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# THE QUESTION OF FREE WILL IN THE AGE OF MEDIA

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## Introduction

In the biblical book of Job, in order to test Job's faith in God, God makes the innocent Job suffer through the loss of his family, his health, his wealth and his friends. Then, feeling that he has been treated unfairly, Job questions God why he has to bear so many miseries even without knowing why. He says, "Look, he passes by me, and I do not see him; he moves on, but I do not perceive him. He snatches away; who can stop him" (Job 9.11-12)? In Job's view, God has the power to determine every believer's life without considering whether his interventions are justified, a situation which leaves no room for Job to exert his will as a mortal. What Job keeps moaning about is exactly his realization of the futility of human life and human ability. Although the story of the "dissenter" Job ends with Job's reconciliation with God and with God's restoration to Job of what he once possessed, it is still one of the earliest representative cases that explore the question of man's limitation and the exertion of our free will.

Nowadays in an age marked by the unprecedented development of technology, especially of media, more people start to be upset by the power of technology, and the debates on the question of free will continue. More and more people no longer believe in God, but have become the adherents of technology. It seems that nowadays no one is able to live without the benefits of science. In a way, technology has taken the place of God in the sense of becoming an invisible "dominator" of our lives. When in trouble, we ask it for help just as Christian believers plead with God. But on the other hand—we are so deeply entangled by its formidable power that it is almost no longer possible for a modern person to break free completely from the influence of technology. Technology now shapes our mindset and affects

our judgment. The difference between Job and us is that while God passes by us and we may not see him, as Job maintains, technology actually invites us into its play. In other words, we are in an interactive relationship with technology, which means that humans are both the creators and subjects of the technological expansion.

Media as the direct products of technological improvement, keep moving forward in form and content. From newspapers to radio, television and internet, today's media not only become richer in forms, but also have a more formidable controlling force of people's lives and thoughts. On the one hand, we seem to benefit from the convenience brought by new media and mass media—different parts of the world connect to each other more efficiently thanks to the immediacy of news and messages, and with the aid of instantaneous communication, common people are able to keep in touch with those they care about, wherever and whenever they like. But every coin has two sides. We notice that media are so influential that we start to worry about the other side of media, the potential danger behind the convenient way of life. Is the world really becoming more transparent with increasing information sharing? How do we make sure that the information ultimately reaching us is authentic and original? We also notice that media can be used as tools for surveillance—cameras are not merely used for film shooting or photo taking, but are also possible hidden monitors. All media together weave a huge web with personal data and information that extends deep into our personal lives. The age of media is not an age without questions, and one of the main debates in the age of media concerns the question of whether the media leave us enough rights or capacity to choose and decide for ourselves, and to act accordingly.

The concern about media is still a part of the continuous reflection on free will. The debate on free will actually emerged long ago. Ilham Dilman in his book *Free Will: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction* gives an overall introduction to the debates on free will in western history in chronological order. According to Dilman, the focus of this topic in fact shifts with time and he points out four stages:

Early Greek thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle discuss this topic primarily from the perspective of the relationship between will and personal responsibility, believing that the realization of free will is tightly linked to the problem of morality. In the later age of Christianity, for thinkers like St. Augustine, apart from the concern with morality, their focus with regard to free will shifts to theological issues such as the question of free will and God's foreknowledge. With the rise of natural science and the surge of industrialization, more scholars start to question the relationship between universal causation and human agency, and between free will and determinism. More recently, the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed the shift to psychological analysis, represented by Freud's analysis of the psychological limitations of human freedom.

The discussion on the question of free will continues in our current age of media. Apart from theoretical reflections, a mass of literary works and films have already entered the debate by offering their interpretation of this topic. But how exactly do those literary and filmic representations deal with the question of free will? They may not provide a definitive answer as to whether we actually do have a free will; still, in my analysis, I hope to bring out the hidden messages they contain. There are many works dealing with this topic, from which I have chosen Peter Weir's film *The Truman Show* released in 1998 and the story of "An

Orison of Sonmi~451” in David Mitchell’s novel *Cloud Atlas*, which was published in 2004, as two examples to study the question of free will.

*The Truman Show* is a satire on reality television shows, which reflects on the role of mass media. It tells the experiences of Truman Burbank as the protagonist of a popular live show, “The Truman Show”. Living in a virtual town named Seahaven, Truman is unaware of the fact that he lives under numerous cameras and his life is planned and broadcast incessantly to his audience. However, Truman finally realizes his situation and manages to run away from Seahaven and enters the real world.

“An Orison of Sonmi~451”, the fifth story in *Cloud Atlas*, is set in a dystopian future in Korea. Sonmi~451 is a fabricated clone waitress working at Papa Song’s dinery, and like other clones, Sonmi is owned by the powerful corporate state Nea So Copros. Sonmi begins to ascend and acquire consciousness after she is acquainted with knowledge as a test subject. Then she is asked to help the Union (the rebels against the government) by writing her *Declarations* to raise the self-awareness of other clones. However, Sonmi is arrested in a raid and sentenced to death for treason by the government. At the end of the story she discovers that Union is also a pawn of the government.

Both stories presenting the protagonists’ search for free will, they raise important questions: Does technology as presented in these stories really limit our potency to exert our free will? How do the stories represent our plight in the age of media? And in what way do they shed a light on the debates on free will?

In order to better demonstrate how the two texts explore the question of free will, for

my textual analysis I will make use of modern literary and film theories, including Foucault's account of the disciplining of the modern subject and Debord's media theory, post-humanism, narratology and possible-world theory. I will first introduce the theories and then employ them in my discussion of the texts. Specifically, this thesis consists of three chapters:

The first chapter builds a theoretical framework for my later analysis. In this chapter, I use Foucault's notions of "disciplinary society" and "power" and Debord's media theories to explain media's role and today's social status, and explain the role of narratology and film narratology in textual analysis. I also present post-humanist views on the relationship between technology and the future of humanity, as well as theory concerning the literary use of possible-worlds to explore social and moral dilemmas.

In the second chapter, I focus on camera gaze, which is a typical concern in the media-controlled context, as well as several layers of focalization in *The Truman Show*. Centering on the case of *The Truman Show*, I try to find answers to these questions: Is the realization of free will hampered by media, especially the camera gaze? How does focalization work in the story? I also explore to what extent our free will can act against that powerful control, supposing that our life were as predetermined as Truman's.

In the third chapter, I offer a post-humanist perspective to explore the problem of free will as exemplified by "An Orison of Sonmi-451" in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*. Paying special attention to Sonmi-451's story, I will analyze how the novel represents human clones exerting their free will. I will also illustrate the common points shared by *The Truman Show* and *Cloud Atlas* by adopting possible world theory. I believe both works are representative of

some central problems concerning the relationship between free will and the media.

The absolute realization of free will seems to be impossible, and that is exactly the reason why we keep searching for it. This thesis, like many others, is also a search for free will, but with a new focus on the features of our time.

## Chapter I

Many religions have already discussed the question to what extent one can exert one's free will. In Buddhism, it is believed that the primary rule that runs the world is the causal principle, or "hetu-phala" in Sanskrit. The term "hetu-phala" means cause and effect. Buddhists believe that every result has its cause: good deeds bring about good results, while evil actions accordingly result in evil effects. Moreover, according to Buddhism, especially the branch of it that thrives in Chinese culture, hetu-phala is not unchangeable, because in order to transform a cause into an effect, one still needs a "condition", involving a subject who takes control. Therefore, Buddhism does not stand on the same side as determinism, but offers believers possibilities to change the status quo. *The Truman Show* and "An Orison of Sonmi~451", as I will discuss later, also represent possible "conditions" that enable people to make a change and exert their free will if viewed through the Buddhist notion of hetu-phala.

Before analyzing how *The Truman Show* and "An Orison of Sonmi~451" represent the debate on free will, I think it necessary to introduce the theories I will use in my later discussion. In general, my discussion involves ideas from media theory, narratology and film narratology, post-humanist theory as well as possible-world theory. Some aspects of different theories may overlap in some aspects. The theories themselves are broad and diverse, so I will focus on those concepts and ideas that are most pertinent to my discussion of the question of free will.

Foucault's Notions of "Discipline" and "Power" and Debord's Media Theory



Media are highly diverse, but in terms of their influence, the most prominent forms are traditional mass media and today's new media. Mass media including television, newspapers and magazines connect us to the rest of the world. Dan Luhmann says, "Whatever we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media" (Laughey 2). Now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, social media have gained a crucial place in our daily life. Many scholars have discussed this phenomenon, and come up with their analyses of existing or potential effects of media. Media theory, as defined by Dan Laughey in his study *Key Themes in Media Theory*, is "a systematic way of thinking about means of communication" (4). Media theory is not static and there does not exist a standard theory that answers all the questions about media. Instead, it is constantly renewing itself, along with changing social conditions that affect our economies, cultures and technologies. And different schools of media theory, just like theorists on the question of free will, are engaged in continuous debate.

However, despite this diversity in theoretical perspective, most approaches in media theory deal with the relationship between technological development and human living conditions, raising questions such as whether our lives are determined by media, or in what sense our lives are shaped by media, or, alternatively, to what extent we shape the media. The force of media is so great in contemporary society that it shapes what we are now.

The discussion of the relationship between the human individual and media can also be related to debates on the question of free will. To analyze the question of free will in the age of media, I will several notions proposed by Michel Foucault as well as Guy Debord, namely, Foucault's concepts of "discourse", "power" or "disciplinary power", and "disciplinary

society” (Foucault 1493), and Debord’s “spectacular economy” or “the spectacle” as introduced in his work *The Society of the Spectacle*. Actually, Foucault does not elaborate on media or its effects on contemporary society, but his opinions on the characteristics of modern society shed a light on the role of media in today’s society. Foucault’s views concerning organization of society and Debord’s media theory constitute a basis for my later discussion.

In his study *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault develops his core concept of “power” by analyzing how modern prisons work towards a better way of controlling subjects. For Foucault, disciplinary power is pervasive in social institutions, operating through social discipline or norms, surveillance and intervention; power is diffused through social institutions such as schools, prisons, and hospitals. Generally, the control over people can be simply achieved by observing their actions. Especially in modern society, this power intervenes with people’s everyday life, training and shaping them in such an omnipresent way that no subject can escape from its influence. He maintains that under the control of power, there can be no meaningful resistance or rebellion, and even if there are, those activities are still the representation of the power. In Foucault’s view, the main purpose of this disciplinary system is to correct any behavior of the system’s subjects that is considered deviant.

As I mentioned above, Foucault does not directly address the role of mass media, but his thoughts on how modern society works as well as on the status of the subjects under surveillance shed a new light on the relationship between media and technology. For instance, according to Foucault, modern power penetrates everywhere: accordingly, social institutions like media become the channel by which dominant power is imposed on subjects.

Furthermore, technology and the media it creates are also vehicles of disciplinary power, directly utilized to monitor subjects. Under most circumstances, media as a vehicle of power are too omnipresent to be observed by individuals, and even if they are aware of the existence of such means of surveillance, it is likely that unorganized individuals do not possess the ability to overthrow power. But is this also the case in works of art, and what room does literary and cinematic representation offer for breaking up the disciplinary system? These are the central questions to be discussed in this thesis.

In his study *The Society of the Spectacle* (*La Société du Spectacle*), published in 1967, Guy Debord, a French Marxist theorist, puts forward the idea of “the spectacle”. Debord explains that the spectacle is “a social relationship between people that is mediated by images” (12), which lies at “the very heart of society’s real unreality” (13). Media such as newspapers, radio and television are manifestations of this spectacle. In our modern society marked by consumerism, media create images that are deceptive: we tend to believe the evidence of our eyes so we will naturally trust the images we see, even if the images do not present the truth. While signifiers (images, or what we see) are replicated and multiplied without limit, our public life which is supposed to be the reflection of reality, also becomes artificial. The spectacle as “the opposite of dialogue” (Debord 17), like Foucault’s concept of power, has an all-inclusive sphere of action, due to which an incidental change of rule has no actual influence on the spectacle: it quickly reestablishes its rule. Debord also claims that the spectacle (according to Debord’s study, the spectacle is constituted by mass media) plays the role of spokesman in hierarchical societies (18): the spectacle has the ability to control communication and leave itself the only discourse allowed to be heard.

Moreover, Debord argues that the spectacle is not the natural result of the development of technology; instead, he believes society chooses its technical content to suit the needs of its ruling classes (19). Mass media, as the most obvious manifestation of the spectacle, only answer these needs. According to Debord's theory, then, media help to maintain the existing order and can adjust to the renewal of rules in their one-way communication process.

The common point shared by Foucault and Debord is that they both suggest a modern society run by an all-encompassing system. That system is inescapable for individuals and for them, free will does not seem to exist. Foucault's theory on social construction and Debord's media theory, as well as the landscapes of modern society they depict, are insightful for the discussion on free will. When discussing the role of media in my two case studies, *The Truman Show* and "An Orison of Sonmi~451" in *Cloud Atlas*, I will refer to Foucault's "disciplinary society" and Debord's discussion of media control. Their determinist views also inspire me to seek answers to the following questions: Is there no way to escape the control of media, imprisoned as we are in a disciplinary society, controlled by media? Do these case studies indicate any possible solutions to our plight?

## Focalization in Narratology and Film Narratology

As said, I will use *The Truman Show* and *Cloud Atlas* as my main study objects to discuss the question of free will in the age of media. But in order to explore how literary and filmic texts represent the debate on free will, theories that center on texts themselves need to be engaged, with special regard to viewpoint and narrative structure of the texts. Apart from Foucault's

and Debord's views of society, therefore, I will also adopt theories from literary and film narratology to develop my argument. Filmic narrative shares some common points with literary narrative; however, because of the specific mode of presentation and the blending of temporal and spatial elements that characterizes film, film narratology is viewed as a specific branch of narrative study.

The word "narratology" was originally coined by Tzvetan Todorov, a prominent figure in French structuralism, whose aim was to study the logical and general structure of narratives. Todorov attaches much importance to plot and takes it as the primary abstract structure of narrative. In his work "Structural Analysis of Narrative", he analyzes Boccaccio's *Decameron* from the angles of "action, character, recognition" (2026), and concludes that there exist certain schemas shared by all the stories of the *Decameron*. By means of structural analysis, he tries to discover a general "grammar" underlying individual texts. That is to say, he views different literary texts as variants of a common structure. Thus, one task of narrative analysis, in his understanding, is to abstract an underlying general schema from seemingly unrelated plots.

Todorov's theory will be useful when comparing the similarities in plot and structure shared by the two texts I have chosen for my analysis. In addition, to study the internal properties of each text more closely, I will engage with the work of Dutch cultural theorist and narratologist Mieke Bal. One of Bal's central concepts is that of focalization. According to her, phrases like "narrative perspective" and "point of view" work to conceal the distinction between the viewer and the viewed within a text, so she proposes the concept of focalization, instead. Focalization, Bal explains, means "the relation between the vision and

that which is ‘seen’, perceived” (142). The notion of “the focalizer”, the subject of focalization, and the focalized object are two sides of focalization (146). The focalizer as subject “focalizes” the object, which means that the act of focalization is always subjective. She then draws a distinction between character-bound focalization (CE), which means that focalization lies with a character, and non-character-bound focalizer or “external focalization” (EF) (148). Bal’s analysis of subject and object of focalization provides insight into the relationship between subject and object of focalization as well as the relationship between the narrator and characters. However, several levels of focalization may coexist in one text. Bal claims that focalization is “the most important, most penetrating, and most subtle means of manipulation” (171); she believes that paying attention to focalization will uncover the hidden ideology behind the text.

Developed on the basis of literary narration, film narratology also relates to media theory: in other words, theories of film narration can be regarded as a part of media theory. Film narration is fundamentally based on the intrinsic features of cinema, which means that technological features of cinematographic art determine the narrative possibilities of cinematic narrative. Among film narratologists, these technical features, which include filmic technical aspects such as shooting, editing, and the use of sound effects, have already been given enough attention in scholarly discussion. Therefore, I want to pick up another aspect derived from Bal, namely “focalization”. According to Bal, in narrative discourse, focalization is “the direct content of the linguistic signifiers” (163); in visual art works, however, it is “the direct content of visual signifiers like lines, dots, light and dark” (163). As for the cinematic medium, films consist of both words and images, so focalization in films

encompasses both linguistic and visual signifiers. What is more, in both films and literary texts, the same objects may be interpreted differently if they are viewed by different focalizers. I choose the film *The Truman Show* as my case study, and the analysis of focalization is particularly suitable for this film, on account of its structure of a double show—Truman’s life is a reality show to the audience inside the film, and the film itself is another show in the eye of the film’s external viewers. This dual structure raises the following questions: How do different focalizers interact in this film? What are the roles of the viewers’ gaze and the camera gaze? And how do these different focalizers influence Truman’s choices and actions?

As narratives, *The Truman Show* and *Cloud Atlas* do not belong to the same medium—one is a specimen of film art marked by a combination of visual and verbal effects while the other is a literary work featuring words and language. Film narratology, especially the concept of focalization, can be applied to analyze the characters of *The Truman Show*. And the literary theory of narratology also helps to interpret Sonmi’s story as an integral part of Mitchell’s whole novel—Sonmi’s story seems unrelated to other stories in the book, but in fact it is by no means irrelevant to them. In light of Todorov’s narratological grammar, those stories can and should be read as a coherent whole.

Extending Todorov’s observations concerning an underlying common grammar to the question of free will as such, I would propose that those two texts I chose for my case studies present a common logic in this respect.

## Post-humanist Arguments on Technology and Human Being's Future

Scholarly reflection on the question of free will in the age of media, as I have mentioned, stems from the question of the role of technological development and its effect. The 21<sup>st</sup> century we live in witnesses the creation of “products” brought by technological achievements such as genetic technology and artificial intelligence. Some of these inventions seem similar to science-fiction: thus the emergence of cyborgs and clones works to blur the original clear boundary between human bodies and man-made artifacts. The impact of technology on humanity's future is becoming one of the most controversial topics in our modern world. Conservative worries about the loss of humanity or of what makes humans humane emerge before the actual technological realization of humanity being supplanted—scholars and writers have put forward their assumptions and imagination concerning a possible future of humanity long before the age of media. In some sense, the fear of the unknown and Frankenstein, the uncontrollable “monster”, continues as long as human beings exist.

Post-humanism is a school of thought dealing with that fear by studying (possible) changes of humanity resulting from technological enhancement of humans themselves. In his study *Medical Enhancement and Posthumanity*, Andy Miah concludes that post-humanist thoughts are developed under the condition that “the need for justifying self-modification (through technology) has become a necessary and crucial characteristic of contemporary social-political processes” (3). Post-humanist discussions on humanity are broad and sometimes vague: yet post-humanism takes an important place in recent cultural theory and philosophy. Basically, post-humanist scholars hold that humanity can be brought under the



control of technological advancements such as artificial intelligence. These scholars derive their inspiration from theories in other fields of study as well. For example, scholars like Elaine Graham and N. Katherine Hayles base their post-humanist study on cultural theory (Miah 20).

One of the pioneers in post-humanist theory, Hayles develops her views on post-humanism mainly in her work *How We Became Posthuman*. Hayles studies how technological changes blur the boundaries between human beings and machines, and how “information lost its body” (Hayles 2162). She holds the opinion that our subjectivity becomes more fragmented and heterogeneous under the influence of cyber technology, with ourselves transforming into “virtual bodies” (2162)—our presence as virtuality in cyberspace. Hayles’s argument concerning the influence of cyberspace enables us to have a better understanding of the age of media. In this age, our lifestyle which relies heavily on cyber technology is one manifestation of the progress of media territorialization. Cyberspace and spaces produced by mass media such as television together create virtual time and space, which usually slides into our life without our notice and blends into the reality we confront.

Post-humanists’ attention to the transformation of humanity by technology touches on another, more complex philosophical question: what is human? This is also a question remaining to be solved in debates on free will. We may regard possessing a free will as one of the main features of human species, but if we suppose human clones also have a free will, then what is the difference between a human clone and a real human? For artificial lives like clones, we intend to play the role of God at the very beginning, so it may be hard for some humans to regard their clones as their brothers and sisters that are equal to them. Within the

sphere of post-humanism, it is still difficult to obtain an answer to the question of what constitutes humans: still, many literary works try to offer their own version of this answer. “An Orison of Sonmi-451” in *Cloud Atlas* is such a story, which tells about clones, produced through human’s technology. In *Cloud Atlas*, the question of free will is more complicated with the protagonist being a clone instead of a human being. Are human beings still unique in the age of cloning? Do clones possess the ability to exert their free will? And if they do, are there still any differences between a human being and a clone? This literary imagining of a clone’s adventure can be regarded as a mirror that provokes us to think about the possible future of human beings.

In all, post-humanist theory will be a helpful tool to explore the relationship between scientific and technological improvements and human living conditions. A post-humanist perspective will lend additional depth both to my discussion of free will, and to my question of what makes a human being.

## Possible Worlds Theory in Plot Analysis

The clone’s story in *Cloud Atlas* shows a constructed world created by Mitchell’s imagination. What is depicted in the novel may or may not happen in the near future, but whether it becomes reality or not, the message it bears is nonetheless constructive to our understanding of contemporary life. One feature shared by *Cloud Atlas* and *The Truman Show* is that they both construct fictional worlds parallel to our own. On the one hand, each of these parallel worlds resembles actual human society; on the other hand, obviously, it is marked by

fictitious elements. Readers and audience can easily tell from those stories that the fictional worlds are not real but products of the imagination. At the same time, however, they also realize that some aspects of the virtual worlds presented, such as the social order, hierarchy and human nature, are either so ironically alike to the real one they live in, or so shocking and foresighted that they awaken people's innermost fear of the unknown and uncertain things that may get out of our control.

The parallel worlds built in literature and film as well as the questions they raise can be well addressed by possible-world theory. The concept of possible worlds originally emerged in philosophy. Later it entered into the field of literary theory and became a productive tool for studying fictional worlds. Marie-Laure Ryan proposes that reality is "a universe composed of a plurality of distinct worlds" (Schaeffer 104). The actual world and the alternative possible worlds together make up this system. Views on the relationship between the real world and fictional worlds tend to vary. David Lewis, for example, proposes that readers will picture in their mind the images of fictional worlds in the way that is closest to the real world, although the imaginary worlds may differ much from the actual world. This is called by Lewis "the principle of minimal departure" (Schaeffer 105). Lewis's opinion leaves room for more possibilities in texts—texts are not necessarily the faithful imitations of reality, but can have degrees of deviation from what we consider to be within the range of the "real".

Nevertheless, some other scholars hold views different from that of Lewis. Umberto Eco, for example, argues that, instead of being a possible world itself, a literary text is "a machine for producing possible worlds" (Schaeffer 105). One point on which these theorists agree is that they all deny the existence of an absolute gap between the real world and fictional worlds.

They agree that fictional worlds can offer insights about reality. The concept of possible worlds is applied to many fields of studies, such as narrative semantics, fictional characters, plot, etc.

I think that possible-world theory may well shed light on how literary and cinematic texts represent the question of free will. For instance, possible-world theory maintains that non-real characters can be studied more thoroughly than characters in real life, because narrators of novels are able to provide more well-rounded portrayals of virtual characters (Schaeffer 99). This claim is based on the assumption that readers are able to perceive the similarities shared by non-real characters and real human beings. This interpretation of fictional characters may well illuminate the analysis of Sonmi~451, a clone, a totally non-real character created in a fictional world. The image of Sonmi~451, according to possible-world theory, thereupon becomes a possible source of enlightenment regarding our lives in the real world.

The topics discussed by different theorists within the sphere of possible worlds are far-ranging, and it is impossible to use all relevant viewpoints to elucidate the two examples I will discuss. So, in my analysis, I will start with Lewis's "principle of minimal departure", and focus on plot and character analysis within the possible world structure. As far as I am concerned, possible-world theory creates a possibility of studying both the present and future.

## Conclusion

I base my research of the literary and filmic representation of free will on the above four theoretical spheres, namely Foucault's notion of disciplinary society and Debord's media theories, Bal's theory of focalization in narratology and film narratology, the post-humanist exploration of the relationship between technological development and humanity's future, and the innovative insights provided by possible-world theory. These theories will be tested against *The Truman Show* and *Cloud Atlas*, to show the differences and similarities in the representation of free will between the two texts.

Theories are just castles in the air if they are not combined with cases. In the next two chapters, I will offer detailed analyses of my two examples, *The Truman Show* and "An Orison of Sonmi-451" in *Cloud Atlas*.

## Chapter II

In his poem “The Game of Chess”, Jorge Luis Borges asks, “God moves the player, he in turn the piece. /But what god beyond God begins the round/ of dust and time and sleep and agonies” (Borges 103)? The game of chess in this poem represents Borges’s quest for religious ascension and infinite divinity. His metaphor of the chess game, however, can also be regarded as one possible understanding of the rules of the universe. The relationships between God and the player, and between the player and the piece indicate the position we are possibly in: every individual is the player who has certain ability to move the piece, but there exists a greater power behind the individual. *The Truman Show* is an example that corresponds to Borges’s metaphor for how the universe works. Borges does not give an answer to his question in that poem, but does *The Truman Show* offer a possible answer?

In this chapter, my focus will be on the representation of the question of free will in the film *The Truman Show*. During my exploration, I keep asking these several questions: How does this film work as an example to represent the question of free will? Does Truman, the protagonist, possess free will in this film? If the answer is positive, then how does he realize his free will? Also, does the case of Truman demonstrate to what extent we can exert our free will in the age of media? And if so, in what way?

I try to offer my answers to the above questions through my analysis testing my finding against the theories I introduced in the first chapter.

Weir’s *The Truman Show* directly engages with the discussion on free will and reflects on how human beings deal with the force of media. It is an American film that shows the

reality of the American television show market in the 1990s. Released in 1998, the film depicts the age when mass media, here represented by television, already took a significant part in ordinary people's daily lives in developed countries like US. It captures the characteristics of that age, when various eye-catching TV reality shows became a popular form of entertainment. To attract more viewers, producers would spare no efforts in character setting, plot, camera control, and other possible perspectives. When higher ratings become their ultimate goal, the possible controversies they trigger in morality and humanity, and questions like the boundary between reality and truth may be of little significance for the producers. After all, entertainment seems incompatible with education. So, is *The Truman Show* one of those eye-catching shows that raises moral controversies?

### Life Under Surveillance: Seahaven and the Panopticon

*The Truman Show* narrates the story of a man's pre-determined life, which is not pre-determined by God or some mysterious force, but by human desire. Director Christof together with other producers is devoted to this reality show which targets every detail of Truman's life with the help of nearly 5000 cameras. At the beginning of the film, we viewers are confronted by the caption that the show is "an entire human life recorded on an intricate network of hidden cameras and broadcast live and unedited 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to an audience around the world".

Truman is sent to Seahaven when he is still a baby, and he becomes the only character ignorant of the existence of cameras. To convince him, the producers create an entire artificial

town named Seahaven where his relatives, friends, boss, neighbors, and even passers-by are actors arranged by the show. However, with the occurrence of several unusual incidents, such as technical errors caused by the production team and the reappearance of Truman's father who is supposed to be dead for years, Truman gradually discovers the truth of his life and sets about making plans to escape. After overcoming various difficulties set by Christof, Truman finds the exit to the real world. With Truman's successful flight, this show finally comes to an end on television.

The environment Truman is in is a concrete version of "disciplinary society" in Foucault's terms. This disciplinary society exerts its full control over Truman's whole life span. In Foucault's opinion, there is no escape for an individual in the disciplinary system. Everything is pre-determined and preset by the producer of the show: from Seahaven, the artificial town Truman lives in, to Truman's most intimate companion, his wife, who is an actress responsible for promoting all types of commercial products in this reality show.

In fact, Peter Weir plays a trick on the names of the producer Christof and Truman. On the one hand, Christof is Christ of Truman. As the executor that designs and controls the progress of the show and his "product" Truman, Christof plays the role of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, although the protagonist is given the name of Truman, "Truman" in a sense is not a "true man". Different from men in real life, Truman lives in lies and does not have the freedom to choose before he manages to break free from Seahaven. Moreover, as the character in the reality show, he is created intentionally to entertain the audience, so in this sense, Truman is a man designed and manipulated by the team behind him, rather than an independent man fully enjoying his freedom.



When Christof tries to persuade Truman to give up leaving Seahaven and to accept the present world he lives in, he says, “There is no more truth out there than there is in the world I created for you”. In Christof’s view, the outside world is the same as the world of Seahaven, and he believes that even though Truman steps into the real world, he would confront a similar situation. Judging from the implication of Christof’s words and the trick with the names, the film seems to suggest a metaphor: if there is a God-like figure behind Truman--the director Christof, then who can say that there is not an equally God-like power behind the viewers, the common people, in the age of media?

To answer this question, first of all, we should make clear whether the film shows that Truman has free will, and if so, to what extent he can exert his free will.

Going by Foucault’s opinion of how the world works, the answer is bound to be negative. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explains the workings of the classical prison system, which is a microcosm of power structures in industrialized society. Foucault uses the Panopticon as an example to further explain how power works. The Panopticon, is a circular prison building designed by nineteenth-century social theorist Jeremy Bentham that allows for perpetual observation in all directions by a single guardian positioned in its center. For Foucault, the Panopticon becomes the highest representation of modern disciplinary society (Foucault 197). Meanwhile it may be noted that while the Panopticon offers the most efficient and complete visibility of the inmates, Seahaven, the town Truman lives in, is another form of the Panopticon. Foucault summarizes the features of the society run by the principle of panopticism as follows:

This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the center and periphery, [...] in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead--all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism. (197)

From Foucault's description, we can see the resemblance between Seahaven and the Panopticon. In Foucault's opinion, modern disciplinary society is modeled on such a prison, and institutions like schools, hospitals, armies and factories are part of the disciplinary society, the amplified version of this prison. Like a prisoner, Truman is also under constant observation, and his every tiny move will be reported to the producer.

For instance, one day Truman meets a girl called Sylvia who is hired to play the role of Truman's fellow student at his college. Then Sylvia falls in love with Truman and decides to tell him the truth about his life. However, because of this transgression, she is thrown out of the show before she can help Truman escape from it. To prevent Truman from learning the truth, the team behind the show arranges a man to play Sylvia's "father", who tells Truman that Sylvia is traveling to Fiji. Truman decides to follow Sylvia's traces and leaves for Fiji too. However, during his escape, he encounters a series of strange incidents: first he finds that the airplane tickets are sold out "coincidentally" and is warned by the ticket seller that it is very dangerous to take a flight: then he decides to take a bus, but the bus to another town never really departs due to an "accidental" breakdown: and lastly he has to drive, but wherever he goes, there is always a sudden traffic jam. The crew of the show even create a "nuclear leak" to warn him off the road. Even when he finally overcomes his fear of the sea and gets on a boat, the weather suddenly changes and Truman has to fight against the fierce "storms" in the "sea". Arranged deliberately by the executor, those 'accidents' show that Truman's every

action is under the surveillance of cameras. Because of those cameras, the executor and his team are able to react quickly to unexpected events in Seahaven. Truman's being closely observed corresponds to what happens in the prison of the Panopticon.

Foucault believes that for individuals, there is no escape from such a systematical network of disciplinary society, because power is so omnipresent in this all-encompassing system that the individual's effort of escaping makes no sense. Nevertheless, in *The Truman Show*, Truman indeed escapes successfully from his prison, which is Seahaven. So does not the case of Truman show that human beings are able to exert their free will, because they can react and make choices even in a seemingly predetermined world (Seahaven)? Based on my analysis of *The Truman Show*, I will argue that the answer is not that simple.

#### Four Layers of Focalization and Truman's Realization of Free Will

The film *The Truman Show* reveals an ironic fact about reality shows: both the "actors" in the show and the audience are participants in media, and more importantly, they can be led and controlled by a mysterious power, even without realizing the fact of their being controlled. The mysterious power in this film is the power behind the hidden cameras, which assumes control over action. Does Truman have a free will? I will analyze this question by examining four layers of focalization involved.

The environment Truman lives in is presented through three different perspectives--Truman's, the executor Christof's and that of the audience inside the film. To clarify the relationship between the subject that performs the act of watching and the object

that is watched, I will use Mieke Bal's concept of focalization. According to Bal, focalization is an act performed by a subject on an object (142), and focalization is the viewpoint from which an object or event is presented. As for the first layer of focalization, Truman is the focalizer, and what he perceives is the focalized object, which is the artificial world of Seahaven. But this is the perspective with the least access to real information. The film also presents the perspective of the producer, who is the second subject of focalization. From Christof's perspective, Truman is the focalized object. Almost possessing unlimited control over the show, Christof as the producer plays the role of God watching the whole process. Nevertheless, his viewpoint is revealed from time to time to the audience who watch this film. As for the third level of focalization of the film, the viewers inside the film are also the focalizers of Truman's life. The audience in the film shares the producer's knowledge of what happens to Truman, but they have the least impact on the fate of Truman. The audience influence the rates of the show, which are the crucial reason of its existence. The more realistic the show is, the more audience are willing to watch and therefore, the less information about the truth is known by the show's protagonist Truman. The curiosity of the audience actually makes Truman's plight. However, the sympathy from any one member of the audience can also make a difference to Truman, as is exemplified by Sylvia's telling Truman the truth.

The viewers outside the film are the only ones that are able to see three perspectives at the same time and therefore to know the truth of the show, as well as the only ones that can do nothing to change what is presented in the film. This means that the viewpoint outside the film constitutes yet another level of focalization. In this way, the three layers of focalization

mentioned above enable viewers to get an overall knowledge of Truman's real situation--under the absolute control of camera. In addition, focalization in this film is not static but shifts with the development of the story: Truman moves from a very limited view to an almost inclusive view. Truman at first possesses the least information of what happens to him, and by the end of the film, he knows as much as Christof about the truth of the show.

In her discussion of focalization, Bal draws a distinction between two types, namely between character-bound (internal) and non-character-bound (external) focalization (148). However, unlike literary texts, film uses both words and images to convey information. There is not an obvious narrator throughout *The Truman Show*: instead, it is the convergence of various levels of focalization that makes the film. Nonetheless, the director and producer decide what to present and what to cut out, so in this sense, there exists a hidden narrator of the film, which is the director/producer. I will not discuss this hidden narrator separately in my analysis. What the producer and the director do is "telling by showing", so in this respect, their narratorship coincides with their positions as focalizers. The three focalizers mentioned above are all characters, and all three represent different levels of internal focalization. In addition, verbal captions in *The Truman Show* also act as one type of narrator. The captions from the very beginning show the basic background of Truman's story, which is about a popular television reality show. The captions make the audience outside the film a part of the group that know what happens to Truman.

Truman does possess free will in terms of the first level of focalization. As I have mentioned, in the age of mass media, it is hard to achieve a unanimous conclusion on whether we have free will. But if we temporarily turn our look at the representation of this topic in

this film, then we can answer the question whether Truman has free will in the film. Truman does have free will here, both freedom of will and freedom of action. Although Truman is on the disadvantaged side and seems to fight alone on his way to obtaining freedom, he is still capable of thinking freely, making decisions, putting them into practice and succeeding.

Firstly, the film presents Truman's change of attitude towards his environment. At first, he does not notice anything unusual until the appearance of Sylvia. The life he leads in his view is as common as other people's. Actually, Truman faces life with a quite earnest heart. He wakes up in the morning brushing his teeth, and embraces the new day with a smile to the man in the mirror. Then he goes to buy magazines on his way to work as usual, and gets back home enjoying cozy family life. Nothing is special before he encounters his dead father, if we neglect the existence of the audience inside the film or the executor who keeps reminding us that Truman is actually being watched in a reality show. Here, the second and the third focalization play the role of depicting the "real" situation of Truman and offering this information to us, the real audience of the film. In his own eyes, Truman seems to have a free will, and he is not even bothered by the question of whether he is free. In other words, at least until this moment when he learns the truth about his life from Sylvia, he believes he can think freely and act freely as every one else. But he does not know that every one except himself is an actor.

The appearance of Sylvia shatters his cognition of the world he has been accustomed to for years. When Truman finds he is under the surveillance of numerous cameras, he realizes that the so-called free life he once enjoyed is a lie. He determines to seek real freedom. Having overcome all the obstacles thrown in his way by the producer, he finds that to his

surprise, his boat punctures the wall of the dome, and finds an exit door to the outside world. Although Truman's exertion of his free will is hampered by Christof, Truman still decides his own fate rather than giving up or becoming another actor. Therefore, Truman has free will and exert it, which means he is indeed able to turn his will into action. The desire for truth and freedom is a natural request for Truman. By no means can he endure living in deception, even if he knows clearly how powerful the enemies are.

Truman indeed breaks free from his prison, and the realization of his freedom depends largely on his determination and courage. Planting the seed of fear in Truman's soul is the strategy Christof uses to stop Truman from exerting his free will. In order to intimidate Truman to stay in Seahaven, Christof at first makes Truman's 'father' die from drowning when Truman is still young boy, so that he will be afraid of water and the sea for all time. When Christof finds that Truman's determination and bravery to seek freedom are beyond his expectation, he creates a bunch of obstacles, such as traffic jams, the nuclear leak, and tempests in the sea on Truman's way out. When Christof finally realizes that he cannot stop Truman through these physical obstacles, he tries to brainwash Truman through words. He tells Truman that "in my world, you have nothing to fear" and "Seahaven is the way the world should be". Christof wants Truman to believe that he has created Seahaven for Truman's good, because it is a safer place than the real world. But Truman's desire to break free is more urgent than his desire for a stable life, so he refuses Christof's 'kind' advice. "You never had a camera in my head", says Truman. For Truman, Christof can impede him from exerting his free action by camera control, but he cannot control his mind or deprive him of the ability to think freely. After all, the camera can only detect the visible things, while

a human brain may be led but cannot be watched.

On the other hand, Christof's mercy and the pressure from a part of the audience of the show also play a part in Truman's realization of his freedom. Sylvia, as one viewer and participant of the show, keeps pretesting against what the team of the show do to Truman when she is kicked out by the team for telling Truman the truth. And indeed, Truman cannot exert his free will without exterior help. From his birth to his successful escape, Christof still takes control of the whole situation. I think Christof would have had hundreds of other ways at his disposal to prevent Truman from leaving Seahaven, but he has to give in when faced by Truman's invincible resolution. For Christof, Truman's rebellion means better ratings. This is the reason why he lets Truman leave; he does not sincerely care about Truman's struggle for freedom. The pressure from some viewers is also a factor that prompts Christof to make a concession. As I mentioned above, Sylvia is one of the actors in the show, but due to her "betrayal", she is fired and becomes a viewer who cares a lot about Truman. Her appearance tears up the ugly face of the show, and causes other viewers to pity Truman's situation. What is more, Sylvia does not stand by as other spectators do. Instead, she voices her protest in an interview, telling people that it is inhumane to treat Truman as a puppet. With more and more viewers pitying Truman, the producer team has to consider the audience's feelings if they want their show to remain successful. In this sense, Christof has no alternative but to give in and give Truman his freedom. Truman, however, is unaware of his support beyond the world of Seahaven.

Therefore, if Truman's realization of free will means his successful escape from Seahaven and from the control of Christof, then it is appropriate to conclude that Truman has



free will to the extent that he can think freely, and that he is able to turn his will into practice. But his own ability is not enough to help him obtain freedom, which means that the exertion of his free will is impossible with the help of the outside.

## The Exertion of Free Will in the Age of Media

Shakespeare once said, “All the world’s a stage / And all the men and women merely players” (83). Truman manages to break away from the stage specially set for him, and avoids becoming another actor in the reality show. Does that mean he is ultimately liberated by his getting rid of the old life in Seahaven and walking into the real world? The film does not offer a direct answer. But in my opinion, the film seems to suggest that the end of life in Seahaven does not necessarily spell a completely new epoch for Truman.

The film actually implies this point through several details. The response of the audience of the show in fact presents how viewers are carried away by media. In the film, the audience of the show are of all ages and professions, including retired old couples, drunken men in the pub, and two garage securities. These viewers love to peep into Truman’s life. They do not think it inappropriate to watch every detail of his life in the reality show, and instead, they may get a sense of satisfaction from knowing others’ privacy. They laugh with Truman when he falls in love with Sylvia; they pity his sufferings when he is held back by various obstacles on his escape; and they cheer for him when he ultimately obtains his freedom. However, except for Sylvia, most viewers only pity Truman, instead of sympathizing with him. These viewers only regard Truman as a character of a reality show or a member of entertainment

industry, rather than a common human being like themselves. Sylvia is the only person who cares about Truman and tries to do something for him. At the end of the film, seeing that “The Truman Show” comes to an end due to the main character’s escape, the two garage securities just switch the channel and continue to find something interesting to watch elsewhere. For them, the ending of “The Truman Show” only means the end of one show, and they know that there are still many other shows waiting for them. The satirical point is that the viewers both inside and outside the film think they know Truman and care about him by sharing their feelings, without realizing that they themselves are also manipulated by the show and the director behind.

Like the player that is playing chess, the audience is unconscious of the existence of the power that controls the player. Why are they unable to realize their situation? I think the primary reason lies with the characteristics of the media involved this film, which are television and cameras.

Pierre Bourdieu, a French marxist and philosopher, analyses the role of television in society in his study *On Television*. As for the influence of television in modern world, he points out, “Television enjoys a de facto monopoly on what goes into the heads of a significant part of the population and what they think” (18). Television is so popular that it has become one of the few most important channels through which people get information. When people are more and more reliant on television and believe what is presented there, they begin to fall into the trap of this medium. Bourdieu says television enjoys a monopoly because “television can hide by showing” (19). He says, “it can hide things by showing something other than what would be shown if television did what it’s supposed to do, provide

information” (19). That means television can frame its topics as information rather than present them as fictionality like films.

To take *The Truman Show* as an example, the director has the power to decide what to broadcast and what to hide. For instance, when Truman temporarily disappears from the surveillance of cameras (he is trying to get out of Seahaven on a boat), the sponsors threaten to suspend their sponsorship for fear that the show would come to an end shortly. Then Christof tells them it would be unwise to stop sponsorship when the audience are so curious to know what happens to Truman at the moment, and he decides to broadcast Truman’s sex tape in the following series. In fact, by continuing to release sensational news, “The Truman Show” hides the critical information that the show itself is inhumane. “Television calls for dramatization” (19), says Bourdieu. Christof knows how to create dramatization and in this way, he can keep the audience spellbound. The eye-catching news that reveals Truman’s privacy will attract the audience. And by stuffing them with continuous updated content, they are left no time to reflect on the hideous aspect of the program.

The impact of television in *The Truman Show* can be best described by Bourdieu’s paradoxical adage: “Television, which claims to record reality, creates it instead” (22). Instead of reporting reality, *The Truman Show* creates a type of reality. “It’s all true. It’s all real... Nothing you see on this show is fake. It’s merely controlled”, says Marlon, Truman’s best friend. The form of a reality show itself is a way of creating reality, through controlling what should happen and what not. The audience outside the film think they are experiencing a style of life which in their eyes are free from outside control by watching others’ lives, and will usually have a sense of identification with the characters in the show. Then they get lost

on the boundaries separating pre-existing reality from the reality created intentionally for them. That is the reason why the audience are easily carried away by television, without realizing they are also manipulated.

The role of cameras in this respect is also worth noticing. On the one hand, cameras directly participate in the production of television programs. Cameras are able to store information in images, which are usually less ambiguous than words and are more easily accepted as truth. We always say “seeing is believing”, so when it comes to reality shows, the audience are very likely to take them as reality unconsciously. Hence, with the help of the camera television creates its own reality. On the other hand, cameras also play the role of watchmen. Truman is watched by thousands of cameras, almost having no place to hide. The effect of this pervasive camera gaze is clear: we may enjoy watching others through cameras, but I believe almost no people would endure the permanent gaze of cameras when it happens to ourselves. However, most audience members presented in the film do not realize the danger of camera control.

In short, when it comes to the audience inside the film, they are not aware of the fact that they are also under the manipulation of the show and their act of watching the show makes them accomplices of the production team. Many of the viewers, however, are also unaware of the evil side of the camera gaze. As a consequence, the viewers of the show seem to lose the ability to fully exert their free will in the age of media. That is how the real world Truman will enter looks like, and who says it is impossible that Truman may become a member of another such audience?

Christof tells Truman that “there is no more truth out there than there is in the world I created for you”. Christof’s words make sense if we take them as a warning against our modern lifestyle that highly relies on media. According to Debord, our modern world is more closely connected with images than it was several decades ago: the social relationship between people is negotiated through media, which forms the spectacle (Debord 12). Television and cameras are manifestations of the spectacle. The bete-noire of the spectacle lies in its power to maintain the existing order by infinitely adjusting the rules. When communication is controlled by the spectacle and then becomes one-way, the exertion of free will will be impossible. The audience in *The Truman Show* demonstrate the influence of one-way communication: they partly lose the ability to think freely.

However, despite the audience’s half-hearted response, the main character of this film, Truman, does obtain freedom by breaking out of the prison of Seahaven. Despite details such as the viewers continuous passion for television shown in the end of the film, which possibly suggest a dead end to ultimate freedom from the control of media, I think the film still focuses on Truman’s courage to fight for freedom no matter how desperate the situation is. The moment he opens the exit door, Truman rejects Christof’s promise of a seemingly more stable life, and becomes a “true man” in the sense of realizing his free will.

For people whose lives are closely connected to mass media and new media, *The Truman Show* is a fable of the age of media. We cannot overlook the danger of being watched and controlled by cameras, nor can we lose sight of the film’s appeal to fight media control. This film urges us to think whether we are likely to be in the same situation as Truman, and how our exertion of free will may be hampered by media, and also, what we can do to free

ourselves from the bondage of media control. “It could happen to you”, Truman reminds us.

## Conclusion

“But a man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated” (Hemingway 108). Hemingway’s saying in *Old Man and the Sea* best describes the spirit demonstrated by Truman. By presenting Truman’s struggle to obtain real freedom, *The Truman Show* participates in the discussion of free will in its own way. By running away from Seahaven, Truman flees from the control of Foucault’s “disciplinary society” or Debord’s spectacle. In other words, denying the determinist view, this film at least offers us an optimistic angle and shows that even if we are trapped in a world like Seahaven, we still have a chance to make a change. The close of the show indeed marks the renewal of Truman’s life: however, can Truman continue to exert his free will when walking into the real world? The film does not give us the answer.

We are unavoidably influenced by our environment. “We shape our tools and afterwards our tools shape us”, says Christof. What matters is that we realize to what extent we are affected by our exterior environment and that we reflect upon the question how much room it leaves us to exert our will. Truman accomplishes his own salvation by escaping from Seahaven, but what about us viewers in modern society who are largely controlled by media, just like the audience presented in the film? Is there always a way to combat the rules imposed on us? If we take Truman’s example, then the answer is yes; yet if we reflect on the example of the audience in the film, then we have a hard time finding a definitive answer.

Supposing we are the players in a game of chess, Borges asks, “what god beyond God begins the round”? Through Seahaven, under the surveillance of ubiquitous cameras, *The Truman Show* tries to find out what powers impede the exertion of our free will and how this is done. However, one thing is for sure--our persistent search for answers to these questions is due to our innermost fear of Seahaven’s becoming an undeniable truth.

### Chapter III

In my second chapter, I explored the cinematic representation of the question of free will in *The Truman Show*. Apart from film, other forms of art such as literary works also participate in the discussion of free will. In this chapter, I discuss “An Orison of Sonmi~451”, one of the six stories in David Mitchell’s novel *Cloud Atlas*, to study how the novel represents the possibility of free will with regard to human clones, as compared to “real” human beings. In my analysis, I focus on the following questions: Does the character Sonmi~451 have a free will? If so, how is it represented in the novel? Moreover, from the example of Sonmi~451, a clone, I want to explore whether the case of Sonmi~451 sheds any light on the possible future of human beings, as well as the relations between technology and human beings.

*Cloud Atlas* consists of six seemingly unrelated stories. The story “An Orison of Sonmi~451” is the fifth one, and it tells the reader about Sonmi~451’s past experience in the form of her interview by an Archivist. In this interview, Sonmi~451 tells the Archivist how she worked as one of the slaves in Papa Song’s restaurant, how she discovered that she possessed self-awareness and began to “ascend” under the guidance of members of Taemosan University, and then how she witnessed the killing and recycling of retired clones into “Soap”, a chemical used to feed fabricants and control their consciousness. Also, Sonmi~451 admits that she has helped the rebels, members of the Union who intend to raise the self-awareness of all clones, by writing her *Declarations*. Her writing the manifesto is the direct reason why she was arrested by the government, tried and condemned to death, and finally brought to the Archivist for this last interview. However, at the end of the story, Sonmi~451 reveals that she



knows the rebellion, including her own ascension (the term “ascension”, in this novel, refers to a clone’s elevation of mind, intelligence and behavior from ignorance of its state of being to a level of possessing self-awareness closer to that of human beings), has been deliberately staged by the government so as to create a myth of rebelliousness among the fabricants and instill mistrust of fabricants among pure-bloods, which means she has been manipulated by the (human authorities) all the time.

Sonmi~451’s story can be summarized as a clone’s struggle against her manipulation by humans and a struggle for freedom of both mind and action. So is her struggle a successful one, in other words: does she realize her free will? To solve this puzzle, firstly I will explore the exact process of Sonmi~451’s ascension, and engage the theory of focalization to examine whether or not she can be said to have and exert her free will. Then, I adopt a post-humanist viewpoint to study the relations between technology and humanity. There are also some common points shared by *The Truman Show* and Sonmi~451’s story, and possible worlds theory will be of great help to analyze the representation of free will in literary and cinematic works like these two cases.

### Ascension of Sonmi~451

Similar to the panoptic environment presented in *The Truman Show*, “An Orison of Sonmi~451” is also set against a background of pervasive control. However, unlike *The Truman Show*, which places its human protagonist in a stage-like world with real human beings as actors, Sonmi~451’s story is not simply about human beings, but also about clones,

or more specifically, about the relationship and confrontation between clones and human beings. Therefore, in terms of the exertion of free will, the case of Sonmi~451 is more complicated. Before discussing whether Sonmi~451 has a free will, I think it necessary to make clear the perspectives the story presents to readers. The story takes the form of a dialogue between a clone and an Archivist, which means that the information readers obtain primarily depends on Sonmi~451's answers to the questions addressed to her by the Archivist. I already used Bal's theory of focalization to analyze Truman's realization of free will, and I think her theory can again be enlisted to interpret Sonmi~451's story.

The most obvious relationship between focalizer and the focalized in this story is that between Sonmi~451 and what she sees and perceives. This focalization does not change throughout the story. Via Sonmi~451's account, readers are able to follow the story from her perspective. The focalized objects change with the variations of Sonmi~451's environment: from Papa Song's dinery, to Taemosan University, to Papa Song's Golden Ark (that is, the slaughterhouse ship masked as a vehicle that is supposed to take clones to a paradisiacal place of retirement after their twelve years of service), and finally she faces the Archivist. In this sense, while talking to the Archivist, she focalizes her own past for all time, and the image of the Archivist is shaped through the dialogue between him and Sonmi~451. In Sonmi~451's view, the core event in her story is her "ascension", which is not a sudden elevation, but a slow progressive process achieved with help from the outside. Whether the ascension is successful or not helps to answer these two questions: whether Sonmi~451 has a free will and to what extent she can exert it. In other words, does she ascend to a state that enables her to think independently and act freely?

At the beginning of her account, Sonmi~451 awakes one day realizing that she is different from other fabricants, and from that moment on, she begins her ascension. The first exterior factor that expedites her ascension is the death of Yoona~939. Yoona~939 is a clone that first shows symptoms of “deviance”. She starts to mimic the consumers instead of taking and obeying orders, and hence her vocabulary becomes far richer than that of other clones. Moreover, she is no longer affected by Soap, which erases the words the clones just learn and “deadens curiosity” (Mitchell 189). The transgression of Yoona~939 ends with her being murdered by a guard in Papa Song’s dinery. Luckier than Yoona~939, Sonmi~451 is aware of her change, and from Yoona~939’s tragic ending she learns to be more cautious by keeping her ascension a secret and pretending to be the same as other clones. But what does “ascension” exactly mean in terms of Sonmi~451’s case? Sonmi~451 describes her understanding of ascension to the Archivist: at first she hears “the voice of sentience”, and then she realizes that she is in the urgent need of enriching her language, and her curiosity about “Outside” increases (205-06). At least in Sonmi~451’s case, the improvement of sentience, language, and curiosity plays a significant role in her possessing a free will, and in getting rid of the bind of Orientation, the program that presets and limits the clones’ ability. However, Sonmi’s final realization of the extent of that improvement is actually manipulated by an exterior power, the human authorities, or so-called “purebloods”, which means that she is not capable of transcending Orientation and realizing her ascension completely on her own.

The most important help she receives in the process comes from Wing~027 (who is a clone himself), and Hae-Joo (a pure-blood), who both work in Taemosan University. Sonmi~451 soon faces the first choice she makes in her life when she starts to ascend: to

leave Papa Song's to go Outside, or remain in Papa Song's and wait for her ascension to be discovered by purebloods. She chooses the former. Then she is taken by a secret helper called Chang from Papa Song's to Taemosan University where she feels that she becomes an experimental subject for studying the ascension process. She tells the Archivist, "In Papa Song's I had been a slave; at Taemosan I was a slightly more privileged slave" (241). Clones like her are created to serve humans day and night, and they are not allowed to possess self-awareness so that they will not rebel due to overwork. The above statement shows Sonmi's awareness of her being another "deviant" clone worth observing and studying, rather than being a common subject with life and dignity. This remark is offered at the time of her final interview when she has already finished her ascension. However, her clear awareness of her state of being is a proof of the success of the ascension.

During her transcending period, Sonmi~451 receives guidance from Wing~027, who is also an experimental fabricant specimen. As Sonmi~451's first mentor, Wing~027 tells her that if she wants to survive for long, she must "create Catechisms" of her own (215). In Papa Song's, all clones are made to obey and recite the Six Catechisms drawn up by the company, and they are given a promise of Xultation after their twelve-year service. But Wing~027 teaches Sonmi~451 to rebel and to think critically. What is more, to be more like a human, Sonmi~451 is told that she needs intelligence, which can be realized by another ascension through time, of which she has enough, and knowledge (216). Wing~027, however, is "accidentally" burnt to death, which provokes Sonmi~451's innermost "fury". "Fury forges a steel will", recalls Sonmi~451: "that day was the first step to my Declarations; to the prison cube, and to the Lighthouse" (219). Wing~027's tragic death has a huge impact on

Sonmi~451's ascension process--she is not only able to think, but also able to react with the determination of her will. Her fury is the emotional reaction that directly leads her to the road of rebellion.

Wing~027 shows Sonmi~451 the importance of learning and obtaining knowledge, as well as the ability of independent thinking. Another mentor Hae-Joo, a human being and a member of the anti-government organization Union, also plays a part in Sonmi~451's ascension. By taking excursions with Hae-Joo, Sonmi~451 learns from her contact with human beings how real human society works. For Sonmi~451, Hae-Joo is not merely a mentor like Wing~027; he also becomes her closest human friend and partner. Although Sonmi~451 is convinced in the end that Hae-Joo was a provocateur put in her path by the government to collaborate in a plot ensuring that clones like Sonmi~451 would be always kept under its control, she does learn how to live and behave as a human from her human guide.

With the help of her two mentors, Sonmi~451 accomplishes her ascension-- before she is condemned and sent to the Archivist, she possesses the ability to think freely as a free human, which means she is able to think free from the control of Orientation, and to form her own opinion about her situation. Judging from Sonmi~451's account, then, she does succeed in her ascension.

Another relationship between focalizer and the focalized object is also worth noticing, namely between the Archivist and what he hears and perceives. The story takes the form of a dialogue, so Sonmi~451's account constitutes only one side of the discourse. The Archivist

plays the role of an interviewer who enables readers to draw a complete picture of what happens to Sonmi~451, but his responses also complement Sonmi's story by offering alternative views of what happens, make him a focalizer in his own right. For example, when Sonmi~451 tells the Archivist she sees how retired clones are butchered and recycled in the ship, the Archivist expresses his doubt: he thinks it is likely that Sonmi~451 has been brainwashed by the movement behind the rebellion, because he believes that "no such... 'slaughtership' could possibly be permitted to exist" (360). The Archivist from time to time interrupts and questions the authenticity of Sonmi~451's experiences, and puts forward his own opinion. Readers thus have to take the responsibility of choosing the side they believe. Nevertheless, the Archivist's doubt and questions cannot deny Sonmi~451's accomplishment in ascending, nor do they imply the impossibility for clones to exert their free will, compared with "real" human beings.

### The Question of Free Will: Technological Development and Humanity

From the above analysis, it would seem that Sonmi~451 manages to complete her ascension. But the question is, does her successful ascension mean that she has the ability to exert her free will? Or to put it more precisely can Sonmi~451 exert her free will as a clone? Another question worth discussing is: If a clone possesses free will, then what does this mean for human beings and humanity?

In fact, Sonmi~451 does not think she has a free will, because she cannot even regret her actions. When the Archivist asks her whether she regrets the course of her life, she answers as

follows: “How can I? ‘Regret’ implies a freely chosen, but erroneous, action; free will plays no part in my story” (365). Sonmi~451 believes she cannot make any choice but accept what has happened to her for all time, so she does not believe in the role of free will in her story. Despite these words, however, I will contend that she has free will and can exert it partly. My answer is based on two points which I will proceed to discuss here: the logic of Sonmi~451’s speech and the (potential) influence of Sonmi~451’s rebellious act.

On the one hand, Sonmi~451 is able to think freely, which can be seen from her clear awareness of her state of being. That awareness is explicitly shown by her speech and the coherence of her story. For instance, Sonmi~451 knows that instead of being duplicates of one another, clones have different minds. She observes that purebloods do not realize this uniqueness in different clones, but just try to convince themselves that these differences between individual fabricants’ minds do not exist. As for the reason why purebloods are blind to this point, she says, “To enslave an individual distresses the conscience, but to enslave a clone is merely like owning the latest mass-produced six-wheeled ford” (191). Actually, when Sonmi~451 speaks these words, she has already accomplished ascension. Her realization that she is a slave shows her lucid logic in understanding the rule working in Papa Song’s dinery as well as the truth of human’s psychology. From her talk with the Archivist, we can also see that Sonmi~451 becomes quite confident in what she believes, and the doubts of the Archivist cannot shake her stand. One interesting example is Sonmi~451’s reaction to the Archivist’s following observation. “You seem to have embraced Union propaganda wholeheartedly, Sonmi” (342), says the Archivist. Sonmi~451 retorts directly, “I might observe that you have embraced Nea So Copros propaganda wholeheartedly, Archivist” (342). Sonmi~451’s

refutation shows her ability to judge based on her own belief and knowledge, which is considered a sign of serious deviance and revolt from her maker's point of view.

Moreover, Sonmi~451 is not a human, but she is more humane than human beings in charge in the story. Under the governance of the Juche, which is the powerful corporate government of Nea So Copros, the living conditions for human beings worsen: the environment is severely polluted and lands become barren and unsuitable for people to live in; the gap between the poor and the rich is enormous. Nea So Copros creates a consumerist society with highly advanced technology but with little humane concern for its people. Sonmi~451 as a clone, instead, shows sympathy not only for her clone sisters when she witnesses the cruel butchery, but also for human beings suffering from poverty, wars, and miseries she encounters during her adventure. In this sense, Sonmi~451 is far more humane than the governors. She has taken over the most precious property--humanity--from purebloods, which means she is freer in mind and thought than her human rulers.

Therefore, I conclude that Sonmi~451's ascension is successful in that she can think free and then speak her mind. This ascension, in fact, means that Sonmi~451 has become more and more like human beings.

Secondly, although Sonmi~451 herself does not believe free will ever plays a role in her story, her influence, which is not expected by the government and whose effects will manifest themselves only in the next story, implies that she has attained to the exertion of her free will to some degree.

Meanwhile, it is still necessary to find out why Sonmi~451 believes she does not own



free will. One possible reason is that she is aware of her being a clone and fabricant, which means she knows she has been pre-programmed: she may therefore believe that what she does is still part of the program. Moreover, she believes her whole confession is based on scripted events, and she thinks she is in a show where most of the people and the fabricants involved in her story are actors. The opposition between Union and the government itself is part of a conspiracy between the rulers. Accordingly, Sonmi~451 says she realizes her fate the moment she completes the manifesto (363).

In fact, the story does not give direct evidence to prove that what Sonmi~451 says about the conspiracy is true: neither do we know whether Sonmi~451 has really been handled as a chess piece by the authorities. That ambiguity leaves room for the possibility that her feeling of being controlled just manifests her fear of the power she cannot defeat by herself. However, I think it does not matter whether Sonmi~451 really knows the plot, nor does it matter whether she writes her *Declarations* by choice or not. What matters is that her action of writing the manifesto does have an impact on the status quo of her world. Sonmi~451's rebellion against the Six Catechisms starts to spread across the country via media: "Media have flooded Nea So Copros with my Catechisms. Every schoolchild in Nea So Copros knows my twelve 'blasphemies' now. [...] My ideas have been reproduced a billionfold" (364-65). The impact of her act has been expanded by media. The important thing is that Sonmi~451 is convinced she will kindle a revolution and may become a model for later generations to react against the existing system, a conviction that is demonstrated by her quote of Seneca's warning to Nero: "No matter how many of us you kill, you will never kill your successor" (365). Sonmi~451 realizes both the actual and the potential effect of her

*Declarations*, and in the next story of *Cloud Atlas*, “Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After”, she is even worshipped as a goddess by Zachry's people, who are among the last remaining humans. In this sense, her will is put into practice.

Judging from the points discussed so far, Sonmi~451's ascension is the elevation from a fabricant who does not have free will to a near-human who can think freely and put her thoughts into practice. From the moment she talks to the Archivist, Sonmi~451 is already like a human being, the only apparent difference, as she mentions, being that she still cannot take human food. But what does Sonmi~451's ascension mean to “purebloods”, and what prospect does this story offer in terms of the possible future of humanity?

## A Post-humanist Interpretation of the Relationship Between Technology and Humanity

Post-humanists explore the relationship between humanity and technological development, and provide their reflection on this pair of relationship. N. Katherine Hayles is one of the pioneers in post-human studies. In her study *How We Became Posthuman* she points out how technological advancement brings about the appearance of post-human body, especially the cybernetic post-human, and therefore changes the traditional understanding of human and humanity. According to Hayles, traditional notions of the human build upon liberal humanism, while the posthuman can be “seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines” (2173). She sees that electronic media are able to give rise to a configuration “so extensive as to change the nature of ‘man’” (2174). The cybernetic post-human merely works

as a carrier of information and codes, while the sharp boundary between bodily existence and machines that exists in conventional notions of the human gives way to indistinctness between the human body and computer simulation. What is more, when material embodiment can be separated from information produced by physicality, human subjectivity becomes fragmented and heterogeneous.

Although Hayles's post-humanist theory deals with the contemporary situation and the near future of cybernetic space and cybernetic subjects, her views still shed light on the apocalyptic future presented in Sonmi~451's story. Hayles analyzes the relationship between body and mind under the influence of advanced cybernetic technology and electronic media, and the situation in Sonmi~451's story bears a similarity to her views. Sonmi~451 is a clone, a man-made fabricant, which means there is still an essential chasm between her and human beings in physical or material structure (for example, she cannot eat human food), but the boundary between her thoughts and a human being's is trivial in the sense that she can think independently. Therefore, whether Sonmi~451 is a clone or not does not affect her ability to exert her free will if we interpret her as a type of post-human being.

If we regard Sonmi~451 as a post-human, then what is the relationship between her and common human beings? I think that if the notion of the post-human applies to Sonmi~451, then it applies to her society as a whole, which means that human beings in her age should also be taken as post-humans due to the blurring of the boundary between the human body and technology. For instance, in Sonmi's story, wealthy purebloods in Nea So Copros become increasingly artificial by buying rejuvenation to prolong their lives, while the poor have no choice but to be banished to the slums and die in poverty and misery. In that way, the division

between human bodies and the artificial or the technology becomes vague, and this case also reveals that the relation between the human body and technology is determined by capitalism.

Sonmi~451 is not an exception, and accordingly, her wish to exert her free will is as natural as with any human being. Also, her doubt about whether she has a free will or not is itself a sign of the kinship between the ascended clone and the human. Her denial of the role of free will in her story, bespeaks a pessimistic attitude towards life and fate, and a similar sense of feebleness or loss of control over one's life also occurs to real human beings. Meanwhile we may note that Sonmi~451 can at least reflect on whether she has been brainwashed or pre-set by the clone company, while the purebloods in her story, the real human beings, seem to lose the ability to exert their free will. The Archivist who insists on the truth of the doctrines instilled by the government is a case in point. That is to say, the positions of clones and human beings are reversed to some extent, and ironically, the purebloods in the story do not realize this.

Post-humanist theory unfolds a new perspective for reexamining the relationship between human beings and technological advancement. "An Orison of Sonmi~451" depicts an apocalyptic society where the traditional notion of humanity is challenged by the appearance of clones like Sonmi~451. Ascension makes the clones more humane than human beings, which is indeed a horrible prospect for men who are still in the dark, unaware of the value of free will and the possible consequences of Sonmi~451's awakening.

The Possible World in Sonmi~451's Story and Cloud Atlas

In my above analysis, my aim has been to show that Sonmi~451 is a character created by Mitchell to present what happens when human beings are defeated by the artificial intelligence they create. By “defeated”, I mean that the exertion of free will is no longer an exclusively human prerogative due to the successful transcendence of their fabricants. So Sonmi~451’s case can be seen as a warning against a potential danger threatening humanity’s future or a satire on some problems in contemporary reality, such as the harmful consequences of unbridled capitalism for human right. For a further interpretation of the story, I think possible worlds theory may afford a framework.

Possible worlds debates in the domain of literary theory originate in previous discussions within philosophy. However, “possible worlds” is a vague concept and philosophical opinions in terms of the interpretation of possible worlds are diverse. According to Ruth Ronen, the author of *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory*, possible worlds work as “a descriptive tool” for “the notion of alternativeness and for analyzing accessibility relations among worlds” (26). Despite the divergence between specific definitions of the notion “possible world”, on one point all theorists agree: all discussions of possible worlds are about non-actualized possibilities. Moreover, those “non-actualized possibilities” can be explored and recorded in literary works.

For Ronen, fiction is “part of a larger context of discourses that do not refer to the way things actually are in the world” (7). So fictional worlds do not completely share the same social rules with the actual world. On the other hand, Ronen adopts the idea of “a plurality of worlds”, claiming that “possible worlds enable us to describe the universe not as a single, determinate and determined set of facts but as a constellation of possible and impossible

situations” (169).

Ronen also clarifies the meaning of possible worlds in fiction. Usually, she points out, fiction deals with relations between literature and the actual world, and constructs its own world of referents. Fictional worlds are usually based on the principle of *parallelism* (8). This means that fiction builds a parallel world to the actual one, with its own values and discourse that differ from the actual one, but that still has many counterparts in reality. The logic of possible worlds, on the other hand, is that of *ramification* (Ronen 8), while the notion of possible worlds stresses the existence of an alternative as well as of possibilities that may or may not exist in the actual world. As for the differences between fictional worlds and possible worlds, Ronen puts it this way: fictional facts do not relate “what could have or what could not have occurred in actuality, but rather, what did occur and what could have occurred in fiction” (9).

“An Orison of Sonmi~451” first of all constructs its own world as a fictional story, with its particular subjects, social organization, norms, and value system. It establishes a world far more advanced in technology and science than contemporary actual society. If we take Sonmi~451’s perspective, the world she lives in is much like a huge ruthless and cold factory, where she and other clones have to suffer the autocracy of Papa Song, and where they exist only for the purpose of serving purebloods. In other words, the clones are on the production line from creation to destruction. According to Ronen’s theory of possible worlds, the world presented in Sonmi~451’s story is not merely a parallel world to the actual world, but also a ramification of the actual one. This means there is no definite gap between the fictional world and the real world: instead, these worlds are related to each other in various respects. The

technological development in “An Orison of Sonmi~451” represents a possible direction or trend that we may witness in future or are witnessing now: for example, media like 3DS are commonly used for contact in the story, which dates back to 2004, while the use of 3DS is not an unusual thing today. More importantly, the cultural representation of clones reflects fear of artificial intelligence and worries about the relations between us human beings and our “products”. How to deal with a clone’s rights, if one day we really create a human clone, is still a controversial topic in today’s discussion.

The fears mentioned above are partly brought on by technological innovations. Our level of production is increasing and will bring unavoidable changes to our current way of life. “An Orison of Sonmi~451” creates a futuristic fictional world to simulate the possibilities that may appear in humanity’s future. The possibilities therefore extend from the real world, and work as references for today’s life. On the one hand, apart from technology, this fictional world is marked by its resemblance to some actual geopolitical situations. Thus, Nea So Copros is an imaginary ruling corporation based on the possible situation of a united Korea. Autocracy that is practiced in North Korea still holds its place in this fictional world, and the novel presents an exaggerated version of the aggressive capitalism of South Korea. The difference is that it pushes the real situation to its fictional extreme, where people are not aware of their predicament. On the other hand, Sonmi~451’s experiences exemplify the struggle to gain free will and then to practice it. Sonmi~451’s desire to achieve freedom, her doubt about the existence of free will, and her denial of free will’s role in her story can be read as referring to a real person. Therefore, the possible world presented by “An Orison of Sonmi~451” makes the fictional story not only an imaginary story, but also a metaphor for

what we are experiencing now and may experience in the future.

As one of six stories in *Cloud Atlas*, “An Orison of Sonmi~451” describes one possible world, but if we take a closer look at the other stories in the novel, then we will find that the six stories are all about human nature and human’s existence in various imaginary and even fantastical situations. The temporary settings of the stories range from the 1850s (“The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing”, the first story of the novel) to the post-apocalyptic future (“Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After”, the sixth story), and narrative space shifts between different continents and countries. The six stories are connected in that each introduces key characters and objects that will appear in the next story. For example, the final wish of Sonmi~451 is to watch the last part of a film made about the vanity publisher Timothy Cavendish, who is the protagonist of the memoir “The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish”, the second part of which follows “An Orison of Sonmi~451”. Again, in the second half of Cavendish’s story we are told that Cavendish obtains the rest of the script of Luisa Rey's story, which naturally introduces the second half of the next unfinished narration, the detective novel “Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery”. The six stories, like one ring hooking up to another, offer six possible worlds or six possibilities for the real world. The intended connection in every story seems to reflect the arrangement of fate, as opposed to the potential of free will.

Like “An Orison of Sonmi~451”, *The Truman Show* also constructs its own possible world. Although the setting of the possible world in Truman’s story is different from that of Sonmi~451, the two stories both picture the possible consequences of technological intervention, and both reflect an individual’s struggle to realize its free will under nearly



impossible circumstances. In *The Truman Show*, the free will at stake is still that of a human being, while Sonmi~451's case extends the question of free will to the sphere of the non-human. If Sonmi~451 as a clone possesses her free will and can partly realize it, then human beings should also have a free will as well as the ability to put their will into action. Two different stories and two possible worlds explore the question and the conditions of free will. So, both of these two examples offer a cautious yet affirmative answer to the question whether we possess a free will.

## Conclusion

"I wish to finish viewing a film I began watching when, for an hour in my life, I knew happiness" (Mitchell 365): for her last wish, Sonmi~451 requests to see the rest of the film in order to revisit her only memory of happiness. She finishes her ascension that has made her more humane, showing a capacity for both emotions and rational thought. Although she does not have much opportunity to choose, she still has the ability to think independently, and her clear self-awareness already sets her apart from many human beings who can choose but still choose to live in the dark.

"An Orison of Sonmi~451", like the other stories in *Cloud Atlas*, is a fable of humanity and human nature. The exploration of the question of free will, in these stories, is driven by our basic need for freedom. In its fictional world, Sonmi~451's story deals with the possibility for a man-made creature to have and exert its free will, but it also sheds light on distinct flaws within the actual existence of human beings.

## Conclusion

As human beings, we on the one hand desire freedom of both mind and action, but on the other hand, we find that our desire is constantly frustrated by a ruthless reality that may make us doubt the existence of free will and forces us to embrace fatalism or determinism. It is impossible for human beings who belong to different cultures and historical eras and who vary so much in their minds to achieve a unanimous definition of what is free will, and it is also hard to know how strong humanity's desire for freedom can be. However, all human beings share the need for food, security, emotional feedback. Following Aristotle, all of these needs finally lead to the pursuit of happiness, which is the chief goal of all of our actions: "Happiness, then, is something final and self-sufficient, and is the end of action" (from *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle). The ongoing development of technology in our times, especially the overarching power of media, has given rise to uncertainty and ambivalence regarding the question of our capability to possess and realize our free will, as well as the ability to obtain the happiness we strive for.

Both *The Truman Show* and "An Orison of Sonmi-451" explore the possibility of possessing and exerting one's free will in particular situations. My analysis of *The Truman Show* proves that it is still possible for us to obtain and realize our free will under the pervasive surveillance of cameras, with Seahaven representing an extreme model of how our actual society will work in a possible future. Truman tells us that no matter how huge the blocks are on our road to freedom, if only we have determination and enough bravery, there could be a way out waiting for us to be discovered. Free will can be realized by those with firm beliefs. Like *The Truman Show*, Sonmi-451's story also indicates the possibility of

exerting one's free will. The difference is that Sonmi~451 is not a human being but a clone. However, from a post-humanist point of view, Sonmi~451 has the same rights and abilities as human beings. She has a free will and does exert it, as we may infer from her successful ascension and the influence of her rebellion.

I do not mean to say that these two examples provide a definite optimistic answer to the question whether we human beings can realize our free will in reality, but they do imply hope. They indeed represent examples of how one may achieve freedom of thought and action. For Truman, there is no camera in his mind despite dreadful camera control; for Sonmi~451, no preset program can ever stop her ascension or her freedom of thought.

More importantly, the value of these literary and cinematic representations lies in the possible worlds they create as alternatives for our actual world. Apart from putting these imaginary worlds into concrete words and vivid images, these works also allow us to take a serious look at where we are now and where we may head. Truman or Sonmi~451 are by no means aliens created out of blue, but they are projections of our fear of the unknown and our anxiety about the uncertainty of humanity's future with the rapid advancement of technology. We have to face the potential dangers caused by the rapid progress of technology, and prepare for change. But from these two cases, we may learn that the key to solving the problem is still held in our hands. In this age determined by the omnipresence of media, every individual has good reasons to worry about the overpowering force of disciplinary society or the society of the spectacle. Anyway, given that every whole is made up of individuals, then it is us human beings who create media; yet it is again us as a whole who let media control our lives: this remains the fundamental paradox within human society.

The question of free will will continue to confront us as long as humans exist. In the age of media, this question has become more complex to answer, but we can turn to a vast archive of artistic representations for possible answers. *The Truman Show* and *Cloud Atlas* are two eloquent examples of such representations, yet I think these works still leave much room for us to explore and reflect on our state of being.

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