The Truman Show: Orthography as a Deep Play Model of Gentrification

“Deep play is a game with stakes so high that no rational person would engage in it.”
—Jeremy Bentham, Theory of Legislation

Peter Weir’s 1998 “science fiction” film, The Truman Show, depicts a kind of zero degree of gentrification. Weir’s wife, the production designer Wendy Stites, introduced Weir to the “master-planned community” of Seaside, Florida, conceived by the architectural partners Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk. The choice of a town constructed “instantaneously” but made to look as if it had developed historically reproduced perfectly the logic of film-set construction, where history is “faked” by compressing organic and political processes of town formation into a single de-temporalized crystal, ready for habitation.

Seaside’s urban utopianism not only reproduced the logic of the Hollywood set. It had anticipated the central idea of the film, where the “set idea” was realized as a hermetically sealed container for the surveillance of a single resident who, from cradle to grave, was to be the subject of a television series where all the other residents of Seahaven (the fictional town) were hired actors coordinated by a production team housed in an artificial moon. Truman’s naiveté — his status as a “dupe” — constitutes a dimensional condition. Everyone he regards as a Seahaven neighbor and friend operates within a “production dimension,” which we might think of as a spatial dimension added to the three dimensions of the set’s space and the fourth of time. Truman cannot see this dimension. He must “extrapolate” it from the curious malfunctions of the three-plus-one dimensions he takes to be a normal town. A broadcast on his car radio breaks up as the director’s instructions interfere with the protected bandwidths. A theatrical light falls from the sky like a meteorite. Truman’s occasionally unpredictable behavior creates a flurry of adjustments to the coordination of the actors.

If Truman had lived his life in a town with an evolving political basis, the production dimension would be assigned by most of the religious residents to Higher Powers — for the less religious, luck or fate. But, just as Seaside itself flattened the contingency of temporal growth and decline into a monolayer of designed appearances, Seahaven replaced these with production. We can associate this production with all of the “backstage operations” of the set and condense it into the idea of a space-time dimension that Truman cannot see but which must be actively occupied and maintained by the actors, directors, and crew. This fantasy of an elaborate, techno-ideological space-time dimension was already exploited in Terry Gilliam’s Brazil (1985), where the control of the population was identified with the utilities hidden behind special-access panels, accessible only to centralized hegemonic bureaucracy. The nature of this proprietary

extra dimension compresses strategies to “maintain the course” pre-designed by those in power: the idea of orthographies. Here, I use the idea of drawing (graphics) to cover all the procedures of de-lineating a “proper” course for technology, in the same way an architectural drawing shows how the various systems supporting and maintaining a building coordinates multiple materials, machines, and exchanges of energy, objects, and inhabitants. In other situations, these are covered by the specialized term dispositif (“apparatus”), famously described by Foucault and, later, Agamben. In my adaptation, orthographics, I will return to the origin of dispositif, in essays by Gaston Bachelard. I believe my term, in connection with a contrasting component, orthopsychics (a term also employed by Bachelard), will show that methodology and technique are “self-critical” and “self-correcting” in an objective fashion suggested but not fully explored by Bachelard. The corrective orthopsychic forces work in dialectic with orthographic proscriptions, but this dialectic is not oppositional. Rather, one term is inscribed within the other, producing “two sides of one coin.”

2 Bachelard left the question of why self-correction should offer the object-oriented subject — the scientist, philosopher, or critical theorist — a dimension of speculative freedom, accompanied by a feeling of jubilation. This element was completely ignored by Michel Foucault, who argued for the complete eclipse of the subject by the institutions of the dispositif.

The fusion of techno-ideology and the imaginary invisibles of theological and psychic cause, so clear in The Truman Show, provides us with all the controls needed to conduct a laboratory experiment. This experiment, in short, would aim to discover the “Isotope of Gentrification,” the sub-atomic particle that is the necessary and sufficient condition for the production of what could be called the amalgam of discourse, architecture, urban conditions, and social-political dynamics surrounding the displacement of poorer residents by richer ones, supported by the fantasy of revival. This isotope, I argue, can be revealed within a cloud chamber we construct by examining key procedures in the construction of subjectivity, scientific thought in its many guises, and the specifics of what Gaston Bachelard described as the apparatus (dispositif) in relation to the subject’s “self-corrective thinking” in relation to the truth of
objects. This is not a component of “object-oriented ontology” (speculative realism). Rather, it is a critique of the central tenet of this contemporary philosophical movement, based on the observation that object-oriented ontology is more accurately an subject-correcting epistemology. Epistemologies are necessarily both object- and subject-directed, and as such they are “ortho” in that whatever counts for truth must be subjected to tests and proofs; almost inevitably, these tests and proofs are constructed by elaborating some part of the ancient notion of automaton, both (natural) chance and (humanly-constructed) mechanism, out of which a comprehensive idea of technology finds its origin point.

This may sound complex, but a graph/diagram can show it simply. The “ortho” vector comes in, metaphorically speaking, from a generic, “theological” upper space, down to hit (at a right angle, appropriately) a horizontal plenum (the temporality and spatiality of Seahaven), reduced for convenience to opposed vectors that express not just the dialectic of active, engaged social, political, and economic forces but the “discursive space” that cities exist to intensify and optimize. This is also where spatiality and temporality are materialized using multiple signifiers, functions, and institutions: things that mark the passing of time, the consequences of causal chains, and the function of projective imagination and restorative memory. The Truman Show exists within the film as ”The Truman Show,” the televised minute-to-minute surveilled life of Truman Burbank. This, too, appears as a dialectic of opposed vectors, but we, the audience of The Truman Show, know that it is managed by a “fake orthograph,” the system of cameras, microphones, and editor-producers housed in the artificial moon, producing “The Truman Show,” the product marketed to television audiences.

In simplified Marxian terms, the use value is the presumed background of “people living their lives in a historically evolved community.” Utility is expressed in the architecture and layout of the town, although in Seahaven, as with Seaside, Florida, this evolution was faked, the effect was converted into a cause, and the cause connected immediately with the exchange value of ”The Truman Show.” The picturesque happy small town is really a stage set. Truman is haunted by a paranoid fantasy that, in an uncanny way, foreshadows his discovery of the “real conspiracy” against him. He imagines his own “exchange value” in terms that approximate the actual exchange value that is constructed by the show’s producers for the TV audience. This leads us to compare the role of the producer-director, Christof, with the orthopsychic God. For Truman, at least, Christof has actually been God in the usual role of the “unseen hand.” The idea of orthopsychism accommodates both God and the trickster/manipulator because it is a psychism perceived from the point of view of the dupe.

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3 Allow me to draw my account of Bachelard’s idea of the dispositif and orthopsychism from Joan Copjec’s account, in Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists (London: Verso Books, 2015). Copjec expands and refines Bachelard’s idea, justifying us to take her account as primary. My contention is, however, that Copjec herself misses the opportunity to discover a more radical critique of Michel Foucault’s idea of dispositif, which for critical theory has become dominant and exclusionary. The key, I contend, is Foucault’s mischaracterization of the Panopticon’s central tower, as a mono-value (guards perceived to be always present), where in fact it is the binary, presence/absence, that makes the prisoners take on the “orthopsychic” processes of self-correction. For orthopsychics to be understood properly, we must take Copjec’s own advice and read Lacan from the revisionary perspective offered by Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, The Freudian Subject, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 1988). Here, narcissism attempts to undo the defenses of the ego, which has identified with the position of the primal father. Narcissism reverts to autoerotic pre-subjectivity, with its fluid relations loosening the hold of causality and objectivity. Here, the “orthopsychic subject” discovers the dimension of freedom responsible for the joy that Bachelard cited in his own subject’s confrontation with the objectivity of the apparatus.
The dupe, Truman, perceives Seahaven to be a normal town. He doesn’t realize that his neighbors are actors who “go home at night.” Their real lives are co-terminal with the TV audience, not Seahaven. The audience of *The Truman Show* are in on the scam of “The Truman Show.” They laugh at Truman, the dupe, not so much because he can’t seem to put two and two together, but because he seems to act his role with such good nature. Truman’s dupe-icity seems to be his lack of *duplicity*, which we must all have to enjoy Truman unawareness that he is being surveilled 24-7, namely his enthusiasm. He gets into being a dupe with such pleasure that the audience moves past simple voyeurism — the undisclosed invasion of Truman’s privacy that warrants serious condemnation of the (initial) Show’s premise. A little of this condemnation should leak over to tinge the pleasure we have in enjoying the enjoyers, our alibi being that we are “sophisticated” in our *Freudenshade*. We condemn the audience-in-the-audience in the same way we pull for the gangsters in *Bonnie and Clyde*.

We pretend, therefore, to being the non-dupes, those who go past vulgar voyeurism and, while remaining morally superior to those whose enjoyment we enjoy, distill a second-order enjoyment that is, curiously, more than duplicitous. Triplisticous? Because Truman is so good natured, he falls into the same category as other dupes we have come to love: Anne Frank, who no matter how much she witnessed and experienced suffering at the hands of the Nazis, maintained her belief in the innate goodness of humanity, or the artists persecuted by the McCarthy hearings, who despite their tenacious enthusiasm for the rapacious tyranny of Joseph Stalin, seemed to be better than the Senators proclaiming them “un-American.”

When gentrifiers move into a neighborhood, they accord the same respect to the “dupes,” the surviving “original residents,” who have maintained a romantic idealization of a history of the place (at least in the minds of the gentrifiers), in the face of deteriorating infrastructure and political control. The dupes believe in the longevity of their places, just as Truman cannot imagine that his beloved Seahaven is really production set where he is the only non-paid actor. In Marxist terms, Truman believes in utility — “use value” — to the exclusion of “exchange value” in the same way that most people would resist the idea of selling their children or accepting money to kill someone. The audience(s) make a joke out of this blindness. Not to be aware that “everything has its price” is a folly of sorts. But, Truman’s blindness is what endears him. He wouldn’t sell out his neighbor, even though the neighbor is only saying good morning to him every day because she/he is being paid actors’ equity scale. We fault ourselves for our lack of this kind of goodness, and although we enjoy Truman precisely because he is a dupe, we love him for it.

The issue of the dupe allows us to make a fundamental assertion about the structure of *The Truman Show*, and to compare this structure to the process of gentrification in general. This transfer is all the more important in light of the fact that filming takes place in a “pre-gentrified” city that, although it is by definition inhabited by gentrifiers, never had anything to gentrify in the first place — i. e. no deteriorated housing stock, no celebrated past, no traditions of city-country relationships, no old-timers forced to sell out because they are unable to out-bid the newcomers. Use value has given way to exchange value without a fight, because there was no use to begin with. The use, like that of the movie set, is faked to give the residents the illusion of a “traditional community.” Yet, this acceleration past use to exchange is taken to be more realistic, and the would-be original residents are cast as the dupes who mistakenly cling to their idea

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of community in the same way Truman believes he lives among real neighbors, not actors playing their parts.

The simple situation of newcomers out-smarting old-timers while envying them their naïveté is deepened and extended by the role of the “orthopsychic” in *The Truman Show*. Truman’s story, for audience 2, is constructed out of instances of “openings” made into the presumed smooth flow of life in Seahaven. These technological glitches threaten the continuance of enjoyment for audience 1, the presumed voyeurs who are enjoying their 24/7 penetration into Truman’s privacy. But, as Truman begins to see the light, audience 2 anticipates the point where Truman, no longer a dupe, will escape his TV prison.

What is happening? The ortho-metric regulative mechanisms of production were maintaining the smooth flow of Truman’s illusion. But, the gaps/breakdowns of this dimension lead to ortho-psychic re-engineering precisely along the same “ortho” vector. What threatens audience 1’s enjoyment intensifies audience 2’s engagement. The orthometrics was the invisible force holding together all of the elements of Seahaven in their imaginary configuration. The orthopsychics working from the turbulence of breakdowns of this configuration open up precisely the dimension of Truman’s escape to freedom. This is straightforward description of *The Truman Show*’s structure, but what is interesting about it is that it illuminates how orthopsychics works in general. Our immediate benefit is an understanding of the gentrification process.

Academic studies of gentrification emphasize the moral conflict between preserving historically valued neighborhoods at the cost of evicting the residents who, though not always the “original” inhabitants, are disadvantaged by the economics of developing low-cost infrastructure. Capital investment is assumed as an unavoidable presupposition of the gentrification dilemma. Studies focus on the “inauthenticity” of new residents. Even though they often sympathize with the populations they displace and try to preserve some sense of the old community they will inevitably redefine or completely eradicate, the bow to the market forces that, in converting the “use value” that predominates with established neighborhoods to “exchange value” systems that advantage their leverage over old residents who cannot afford selling out or being forced out.

What does *The Truman Show* tell us about this gentrification “paradox”? The film’s two audience, and two shows for the two audiences, unfolds capitalism’s concealed long-term strategy. In general, we might consider that all ideologies, capitalism’s included, employ the device of the “forced choice.” This is, in short, the construction of a binary condition calling for a “balance point.” In the inevitable deterioration of the material fabric of neighborhoods, there are several binaries that work at together. The old/new binary’s forced choice is “restoration” — the recovery of value that time, use, and the elements had eroded. Restoration, like sustainability, is an ideological good because, in effect, there can be no effective argument against it. Restoration can be conflated from its original focus (architectural/environmental...
improvements) to include community, livability, and economic/cultural viability. Again, once the forced choice imposes its golden mean, the choice begins to work like a pronoun — a term that is a “place-holder” idea, holding open a space for meanings that will be volunteered to supplement a generic lack of specificity.

Wherever there are ideological goods, there are verbal and concrete place-holders that call for voluntary attempts to fill the openings with meaning, to bridge over the gaps. These openings are “durably open.” They resist full definition and clarity. The ambiguity is rhetorically productive. Everyone says they know what is meant without actually knowing. Willingness to act without having specific agreements contributes to solidarity. “Community groups” can spring up around revival issues without having to share more than an indefinite core of ideals. Charles Baudelaire: “It is by universal misunderstanding that all agree. For if, by ill luck, people understood each other, they would never agree.”

Misunderstanding is what drives the comedy of The Truman Show. The misunderstanding is mainly Truman’s, with the “template” of what is true fully possessed by the audience. This template includes the model of the set, surrounded by a wall that is revealed at the edge of the artificial ocean, painted to look like a horizon but fitted with an exit staircase. This is the “edge of the stage” so to speak. Beyond the door is a backstage area, but proverbially it is also the space of the audience. Technology has allowed their vision to penetrate every corner of Truman’s daily life, but the edge of this life is the sky with its painted horizon and exit stair.

This is the same as the edge in the diagram, the edge of what is technologically defined as “orthographic” (a “horizontal” activity penetrated from an imaginary “above”) and made visible as “orthopsychic” (the life of Truman as a dupe). The orthopsychic vector has taken the same path as that established by the orthographic. The glitches of technology have corresponded in an uncanny way to the status of dupe that has been the source of the audience’s enjoyment. The audience’s jubilation at the point where Truman discovers the staircase and decides to leave Seahaven behind for once and for all is decisive: this is had been the dimension of energy “stored up” inside every episode. Each plot twist held a kinetic potentiality based on Truman’s passivity as a dupe in light of his potential discovery of the plot against him. The contrast between passive acceptance and Truman’s anxiety/curiosity about his origins, his father, and his circumstantial entrapment has gradually accumulated, and the tension of its enlarging presence is suddenly released at the conclusion of the film, where TV audiences are shown wildly cheering.

Deep Playing the Deep Game

Truman’s escape is a fantasy projection. The “audience” of gentrification is the imaginary reception (judgment) attached to the “staged revival” within sites that enact the utopian restoration dream. The anxiety generated by the antagonism between the revival ideal and the old neighborhood cannot be
resolved by finding an exit stair at the edge of the set.\(^5\) Without this exit, there is no “deep play” going on inside the gentrified community. In Jeremy Bentham’s idea, deep play is a game with stakes so high that no rational human would participate.\(^6\) This defines Truman’s position as a dupe. But, the defining characteristic of the gentrified neighborhood is that, while in the process of being out-bid, many of the original residents are revealed as having no ability to “play the game” (because they cannot afford the rising property costs), the new residents have identified solely with exchange value, where by definition they can play this or other games. They are, by the very act of out-bidding locals, stuck at the level of the shallow game, which is just one game among many.

The deep game is established by use, by use-value, which is established culturally and temporally. This is the game that no one from the outside can afford to play, but by the same token no one inside the game can afford to leave. The game defines the duration and extent of the culture, and when the place of the game is disrupted, the game and its players no longer exist. Or, as in the case of nomads and some migrants, the game’s media shift to more portable institutions — gatherings (“intensification ceremonies”), ritual events (weddings, funerals, christenings), etc. — whose temporary stages afford a minimal scaffolding for cultural survival.

Where Truman’s escape proved the existence and delineated the role of the deep stage, Truman demonstrated that, while it is possible to exit the orthographic zone of gentrification, it is not possible to enter it without the radical duplicity of non-dupes (the actors in “The Truman Show”) who, as Lacan says, must wander (errent, also “err”). Dupes do not err. They do not wander.\(^7\) Their relation to the “names of the father” (genealogy) implicit in the punned phrase, les non-dupes errent (= noms du père, names of the father) is one of staged immobility — catalepsis. The audience voluntarily enters into this state, inside the dark theater or before the glow of the television screen. They identify with the one character on the stage who is the dupe, the victim of the other actors who are in the play but not in the deep play.

Inasmuch as the gentrified neighborhood is a stage, there is an imaginary audience in an imaginary position “above” the neighborhood, if only because the plan can be viewed only from an “orthographic” position, at a right angle. This is an ethical audience, the audience to which academics studying gentrification typically address their apologies for, themselves, moving into neighborhoods by out-bidding and displacing locals. Their apologies typically involve encomiums to the cultures they have succeeded, even to the degraded elements of these cultures, the drug dealers and prostitutes who represent the last

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\(^5\) The anthropologist Clifford Geertz, however, describes an identical escape. He was present at a cock-fight run by his “informants” when the police suddenly arrived. The locals panicked and fled, and in the confusion Geertz fled with them, “forgetting” that as a foreigner he would be immune from prosecution. By identifying with the locals, Geertz was, at least temporarily, inducted into their society as a trusted equal. The staging of the cock-fight and the escape into the grounding temporality of ethnic tribal life duplicates Truman’s escape from Seahaven. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).


economies of survival. Unaware perhaps of Capitalism’s own “deep game” that had, by restricting services and resources, converted a use-economy to an exchange-economy, they lament the loss of the culture and often misattribute its demise to internal, organic processes. Unable to enter into the deep games of either Capitalism or the native cultures they displace, they evaluate their position in terms of a “situation ethics game,” posing the dilemma of gentrification as a collection of binary conflicts (local/outsider, traditional/modern, deteriorating/sustainable). As with all situation ethics games, the question of who has imposed the rules goes unanswered. The forces that withheld supports to the neighborhood in the first place are unquestioned. As Slavoj Žižek has remarked, fantasy films about global catastrophe show that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of Capitalism.

The reception dimension is an orthopsychic dimension attempting to follow the orthographic vector of staging. Christof has constructed and maintained the set of “The Truman Show” for the orthopsychic enjoyment of the television audience, but their real pleasure derives from an excess that builds up within the gaps and turbulences of the set, the excess that becomes the deep game within the “shallow game” of surveillance. This is the objectivity of the subject, the subject considered from the point of view of the orthos, the penetrating aerial view, which has, in its jubilation over Truman’s escape, taken its most extreme pleasure, its jouissance in Lacanian terms, in its own destruction.9

We cannot imagine the end of Capitalism, and gentrification is Capitalism’s purest geographic expression. All of the forced-choice binaries render the “players” into the two camps, the “non-dupes” who “err” and also “wander;” who, although they know now political and economic forces have opened up opportunities in deteriorating neighborhoods that will force “use-value” residents to yield to “exchange-value” newcomers who will out-bid them. The newcomers will support the coffee shops, the boutique hotels, and new artisanal enterprises that will draw the ultimate exchange-value customers, tourists, to wander in awe of the renaissance that gentrification has brought about. Non-dupes out bid the dupes who all recognize to be “authentic.” Even in their ghost-forms of drug-dealers and prostitutes (“the Oakland

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8 John Joe Schlichtman, *Gentrifier* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017). Schlichtman poses the “drug dealers and prostitutes” model of Oakland, California’s problematic deterioration as the paradigm of the gentrification “end-game,” where authenticity plays out its zero-degree position. The “Oakland model” becomes the basis of the gentrifiers’ situation-ethics argument: once use-value has reached this extreme, exchange-value is the justifiable alternative. This is the tipping point between the normative melange of use and value exchanges, unequally distributed around the urban landscape, and the “deep play” structure of orthography/orthopsychics. This is the symptom and fantasy that justifies a Lacanian engagement of popular culture, where in effect we “learn what we always wanted to know about gentrification by asking Truman,” in the pattern of Woody Allen’s “What You Always Wanted to Know about Sex ….” Films and other popular culture projects will frame gentrification because framing is their job. And, with the frame comes the contrast between the dupe and the non-dupe, those who assume mobility (the non-dupes who *errant*, wander) and those tied to location. The Lacanian engagement is, I argue, the only way around the binaries that attempt to prescribe “medial” solutions to resolve linear oppositions. There is no way to avoid the ideology of the binary, since it sublates/suppresses a ‘primal content’ that we might compare to Freud’s contronym (“The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words,” 1910), words presumably prevalent in ancient times that embodied contradictions.

9 This, clearly, involves the central role of Freud’s most difficult concept, the “death drive.” This is not so much the desire for death as it is a counter-motion within the pleasure principle, a turbulence principle that qualifies desire as the desire for something that was lost but never possessed. In relation to culture and capitalism, see Todd McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction? Jacques Lacan and the Emerging Society of Enjoyment* (Albany: SUNY, 2004); and *Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets* (New York: Columbia University, 2016).
model”), their authenticity is derived from the function of surveillance that, with or without a Truman-show-style intervention, serves to create an orthography around historical residence.

If the impasse “we cannot imagine the end of Capitalism” extends to the case of gentrification, as Capitalism’s purest landscape expression, is then the question of gentrification not just a problem of imagination in the loose sense but “the Imaginary” in the Lacanian sense? Isn’t gentrification itself a fantasy structure? I would argue that gentrification is a symptom, a “pure fantasy,” in which the inability to imagine is converted into a necessity to fantasize. We can’t imagine Capitalism ending so we must stage scenarios where Capitalism’s ability to exist as an organ outside a body, its real nature as what Lacan called a “part-object,” plays out a drama within a conditional frame that is the basis of my “orthopsychic argument.” Gentrification is a forced choice, an ideology. It arises not from a rigid imposition of the laws of order and relation that define a proper society but, rather, from the gaps and breakdowns of the causal and semantic chains that define the Symbolic subject. It is the orthos that attempts to repair and reconstruct these gaps and breakdowns. The orthos must stage its recovery projects, and in these stagings it must connect the orthographic/orthologic prescriptions to a larger ethical case, a Law, an I-thou presupposition.

We need at this point to distinguish between imagination and fantasy, something that is difficult to do in English. Fantasy is (in Lacanian terms) a staged response to disguise the traumatic Real, the points at which the Symbolic breaks down and cannot function correctly. Fantasy frames the distinction between dupes and non-dupes, between those who “strut and fret their hours upon the stage” and those who watch from a safe audience position. The dupe works within the frayed apparatus of knowledge, which Lacan designated as S2, while the non-dupe presupposes access to the “master signifiers” beneath this knowledge, S1. The masters watch the dupes; they enjoy the fantasy of being in control of the apparatus, the dispositif.

This is the basis of Lacan’s matheme of the University, where enjoyment/jouissance is accepted as a substitute for learning, as long as we accept the assurance that “masters are in charge,” manipulating the structure of knowledge behind the scene, just as Christof manipulates Seahaven.10

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10 If this essay had been designed to be read by Lacanians, the point would be that The Truman Show is a pure example of University Discourse, the form of semantic exchange that most characterizes Capitalist conditions, according to Slavoj Žižek. I won’t elaborate this thesis, but the basic idea is that the late stages of Capitalism correspond to the ultimate degradation of the signifier in that its S/s or “signified over signifier” relation can no longer be maintained. Lacan was the first to make this point, in promoting the inversion s/S without invoking the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis of semantic idealism (multiple words for snow make Esquimos perceive snow with greater particularity). The advantage of s/S is that we see how University Discourse (S2/S1 → a/$) operates in the mode of fantasy (a/$ as the model of the audience’s artificial “catalepsy” or passivity positioned in front of a stage) while the agency of knowledge is to be undermined by power, the “Foucaultian” argument about dispositif. Where Foucault errs, however, is when he assumes, as a non-dupe, that power interpolates the subject totally. Copjec discovers, in Bachelard’s idea of dispositif, room for the right side of the matheme of the University, the place of enjoyment/jouissance. While the University Discourse shows how subjects “objectify” themselves within the Symbolic, it allows that jouissance, the staging of fantasies to cover over defects within the Symbolic, in this end-game of the Symbolic, see s/S, the fantasy, as relating to the Real of the audience, and not just its demand for a stopgap to conceal the traumatic-Real and cover over the Symbolic. This is jouissance’s Other Side, its backdoor alliance with the death drive, planted inside the pleasure-principle’s A–to–B logic. The death drive takes the form of the accumulation function that, in The Truman Show, makes the audience hungry for its own destruction once Truman discovers the Real of his captivity, his dupe-ness. This accumulation has its own logic, the logic of the “sorites,” the “one grain more” or “one hair less” that introduces universality at the precise moment of maximum contingency. This is a “Hegelian moment,” where the Absolute is revealed to have existed “all along,” inside the particular, a form of the co-existence of thesis and antithesis in the dialectic.
Fantasy allows us to enjoy, and this is the mandate of the Big Others who are in charge of the Symbolic. When we imagine, we have two options. Both work in the dimension of the orthographic/orthopsychic, but one presses forward to reinforce the Ego that is generated and sustained by the Symbolic, the other erodes the edges of the Ego’s defenses and returns subjectivity to an “autoerotic” (self-pleasing) state. We might say that the Imaginary has two modalities, one aiming toward pleasure and satisfaction, the other towards a system that postpones satisfaction through a series of place-holding substitutions. The former targets objects and activities as desirable, the latter shifts these around or removes them entirely. It would be misleading to employ the more familiar terms, “pleasure principle” and “death drive,” for there is no choice, no competition between alternatives. The imagination reworks and revises the (fantasy-generating) Imaginary’s drive to satisfaction in objects at hand. It is “orthpsychic” in that its greatest jubilation comes from what appears, from the outside, to be the destruction of its pleasure-seeking projects.

Watching *The Truman Show* is one way of understanding how this jubilation works through the orthos dimensions, graphic and psychic, which focus on a dupe, who is the “passive hero” of a charade. If we consider the film as a kind of laboratory experiment, its isolation of the sought-for isotope of gentrification happens with the discovery of the orthopsychic function of the audience’s death drive, its joy in its own destruction with Truman’s escape. This is not by any means a way of justifying gentrification. Rather, it aims to destroy the fantasy structure that arrays gentrification’s variables along various binary (forced) choices. Gentrification is one of the purest expressions of Late Capitalism, and as such we must accept it as a saddle point, a minimum of ethics (a real relation to the Good) with a maximum of morality (acceptability within societal norms).