

Telling the Truth – Response Sheet

Title: The Insider
Form: Film
Director: Michael Mann
Date: 1999

Context & Values:

The story conveyed in the text is based on a true story. The film is set in between 1993 and early 1996 and follows on from the court case where the seven CEO's of Big Tobacco appear in court and declare that nicotine is not addictive.

In reality, Jeffrey Wigand was fired from Brown & Williamson on March 24th, 1993. The CBS story was aired on *60 Minutes* on February 4th, 1996.

It was a time in history when 'real' truths about cigarettes were beginning to emerge. Wigand's whistle blowing helped the public confirm what many had already suspected, that nicotine was an addictive drug, and that cigarettes were nicotine delivery devices.

Concepts or Ideas Conveyed about Telling the Truth:

There are many concepts explored in the film about the nature of truth and the way in which the media portrays these truths.

The first notable concept portrayed is the nature of money talking. As Lowell Bergman stated, this issue was possibly "the biggest public health issue in American history." Despite this, CBS initially decides not to air the interview with Jeffrey Wigand. The reason, because by airing an interview that contained information protected under a confidentiality agreement, the network could be sued by Brown & Williamson for tortious interference. If they were sued, it could put a spanner in the works for the sale of CBS by Tisch to Westinghouse. Executives at the network faced the possibility of millions of dollars worth of lost income, if the sale fell through.

Another concept raised, is the nature of how the law can overpower the truth. Jeffrey Wigand had information that could save the American people from further health hazards, potentially saving thousands of lives. But because he signed a confidentiality agreement with Brown & Williamson, he was not able to reveal the information, despite it being the 'truth.'

As a legal adviser for CBS correctly points out, in regards to Wigand's interview, "the greater the truth, the greater the damage."

Language/filmic/visual/aural features:

- Irony – "*60 Minutes* is the highest rated, most respected, TV magazine news show." The irony is that of the contradiction. A TV magazine would be regarded as one of the lower forms of respectability, so to use it in the same sentence as "most respected" is ironic. Goes back to how we portray the 'truth.'

- Silence – Silence is used on numerous occasions throughout the film. The overhead shot of Wigand clearing out his desk is done in silence, as is his ride to the court room before he steps out of the car. This helps to emphasize Wigand thinking.
- Repetition of static – The sound and vision of static is used throughout the film to represent danger and when things aren't clear.
- Film Noir – Darkness and shadows are used in the basement and backyard scenes to emphasize danger and to make things seem unclear.
- Diegetic sounds – One very prominent diegetic sound right throughout the film is the sound of beeping. There is beeping on pagers, phones and faxes and is representational of the way in which communication in that society was changing.
- Reflections – Reflections off Wigand's glasses show him thinking, and the reflections are often symbolic of what he is thinking about. On the way to the court house, he sees the reflection of the cemetery that they go flying past.
- Grainy Shot – There is a shot of Wigand's interview we keep looking at, through the camera or television monitor. This perspective reinforces what the film is essentially all about, getting information to the people through media.
- Shaky Shots – Michael Mann's signature of danger is to use shots that shake. When Wigand approaches his house in his car and sees the security person walking down the side of the house, he becomes fearful and the shots from inside the car immediately begin to shake, as if emblematic of Wigand's fear.
- Humour – In such a serious film as this, the audience requires a moment of humour to give them a mental break, even if just for a moment. When Wigand is testifying in court, an event that Bergman put him up to, outside the courthouse Bergman is asked by a fellow journalist "Have you got any idea what's going on in there?" Bergman replies with "No Idea." This is also a little dramatic irony, as the audience knows what's going on.
- Vocalizing – Vocalizing is used extensively throughout the entire film whenever Wigand or other characters are thinking or in tense situations.

Describe the issues being twisted:

The issue being twisted in the text is quite simple. Tobacco companies have been using ammonia chemistry to increase the effect of nicotine on the brain, and are trying to hide this information from the public.

The company uses threats, confidentiality agreements, gagging & restraining orders, threats of litigation and smear campaigns to try and keep the information secret.