estate of Seaside, Florida. If you check the Seaside and Seaside Institute Internet sites, you see that the town looks exactly the way it appears in the film. Unlike Tim Burton, who shot *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) on location in a suburb on which he did some cosmetic paint job, Peter Weir did not have to refurbish the houses for *The Truman Show*. The pastel hues of the beach cottages are the original colors, and the setting of the reality show within the film *is real*. Seaside, which opened in 1981, was conceived, planned and developed by Robert and Daryl Davis whose dream was to build a pedestrian-friendly community of cottages with picket fences and elevated porches to watch the sun set on the Gulf of Mexico. Our present shots are in keeping with the founders' ideas: in four of them we can watch the sun and the sea from the point of view of a fictional inhabitant on an elevated porch.

Besides having a documentary quality, these images show a scenic location at its most beautiful. The choice of the times of day — four times at dawn and once at night — contributes to make it a landscape of the imagination linked to sleep and to the world of dreams; it is the representation of the idea of a(n ideal) small town. These isolated shots contribute to establish a mood for the emotions of the film and could be defined in the terms of Greg M. Smith as combinations of 'mood cues'.

Architecture and Emotion (or Mood) Cuing

In his book *Film Structure and the Emotion System*, Smith asks himself how a film can maintain a consistent emotional appeal throughout its running time since emotions are brief states that cannot be sustained for long periods of time; so he tries to explain how films are structured to appeal to audiences' emotions (41). His main argument is that

the primary emotive effect of film is to create mood [and] film structures seek to increase the film's chances of evoking emotion by

first creating a predisposition toward experiencing emotion: a mood. Films rely on being able to elicit a lower-level emotional state, which can be established with less concentrated cuing than would be required for emotion. (...) To sustain a mood, we must experience occasional moments of emotion. Film must therefore provide the viewer with a periodic diet of brief emotional moments if it is to sustain the mood. Therefore, mood and emotion sustain each other. Mood encourages us to experience emotion, and experiencing emotions encourage us to continue in the present mood (42).

Smith proposes what he calls a 'mood-cue approach' to film and he assumes that the film 'will use coordinated sets of cues to signal an emotional orientation of the film as a whole' (44). He adds that 'the mood-cue approach satisfies the desideratum for an explanation of emotions across time' (44). What is a cue exactly? Smith defines it as

the smallest unit for analyzing a text's emotional appeal. (Emotions cues are the building blocks that are used to create the larger structures such as emotion markers. Mood is sustained by a succession of cues...) (47).

This definition is interesting to me in so far as it is very reminiscent of Christian Metz's definition of the figure — the figure being for Metz the smallest signifying unit in film (LC 99). We could therefore also define a cue as a *figure eliciting an emotion or a mood*. Cues seem to me the most useful tool for analyzing screen architecture since this approach can be used to deal with *any part* of the film and not only climactic episodes. Incidentally, and amusingly enough, the term 'cue' appears in a number of meanings in *The Truman Show*, as if the film was indeed, so to speak, calling for an emotion or mood cue approach: from Christof's 'no cue cards' in the opening shot, to the sentence 'Truman was the one who arrived on cue' via 'wait for the cue' and the most famous line of the film, Christof's 'cue the sun'.

The dominant mood in the shots described above is a combination of cheerfulness, lightness, harmony, stability and comfort. I would argue that six of the shots convey a *heimlich* mood as opposed to *unheimlich* in two others (2 and 8). The cues that make the hometown *heimlich* are

- The *mise-en-scène*. The long and extreme long shots show a harmonious whole while keeping us at the necessary distance for the landscape to be idealized.
- The colors and lighting: soft pastel hues, harmonious shades of orange, blue, grey, etc.
- The fixed camera. The shots are static and the absence of camera movements fixes the town in space and in time.
- The camera angles. The aerial views convey a sensation of loftiness.
- The sound. Sounds of twittering birds and/or a classical music score establish a cheerful, peppy mood and turn the town into an organic, well-rested body that breathes.
- In shot 7, a *mise en abyme*. Colonial architecture, inspired by the houses of the early settlers, can be said to express the American ideal of home. This poster is one is a series of three that can be seen

in the town center, praising a soothing, simple and natural way of life through, respectively, colonial architecture, hot chocolate, and free-range chicken.

On the other hand, the cues that make the outside of the town *unheimlich* are

- The darkness of night. It is linked to the sea and Truman's fear of water. This shot introduces the flashback of the shipwreck where Truman's father died.
- Disquieting noises: a night bird and the surf.
- The two posters in the travel agency.

We can add Truman's eccentric checkered cap and travel gear that add a comical, jarring note. His dress code already designates him as an outsider.

Many of these cues are redundant. Not all spectators react in the same way to one particular cue, and Smith explains that redundancy is necessary to indicate to the audience which emotional mood is called for.

The study by cognitivist film theorists of emotions (and moods for Smith) may lead to the redefining of genres (see, for example, Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* or Grodal's *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition*). These isolated shots — along with some others, especially in the opening sequence, as well as some lines of dialogue (e.g., Truman to Marlon: 'Don't you have itchy feet?' Marlon: 'Where is there to go?') — all form a structure that should be further analyzed to define a sub-genre: the 'small-town movie'. We see here that each isolated shot is in itself an autonomous world. These images convey the idea that the small-town is a fixed, self-contained universe (fixed yet not petrified, hence not nostalgic), and Seahaven in *The Truman Show* may remind one of New York as drawn by Saul Steinberg in his famous poster.

Architecture and Characters' Emotions

The opening sequence of the film introduces the protagonist and shows how he relates to his environment; he says good morning to his neighbors, witnesses a strange incident and, after a short drive to work that allows us to see the lay-out of the town, walks to his office through the pedestrian town center. Both Truman and Seahaven's architecture share the lead.

In the first shot [2' 39], Truman, on his doorstep, puts on his best Hollywood grin to greet his neighbors. In the title sequence we just saw him in his bathroom, in front of the mirror, expressing his anxiety: 'I'm not gonna make it. You'll have to go on without me'. As he shuts the door behind him and faces the outside world, Truman represses his emotions and, framed between the neoclassical stucco columns of his home and the fence in the foreground, he puts on a false front in keeping with the white façade. The blocking and the composition of the frame are characteristic of the whole film. Time and again, we see Truman in a cluttered frame, in the center of the image but in the middle ground, stuck between a foreground

and a background (elements of architecture, objects, animals, people) that leave him very little breathing space. He is imprisoned within the frame.

In the second shot, a smiling colored family (a couple with a child) wave at Truman beside their white picket fence. The next few shots show Truman's street — a row of shingle-style cottages with white picket fences — and two aerial views reveal the harmonious, new neighborhood and the brick road leading to the town center. What is seen of Seaside in the opening sequence perfectly illustrates the philosophy of Seaside, Florida, which is called 'the New Urbanism'. On the Internet site of the Seaside Institute, one can read:

The concept that guided the development of Seaside — the New Urbanism — has been embraced and adopted by an increasing number of scholars, developers, planners and critics. The principles of the New Urbanism underlie the Institute's approach to bettering civic life. (...) The built environment must be diverse in use and population. (...) [It] must be scaled for the pedestrian, yet capable of accommodating the auto and mass transit and must have a well-defined public realm supported by an architecture reflecting the ecology and culture of the region. (...) New Urbanism communities seek to bring to their residents new opportunities to experience neighborliness in their personal lives and facilitate greater participation in the life of the community.

According to the Seaside Institute, Seaside is 'the most successful example of neotraditional townplanning in existence today'.

The film shows a human-scale community accommodating pedestrians as well as car and mass transit. Truman takes his car while, in the background, a bus stops at the end of his block; the town center, built around a village green, is within short driving distance. It includes a car-free zone animated by a cheerful briefcase-carrying community of pedestrians who greet one another on their way to work, in the same way Truman greeted his neighbors across the street. Later on we see Meryl, Truman's wife, with her bike, 'ladies on red bikes', and Truman cycling to the hospital where Meryl works. So, for one thing, *The Truman Show* can be watched as an extended commercial for the New Urbanism.

While the opening sequence gives us an architectural tour of the town, it also reveals that the protagonist is afraid of dogs [2' 58]. Let me take the dog episode as an opportunity to exemplify Carroll's definition of an emotion. (I take the liberty of such a demonstration, even though Carroll does not speak of the character's emotions but of the viewer's, because for cognitivists the emotions caused by a film imply the same types of processes as emotions in the real world (PV 6), and the tools these theorists use to analyze the two worlds are the same.) In a nutshell, Carroll's cognitivist film philosophy is a 'philosophy of objects'; to him, and to Grodal alike, 'emotions take objects' (FEG 25). (For Smith, on the contrary, non-object-oriented emotional states exist, hence the 'mood-cue approach'). The object of Truman's fear is the dog. 'Emotions require cognitions as causes and bodily states as effects. (...) In fear, the object must meet the criterion of being harmful or, at least, of being perceived as harmful' (FEG 27). A combination of low and high angle shots contributes to destroy the balance of the seemingly stable environment. A low-angle shot reveals Truman

recoiling before the over-friendly Dalmatian, yet again a prisoner of the frame, stuck between the animal in the foreground, and his car and a house in the back. The angles and camera movements, together with a close-up on his worried face, his nervous gestures, followed by a more-fake-than-ever frozen smile and a sigh — all these ‘cues’, in Smith’s terms, concur to convey his fear. The dog incident also exemplifies what happens most of the time while watching a film: in the terms of Tan, ‘in the typical case the viewer’s emotion does not parallel the one observed in the protagonists’ (SFV 53). Here, we may be amused and possibly intrigued by what is going on, but we are certainly not afraid.

As he is about to enter his car, Truman is startled by a noise which turns out to be a UFO crashing onto the street. Carroll writes that ‘emotions proper require a cognitive component’, and so, for him, the startle response is a ‘cognitively impenetrable affect’ (FEG 26). Truman does not know what makes him jump; this response would therefore not be considered by Carroll as an emotion. However, if we follow Smith, this incident is similar to the first one, and can be analyzed as a cue that further contributes to show how unsettled the protagonist is. The friendly town cannot be taken at face value. Truman’s carefree neighborhood is made into a somewhat dangerous, mysterious and unpredictable place where dogs or strange objects can disrupt the peace at any time. The first scene ends with a low-angle shot on a lamp-post, turning this familiar urban fixture into a puzzling entity. A bit later, a second incident involves a dog when Truman sees his father, dressed like a homeless man, in the street. The son runs after the father who has been seized by two people and forced onto a bus [14’ 31]. A low-angle shot shows Truman in front of a double arch topped by threatening spikes and inscribed with the motto ‘unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno’ that ironically stresses the protagonist’s isolation. Two policemen have just walked out of the frame, totally oblivious to the scene of chaos. Truman is trapped in the street, in the middle of the traffic and, to add to his distress and helplessness, we can see and hear an unleashed dachshund in the foreground trotting across the frame. The distortion caused by the camera at ground level compounded by the use of a wide angle lens, together with the amplification of the sound of the dog’s footsteps, are redundant cues that turn Seahaven into a Tati-esque cityscape. The unsteady, inconsistent and insecure environment is hostile to Truman, and its representation undercuts the idealized version of Seahaven conveyed in the fixed tourist panoramas that punctuate the film.

Crosses and Loops

The movie-town of Seahaven is constructed on basic principles; its cinematic foundations are two geometrical figures. They recur over and over again, separately or combined, and appear either in the shape of objects or, more abstractedly, as movements within the frame. The two figures are the circle — and more specifically the loop — and the cross.

The revolving door, which combines circular and linear patterns, is an important element in the architecture of the town; it marks the entrance to the insurance building where Truman works. It appears twice and, very much like the bridge in the film’s climax, it functions as an ‘emotional prop’ revealing the protagonist’s emotions. The first time [4’ 44], it leads Truman

into a sort of trap — his cluttered office where he is shown caught between his two desks against the backdrop of a large window. The structure of the window with a cross pattern marks a separation from, rather than an opening onto, the outside world. The motif of the cross becomes a redundant cue to convey Truman's entrapment in the scene where he takes his bike to go to the hospital and waits on the porch till his wife has gone [38' 18]. The crossed planks on the door in the foreground, together with a rhythmical music, create a suspenseful mood out of a banal situation.

The second time the revolving door appears, it becomes a device that literalizes Truman's confusion and anxiety as he senses he is being spied on, but does not quite understand what is happening [29' 20]. Instead of going into the building he just goes round and round — and out again. The skewed angle and the superimposition contribute to his, and our, dizziness. The town center has become a place for aimless wandering; it no longer functions as a center but as a maze. Truman appears, lost in his thoughts, like a stranger in this strange place peopled by an army of sanitary engineers who keep it spotlessly clean. A few minutes later, an overhead shot entraps him in the middle of the street, spinning like a weathervane with outstretched arms to ward off the traffic; he has turned into a human revolving door [31' 44].

Another overhead shot shows the protagonist in his car with Meryl, driving around a circular loop in the street [45' 46]. Truman just asked his wife to watch for 'a lady on a red bike followed by a man with flowers and a Volkswagen beetle with a dented fender' and explained: 'They're on a loop (...), They just go round and round, and round, and round'. Seahaven has become a Moebius loop, 'a twist in the fabric of space where time becomes a loop from which there's no escape. When we reach that point whatever happened will happen again' (*Star Trek* television series). The figure of the Moebius loop perfectly suits Seahaven, the self-contained small town on an island which, in the reality show within the film, is covered by a dome. Scenes or shots echo one another, or sometimes even duplicate one another, throughout the film (there are two scenes with a dog; we see the revolving door twice; there are two 'Good Morning' scenes; we see Truman inside his car twice; there are two father-son reunion scenes, etc.) until Truman finds the exit. Even the pencil sharpener in the protagonist's office becomes part of the general vortex when its spiraling inside mechanism fills up the screen [1h 09' 32].

Last but not least, I would argue that the turnstile in the harbor is a 'condensation' of the architecture of Seahaven. It can be seen as a hostile variation on the white picket fence — a picket fence for a Moebius band. The turnstile marks the frontier between the hometown and the sea which stands for the 'wilderness', the unknown and dangerous place beyond the town onto which Truman — not unlike his ancestors, the Puritan small-town dwellers — projects his fears. This outdoor sequence is full of irony as it is really, yet again, about entrapment. It relies on a series of compositions using criss-cross patterns, like the shot of the deck seen from inside through the horizontal blinds of the ticket office, or the last shot where the protagonist, repressing his fear, goes back to his white cage which, as the little sign in the ticket office indicates, is 'open'. The turnstile is the pivotal

point where Truman expresses and then represses his emotions. In an issue of *Cinergon* devoted to emotion, Maxime Scheinfeigel writes :

La force centrifuge de l'émotion qui pousse le corps vers une extériorisation de l'être est tout autant centripète car ce qui apparaît comme une échappée hors de soi est en fait une appropriation du monde extérieur, des sensations qu'il dispense. (EAR 17)

After using the turnstile to try and leave the town, Truman needs to take it again to return to Seahaven, his fears safely tucked away behind his contrived smile. As he exits the frame, what is left for the spectator to look at is the turnstile, possibly the 'objective correlative' of emotions in an American small town by the sea.

What Theories? Why Theories?

I have attempted to demonstrate how, in order to study screen architecture, I do textual analysis for which I combine tools — from cognitivist film theory on emotions to Internet resources on urbanism via writings about American culture — and how I customize these tools by sometimes perverting them (e.g. studying emotions *in* the film as well as in the viewer), thereby forging my own tools. This mixture of sources and methods allows me to articulate aesthetic, rhetorical, and cultural approaches. Can one do so many different things simultaneously, you might object? I hope I have been convincing about the advantages of using cognitivist approaches to emotions so as to shed light on screen architecture. Yet, while expecting your possible objections and reservations, let me reveal one of the sources that have comforted me in the necessity of breaking new grounds. It is Christian Metz who writes:

...s'inspirer d'une théorie, ce n'est pas la juger parfaite (et d'ailleurs, quelle théorie le serait ?) C'est ressentir *en soi-même* — d'où l'absurdité de la notion d'"application" — son pouvoir de déclenchement, d'activation du désir dans l'étude d'un domaine *autre*, pour lequel elle n'avait pas été faite (CPF 175).

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