Dreams Within Dreams: Techniques of Dream Representation in Film & Animation

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Submitted to the Faculty of Film, Art and Creative Technologies in candidacy for the BA (hons) Degree in Animation DL832

Submitted March 2025

Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Honours) Animation. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

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Acknowledgements

I want to give a huge thank you to my tutor Austin McQuinn for guiding and encouraging me through the process and giving me the confidence to find my voice while writing. Thank you to my friends and classmates for listening to endless complaints and motivating me through the journey. And thank you to my mum for last minute proofreading this thesis.

Abstract

This thesis analyses the depiction of dreams in historical and contemporary films comparing Surrealist techniques and intentions in dream representation to that of a more classic Hollywood style. Further comparative analysis of dream portrayals in animation and live-action will also be discussed. The thesis argues that while both genres may have the same intentions and goals for these dream-like sequences, the results vary hugely as do the audience's interpretation. The thesis will also examine the striking similarities between how we structure films and our own dream patterns, along with how REM and non-REM sleep has influenced the way we format films.

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Word Count: 8661

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Introduction

Dreams are so vastly different from each other and how different people experience and interpret them is endless. There is no one way to illustrate one's experience of a dream. Every single person will experience dreams differently compared to others throughout their lives and because of this you cannot interpret or represent dreams in an incorrect manner. Dreams can be challenging to describe with words alone but within film making we use images and various visualisations to imitate dreams. Images can speak a thousand words, and in some cases, they can say what words cannot. Dreams are one of the most common and universal experiences among people, we have all had a dream or a dream-like experience at least once in our lives, yet we can never fully understand how each individual person experiences their dreams. We can never recall how our dreams were presented visually with extreme accuracy, but we can often remember the feelings we felt in the moment. Dreams have been a subject in films as far back as the 1920s, while the techniques and representation of dreams have changed and evolved over the years, the ideas and oneiric elements remain the same.

A live-action film using Surrealism to depict dreams can have quite varied feelings and interpretations compared to an animated film using the same techniques.   Animation and live-action are generally viewed very differently from each other, regardless of what they are depicting, they are often viewed as entirely separate from each other. When depicting dreams, while animation may be able to push reality much further than live-action, it is frequently viewed as less shocking or impressive as we are often expecting something bizarre or surreal to happen simply because it is animation.

It has been found that the structure of most feature length films is remarkably like that of the average dream. While this may not be a conscious decision amongst film makers, it shows that our dreams impact us much more than we

may realise. Not only do we showcase dreams and dream-like scenarios within films but this film-like structure has also been showcased within our dreams. Dreams are often used as an escape from the waking world, now we have created our own worlds that we can control and predict based on these dreams that we have experienced. We have unintentionally recreated our own dreams for everyone to experience at their own leisure.

Throughout this analysis, I aim to discuss and dissect the various methods and techniques used to represent dreams in films, along with how the structure of films compare to that of our own dreams. Surrealism is one of the most influential movements for portraying dreams in any media. Surrealists balance both the impartial visuals of life and the uncanny beauty of dreams. This pushes the line between what is real and what is not real. They take the opportunity to challenge the so-called norms of filmmaking, dreams are not limited to the physics and logic of the real world, there is practically no limit to what can happen, we can only go as far as we can imagine and create. I will compare this method to the more classic style that leans towards the norms of film-making, and how they both create varied results. This style of dream representation is more commonly found in recent films as Surrealism was more prevalent around the 1920s and onwards when the Surrealist movement began. However, Surrealism characteristics and techniques are still found in films today.

Dreams are more significant in media than we may realise. Not only do film-makers often choose to portray dreams within their work but it is also quite common for content of films to be discovered from their own dreams. We create films and art from what occupies our mind, as our dreams too portray what occupies our conscious and unconscious mind. Films are regularly thought of as waking dreams that often portray a sleeping dream within them.

Chapter One - Imitation of Dreams

Surrealism balances both the impartial visuals of life and the uncanny beauty of dreams. In this way it allows the unconscious mind to express itself. This has been a remarkably effective way for film-makers to communicate the idea of a dream to an audience. When we are in a dream, things feel somewhat normal for the most part, however, there is often something that just feels a little off, or uncanny that we cannot quite put our finger on. Whether this is how something looks or how someone or something may be acting, the Surrealist approach leans into this subtle but unsettling aspect of dreaming.

Figure 1. Stand By Me

In this chapter, I will analyse how and why film-makers use Surrealism to depict dreams, as well as how the Surrealist approach compares to the more classic style of depicting dreams that follows the norms of film-making. These norms are a set of guidelines that film-makers will often follow, where a story is told in chronological order, and where the goal is to make the camera and editing almost invisible to the audience. Not only do the visual approaches in these more conventional films differ from Surrealist methods, but so do the intentions

behind these creative choices. An example of a dream sequence using more conventional methods is found in *Stand by Me (1986)* directed by Rob Reiner. It is a short sequence where a character is remembering an event, it is a linear sequence of a funeral from his past. We see the character both fall asleep and wake up from this dream, so the audience is very aware that this moment is a dream. In Stephen Sharot's article about Surrealism in American cinema he states, 'The classical style assumed the commonly accepted distinctions between reality and dream, the objective and the subjective, the unconscious and the conscious'.[1]

The depiction of dreams in the more classic style of film-making originally revolved heavily around the use of special effects and visual devices. These were the same techniques used in magician films, one of the most popular types of film and film characters during the decade of 1895-1905. Camera techniques and stop-motion animation were used during these sequences and films of this era, and they became known as trick films. Georges Méliès (1861-1938), a professional magician, was one of the most well-known film-makers and artists to create these trick films. He is widely acknowledged as a pioneer, known for his filming techniques such as substitution splices, double exposure, stop-motion and slow-motion. He combined illusion, comedy and pantomime to create a sense of absurdity and fantasy.[2] Most of his films had a dream-like atmosphere where these filming techniques removed the sense of reality, whether they were actively depicting a dream or not.

The Surrealist art movement emerged in the 1920s and early 1930s after World War I. Surrealism was inspired by the early Dada movement which was most

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[1] Sharot, Stephen. "Dreams in films and films as dreams: Surrealism and popular American cinema." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1, Mar. 2015, pp. 66–89, https://doi.org/10.3138/cjfs.24.1.66.

[2] "Georges Méliès." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 18 Oct. 2024, www.britannica.com/biography/Georges-Melies. Accessed 15 February. 2025.

active between 1916 and 1924. Dadaism and its bizarre aesthetics grew out of the anger of what the people saw as a senseless war. Surrealism, in turn, sought to unite conscious and unconscious experiences so that the world of dreams and fantasy joined with the world of reality. Surrealist artists aimed to create an uncanny dream-like world that captured the consciousness of their audiences.[3]

Surrealism pursues automatism, which is the performance of actions without any conscious thought or intention. Surrealist films were not always so concerned with the plot. They were more focused on moments of a bizarre and inexplainable nature, or what Jonathan Owen refers to as 'flashes of the marvellous'.[4] They balance both the impartial visuals of life and the uncanny beauty of dreams. According to Sharot, the Surrealists 'valued dreams because they represented freedom from the constraints of rationalism and the limitations imposed by bourgeois society'.[5]

The prime example of a Surrealist film from this period is *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí. This is a black-and-white, silent short film displaying an assemblage of dream-like sequences with no obvious logical or narrative connection. This is acknowledged as one of the most influential and well-known Surrealist films. For Buñuel, dreams were the nourishment of his films and dream-logic regularly interrupted the realism of his films.[6] At first viewing, the plot behind this short film is obscure, as this film is filled with very abstract imagery whose many meanings may not be entirely obvious right away.

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[3] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Surrealism". Encyclopedia Britannica, 10 Feb. 2025, https://www.britannica.com/art/Surrealism. Accessed 15 February. 2025.

[4] Owen, Jonathan. "Surrealism and Film." Surrealism and Film (introductory lecture for second-year module). PowerPoint Presentation. Accessed 29 October. 2024.

[5] Sharot, Stephen. "Dreams in films and films as dreams: Surrealism and popular American cinema." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1, Mar. 2015, pp. 66–89, https://doi.org/10.3138/cjfs.24.1.66.

[6] Ebert, Roger. "Un Chien Andalou (1929)." *Un Chien Andalou (1929)*, mseffie.com/assignments/film_unit/unchien.html. Accessed 29 Oct. 2024.

If you were to isolate each shot from this film you would be able to understand, on a surface level, what is happening within the scene, but for the audience, the film continually defies any rational explanation. This was the exact intention of both Buñuel and Dalí. They wrote the script with the plan of not adding in any imagery that would allow the audiences to propose any logical, psychological or cultural explanation.[7]

Figure 2. Un Chien Andalou

Many of these shots came from actual dreams experienced by both Buñuel and Dali. Buñuel told Dali about his dream where a cloud cut the moon in half like a razor through an eye, to which Dali returned with his dream containing ants crawling through a hand. From there, they wrote this short film together. Nothing within this film was made to make logical sense, it was intended to shock their audience, however, that does not mean that it was a pointless film, each scene was written with a deliberate goal.

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[7] "Un Chien Andalou." *Un Chien Andalou | Films and Video Art | Fundació Gala - Salvador Dalí*, www.salvador-dali.org/en/dali/dali-film-library/films-and-video-art/10/un-chien-andalou. Accessed 29 Oct. 2024.

Un Chien Andalou explores instinctual desires and passion. This is depicted with quite graphic imagery. One of these more symbolic images is of a man's hand with ants crawling in and out of a hole in his palm. Immediately, this just seems to be an obscure idea that does not make much sense. Nevertheless, after exploring deeper we learn that the ants in the man's hand may be a representation of death and potential destruction, as Dali repeatedly uses ants throughout his artwork to represent such topics. This idea is further solidified by this man's subsequent actions throughout the short film. He behaves in increasingly hostile ways towards the woman in the film. Critical and thorough research on this work suggests that Surrealist films such as these are much more than just a collection of unrelated scenes and images. While this short Surrealist film may be one of the most well-known films, it still uses some forms of conventional film-making such as natural lighting and unobtrusive camera work. The focus is invested more on the content rather than on how it is filmed.

A contemporary example of how these fundamental traits and techniques are used in Surrealist dream representation is *Paprika* (2007) directed by Satoshi Kon. *Paprika* creates a world that seamlessly blends dreams and reality, and where the boundary between them is pushed. While the story of this film pursues a more conventional route, the imagery and symbolism are heavily Surrealist. In this story, Doctor Atsuko Chiba and Doctor Kōsaku Tokita are trying to capture a person they call a dream terrorist, who has stolen a machine called the DC Mini. This machine not only allows the user to view other people's dreams, but to enter them.

Paprika excels as a film that merges dreams and reality to the point where both the characters and the audience are unsure of which is which. This dream device is an unmistakable representation of Surrealism, where the combination of the dream world and the waking reality achieve a sense of a bizarre perception of

existence. Within this film, they even allude to the power of film-making and the value it brings to the concept of consciousness, as it can help us represent and often recreate experiences of consciousness and even unconsciousness.[8]

Figure 3. Paprika

The dream sequences throughout *Paprika* are laid out in ways that resemble those in *Un Chien Andalou*. These sequences consist of isolated shots that appear to have very little correlation to those before and after them. For example, the very first scene in the film starts in a circus, where a detective, Konakawa Toshimi, seems on the lookout for someone. He is then suddenly trapped in a cage in the centre of the stage. Various members of the circus audience begin running towards the cage and try grabbing through the bars, but all these people have his face, rather than their own. The floor then begins to sink like loose fabric which he falls through. From there he enters various scenarios that resemble typical movie scenes of different genres, such as action and romance. Next, he appears in a hallway where a person has just been shot, and the culprit is escaping through a door at the end of this hallway. Finally, he wakes up in a

[8] Pagliari, Valentina. "Consciousness and Reality through Animation in Satoshi Kon's 'paprika' (2006) -." *Mxdwn Movies*, 22 June 2021, movies.mxdwn.com/feature/consciousness-and-reality-through-animation-in-satoshi-kons-paprika-2006/. Accessed 20 Nov. 2024.

panic. This dream sequence appears multiple times throughout the film, but each time is slightly different. As the plot progresses, this character confronts his past and learns to understand his own failures. The more we see this collection of shots, the more familiar we become with it as a dream, but the very first time we see it, we have no idea if he is dreaming until he properly wakes up. He reacts to the onslaught of events with confusion and fear, not fully grasping what is happening around him, only to be thrown into a brand-new scenario just as soon as he has taken in the first one.

Figure 4. Paprika

Throughout the movie, a large parade of dolls and a variety of inanimate objects show up frequently. As reality and dreams get more unstable the parade gets larger and more formidable. This parade symbolises the imagery of dreams, in particular, nightmares. Instead of showing this in a dark manner, it's shown in a lighter context. According to an interview with Satoshi Kon, he stated, 'I was

against the idea of using a dark image to express nightmares. . . I imagined a nightmare that is "creepy because it is too blissful"'.[9]

While dream sequences on their own are a widely used Surrealist film characteristic, the handful of dream sequences within *Paprika* use various specific Surrealist techniques very effectively. Juxtaposition is utilised frequently during these sequences. Each dream shot has very little to do with the last, creating a sense of confusion and disorientation. Similarly, our dreams generally consist of multiple random snippets of events that often have very little to do with each other, yet our conscious brain tries its hardest to connect them together. Ordinary scenes can also be combined with unusual or surreal objects and scenarios, and this can create a very jarring experience, which again lends itself to how we regularly experience our dreams. There are multiple scenes in *Paprika* where a character will fly or walk on clouds, while in the middle of a normal built-up city. This takes an ordinary situation and combines it with the surreal.

Fragmented narrative is a further Surrealist film technique that is applied consistently throughout the dreams in *Paprika*. This film embraces the disconnection and randomness of dreams, giving the entire film the unusual feeling of a dream, which makes the actual dream sequences much more bizarre. Much like in the first scene in this film, where the detective is at the circus when he then finds himself trapped in a cage in a split-second while being swarmed by people with his own face. As the audience, we cannot predict what is going to happen next, as each action and sequence is so jarring compared to the last. The audience is forced to find meaning through visual symbolism and the emotional impact of a scene.

[9] Slutsky, Mark, and Satoshi Kon. "Satoshi Kon - The Lost Interview." *Something Good*, 21 July 2021, Accessed 2 Mar. 2025. https://www.markslutsky.com/archive/something-good-28-satoshi-kon/

Much like many Surrealist films, *Paprika* is filled with this visual symbolism. Every shot within the dream sequence during the opening scene of the film is much more than just random shots with no intention. While often in Surrealist artwork and films, the imagery and subject matter used can be interpreted in a variety of different ways by its viewers, during the dream sequences in *Paprika*, the meanings may not stand out straight away. However, their meanings are more concrete since these dreams represent the inner workings of the mind of a specific character, that as the story progresses, we get to know better and learn more about. For example, the movie-like scenes we see during the detective's recurring dream make much more sense once we have learned about his past before he became a detective.

This chapter has discussed how Surrealism is used to depict dreams and dream-like sequences within films, tracing some of its development from *Un Chien Andalou* to an analysis of contemporary Surrealism in the film *Paprika* directed by Satoshi Kon. Surrealism is a very effective way of representing dreams in films as it focuses on the absurdity of reality and aims to blur the lines between conscious and subconscious, between dreams and reality. The techniques used in Surrealist films heavily resemble the visuals and feelings of our dreams, they lean into the disjointed and absurd feeling of dreams. Visuals that make no sense at first glance but may have a deeper meaning once you look closer. Realism is used in more classic cinema, which also effectively depicts dreams, it has a very different outcome and audience reaction compared to Surrealism. The Realist approach focuses more on visual tricks such as double exposure and slow-motion. While these techniques may not directly represent what we experience in our dreams, they do create a dream-like atmosphere which gives the feeling and illusion of experiencing a dream. Both techniques are still used throughout films today, they show dreams differently and the choice of using each technique depends on the intention of the film-maker.

Chapter Two - Reality vs Surreality

Dreams have been depicted and explored in live-action films as far back as the silent era, where film-makers such as George Méliès created dream-like sequences that transport viewers into worlds of fantasy.

In this chapter, I will analyse how artistic representation of dreams within animated films compare to that in live-action films. I will analyse two films, the animated film, *Paprika* directed by Satoshi Kon, and *Inception* directed by Christopher Nolan, which is a live-action film, and explore how both films use the same techniques in very different ways to portray a similar sequence. A live-action film using Surrealism to depict dreams can have quite a different feeling and interpretation compared to an animated film using the same techniques. Both *Paprika* and *Inception* depict similar topics surrounding dreams, such as the conscious versus subconscious mind, reality and surreality. The characters explore dreams in a very similar way, by using technology to enter peoples' dreams, to the point where both the characters and the audience are unsure if what is happening is a dream or reality.

While many animated films are set in reality, the majority of animated media makes use of their medium to explore fantasy and things that may not exist. Animation and live-action are generally viewed very differently from each other, regardless of what they are depicting, they are often viewed as entirely separate from each other. Animation can often be viewed as more child-like and fantasy-based, therefore it might be taken less seriously than a live-action film. As *Scott Bukatman* stated in his essay in Animating Film Theory, 'Anything can happen in a cartoon, as cartoon characters frequently remind us as they blithely ignore the

fourth wall and a rather significant ontological gap to address us directly'.[1] Since animation is drawn and generally has a very different look to real life imagery, it is often much more fantastical compared to live action. Even if an animated scene depicts something ordinary and rooted in reality, it still has this feeling of fantasy and something not within reality, an intuition that anything could happen, regardless of the scene. As Edgar Morin suggests 'It is obviously the cartoon that completes, expands, exalts the animism implied in the cinema. . . The cartoon only exaggerates the normal phenomenon.'[2]

If something bizarre or surreal happens within a cartoon, it is often less surprising than if the same affair were to happen in live action. When depicting dream sequences, especially when using Surrealism and pushing the visuals and physics to an extreme, animated films may be viewed as less shocking and surreal. As Sophia Ferraro writes, 'Reality is limited to what we know is real, whereas animation doesn't exist in this vacuum as we already perceive everything presented in this medium as fake'.[3] This does not mean that animated dreams are any less impressive than those of live action. Animation can push visuals to such an extreme that there is almost no limitation to what can be depicted and how far a sequence can be imagined. Dreams in live-action films are commonly but not exclusively used as a flashback or an insight into a character's mind, invariably to give us information that can further the plot or help us to understand a particular character better. These particular sequences use more conventional filming techniques compared to the more surreal

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[1] Bukatman, Scott. "Some Observations Pertaining to Cartoon Physics; or, The Cartoon Cat in the Machine." *Animating Film Theory*, Duke University Press, 2014, p. 301.

[2] Morin, Edgar. "Metamorphosis of the Cinematograph into Cinema." *The Cinema, Or The Imaginary Man*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2005, p. 68, https://archive.org/details/EdgarMorinTheCinemaOrTheImaginaryMan2005UniversityOfMinne sotaPress/page/n105/mode/2up?q=phenomenon. Accessed 29 Nov. 2024.

[3] Ferraro, Sophia. "Describing beyond Words: Why Animation Shouldn't Be Disrespected." *Strike Magazines*, Strike Magazines, 3 Apr. 2023, www.strikemagazines.com/blog-2-1/describing-beyond-words-why-animation-shouldnt-be-disrespected. Accessed 15 Nov. 2024

approach to dream interpretation. However, there are still many live-action films that choose to depict dreams in a more Surrealist way.

Figure 5. Inception

A compelling example of a live-action film using a Surrealist approach to dream interpretation is *Inception* (2010) directed by Christopher Nolan. Most of this film takes place in a dream or multiple dreams. As the audience, we made are aware of this idea early on, as are most of the characters. The plot of this film follows a skilled thief, Dominick Cobbs, who invades peoples' dreams to steal valuable information. He is given the chance to regain his old life by performing a task called inception, which involves implanting an idea deep into someone's mind, entering a dream within a dream. This dream-sharing technology was created for training soldiers, then spread underground into the hands of people like Cobbs. Near the beginning of the film, Cobbs is teaching a young architect, Ariadne, about how entering someone's dream works. He explains how they build this artificial world with enough detail that the subject, the person dreaming, believes that it is real. He needs her to build a world for this job he is about to take on, so during this scene he is teaching her, and she is testing the limits of what she can do in a dream.

She begins to bend the world around them; she manipulates the long road to bend up and back over itself until it is lying directly above them. She constructs bridges over roads and materialises paths. Cobbs warns her about creating structures from real life, as that can create a complicated relationship for the dreamer to their reality, as they start to be unsure of what is real and what is a dream. This sequence is an excellent example of how dreams work within *Inception* as it is being explained clearly to another character so that the audience does not have to piece it together on their own.

Although *Inception* was heavily inspired by *Paprika,* they both approach Surrealism differently. As Ciara Wardlow suggests, 'Inception is a film aesthetically inspired by Surrealism, while Paprika is a Surrealist film'.[4] *Inception* uses Surrealist visuals frequently throughout the film, but all these visuals have clear explanations as to why they are happening. This film tells a very linear story compared to Surrealist films. While the visuals are hugely inspired by the Surrealist movement, the storytelling still follows the classic style of Hollywood film-making. Dreams and reality merge within both films, and the characters are often questioning what is real. This is not the main concern of *Paprika,* but it is a primary focus of *Inception.* Kon leans into the chaos and unpredictability of dreams, imagery that you cannot fully pin down and explain, while Nolan puts logic into dreams, all things have an explanation, he leans into the more scientific and architectural side of dreams. This film is very rigid about dreams, using architects to create and construct these dream worlds, using strict rules and levels that must be followed. While characters are dreaming in *Inception,* anything that happens to their body directly affects the dream world they are inside. In *Paprika*, in contrast, the state of the real body has no effect on the dream world. An example of this, in *Inception*, is during the most well-known scene in the movie, where a character, Arthur, is in someone's dream. Within this dream he is in a hotel, but his real body is in a van which crashes and flips

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[4] Wardlow, Ciara. "The Synergy of 'inception' and 'Paprika.'" *Film School Rejects*, 17 June 2020, filmschoolrejects.com/inception-paprika-synergy/. Accessed 17 Nov. 2024

over as it falls, therefore within the dream, the entire world is rotating and the gravity changes. Although this sequence has a very surreal feel to it, as the world shifts and rotates around Arthur, it has a clear explanation that has been shown and explained to the audience earlier in the film.

Referring back to Wardlow's statement, *Paprika* is a truly Surrealist film, whereas *Inception* uses Surrealist visuals and builds them on the base of a much more conventional story. There are several scenes in both films that are almost visually identical, an example being the scene in *Paprika* where the character Paprika, is in a dream, the dream is beginning to get out of control and is starting to merge with reality. She looks down the street and sees what looks like paint peeling off a wall, but there is no wall there, as if the paint is peeling off reality itself. She touches it and the space shatters revealing a space that seems to have appeared from nowhere.

Figure 6. Paprika

The corresponding scene in *Inception* takes place when Cobbs is explaining to Ariadne how the dream simulations work, and she is exploring how far she can manipulate it. They are walking down a road and she closes a large, mirrored door that seems to have appeared from nowhere, lining it up with another parallel mirror, creating an infinite road between the two. She then touches her hand to one of the mirrors and it shatters, revealing a new long road that was not there before she closed the door. While these scenes are nearly identical, the way the techniques are used, and the context of the scenario holds them apart.

Figure 7. Inception

Fragmented narrative is a Surrealist technique that is applied frequently throughout *Paprika.* This is a storytelling technique that breaks the classic, linear flow of a story, with disjointed and non-sequential sequences in its place. The sequences leading up to this scene in *Paprika* are bizarre and surreal. She is flying on a cloud above the parade of dolls and inanimate objects, when something catches her eye, causing her to then find the peeling wall. This is a scenario that even the main character finds bizarre, she has been in and out of dreams for years but has never seen something like this and so connects along with the audience's experience of never having seen this within the movie so far.

In contrast, the comparable scene in *Inception* is more linear and straightforward. We are exploring the dream world for the first time along with the character, Ariadne, and so we are learning about it as she does. She is creating structures and altering the world around them, and as the audience, we are made aware of this. Everything bizarre that happens during this sequence is explainable as we are beginning to understand the simulation that they are in. We see Ariadne close these two large, mirrored doors in front of each other, we see and understand the set-up of what is then meant to represent a shattering reality. What is revealed from behind the doors once they shatter is not dwelled upon, we understand that she is building new spaces from what she sees around her, taking aspects from the reality she knows and bringing them into this dream.

Juxtaposition is another commonly used Surrealist technique that involves placing contrasting ideas and imagery together to highlight differences. Once again, this is a method that is used constantly throughout *Paprika.* As Sheila Azizah explains, 'The juxtaposition of two or three images can cause varying impressions, meanings and different circumstances if combined with the possibility of various sequences'.[5] The sequences leading up to this scene have multiple cuts back and forth between the chaos of the unpredictable, colourful world of the dream, and the dull, monotonous world of reality. When this wall shatters in the dream world, it reveals a new space which is also heavily contrasted from one another. The dream is warm and colourful, while this new space is cold and dreary. The two worlds are depicted very deliberately distinct from each other, this keeps in sequence with the literal approach of the film.

The sequences leading up to the corresponding scene in *Inception,* however, use almost no juxtaposition. Before we see the shattering mirror, the characters are

[5] Azizah, Sheila, et al. "Juxtaposition in montage movie." *E3S Web of Conferences*, vol. 188, 2020, p. 00023, https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202018800023. Accessed 20 Nov. 2024

walking through a dream that takes place on what seems like a normal street, one that they have seen in their waking life. The point of these dreams is that there is very little obvious difference between the dream and reality. While the action of the glass shattering to reveal a new path feels quite surreal within that scene, it does not feel as unusual or inexplicable as the similar sequence in *Paprika.*

The imagery within these scenes, apart from the shattering wall, is very different. *Paprika* confidently uses bizarre and unusual imagery. The character Paprika, is flying on a cloud over the ever-growing parade of dolls and inanimate objects. She sees what looks like reality itself peeling away from the world like paint. Through this gap is a space that feels completely disconnected from the world from which she just emerged. However, the imagery used in *Inception* is set firmly in reality, even though the sequence also takes place within a dream. The imagery itself is supposed to represent reality, we are not meant to be able to tell the difference between the two. The actions of Ariadne manipulating the world around her stand out significantly compared to the rest of the seemingly mundane dream world.

Inception could easily be considered to have a non-linear story. However, when you look closer at the layout of the film, it never jumps back and forth along the timeline, apart from flashbacks. The component that feels non-linear is when some of the characters enter a dream, leaving one behind, this creates multiple scenarios that are taking place at the same time in different realities. This may seem to challenge what is considered a linear story, but it is simply several linear stories happening at once. The viewer is thrown back and forth between all these realities which can create a sense of confusion. In Joshua Seemann's analysis referring to the various flashback sequences in *Inception,* where Cobbs narrates the flashback while the audience sees it, 'It creates a scene that is visually nonlinear, yet one that is, due to the narration holding it together, very

linear in regard to the progression of the story'.[6] The film mimics the idea of a
non-linear storyline while in reality keeping it linear and straightforward. This
is an excellent example of an instance where *Inception* uses Surrealist techniques
in a way that focuses on the Surrealist aesthetic rather than the intention of
being surreal.

Figure 8. Paprika

This chapter has reviewed how the use of similar techniques can have different
results within animation and live action, looking specifically at Satoshi's *Paprika*
and Nolan's *Inception.* Both films tackle remarkably similar topics and themes,
such as the merging of the conscious and subconscious mind, reality and
surreality. There are points in both films when neither the characters nor the
audience are sure if what is happening is a dream. There are moments in these
films that are nearly identical at first glance, as they contain a comparable
sequence of events. However, these films use a variety of Surrealist techniques
in different ways. *Paprika* is a Surrealist film, both visually and in its storytelling,
while *Inception* is a more classic Hollywood film that uses Surrealist aesthetics
on a surface level to portray similar situations and themes. *Paprika* immerses
itself in the chaos and unpredictability of dreams, whereas *Inception* attempts to

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[6] Seemann, Joshua. "BENEFITS OF NONLINEAR STORYTELLING IN FILM AND TELEVISION."
California State University, California State University, 2017.

put a more logical spin on it by giving the dream world a set of strict rules to follow where everything that happens has a clear explanation. These differences do not make one film better than the other, it simply creates a unique experience for the audience, it takes a similar idea and interprets it in a very different way.

Chapter Three - Waking and Sleeping Dreams

We have created films as a strikingly accurate imitation of our own dreams, whether this was intentional or not. This may be why we can universally understand films regardless of any language barrier. The ebb and flow of the sequential structure of cinema feels so natural to us, and because of this, we need not focus on making sense of the framework of a film. Instead, we must only focus of the content of said story. Within this chapter, I am going to discuss how the consecutive layout of films follows the structure of both REM and non-REM sleep.

Throughout history we have seen a wide range of different techniques and innovations that aim to expand and explore cinema. One of the few attributes that has persisted through the years is the running time of 90 minutes. When sound films became predominant in the 1930s, many of the films remained the length of 90 minutes, while the films that were played before the main feature film during a double bill could be as concise as 70 minutes. This was the cut-off for the feature film as film-makers feared that the audience would lose interest or leave. This is also where the term 'feature film' originated. While of course there were many exceptions, rarely did any film at the time exceed two hours in length.[1]

As Ìåñ Dåvìd states, 'Cinema, like dreaming, is substantially composed of image and emotion. Perhaps it's no coincidence that the dreams cycle lasts for 90 minutes and so does a feature film'.[2] Not only does the sequential layout of films

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[1] French, Matt. "Why Were 90 Minute Length Films a Touchstone in Cinema for so Long?" *IMDb*, IMDb.com, 7 Aug. 2011, www.imdb.com/news/ni12579009/. Accessed 2 Feb. 2025.

[2] Dåvìd, Ìåñ. "Sequences, Dreams and Cinema." Sydney Studies in English (2016): n. pag. Print.
. "Sequences, Dreams and Cinema." Sydney Studies in English (2016): n. pag. Print.

directly reflect the arrangement of our dreams, but so does the emotional perception and the atmosphere. Dreaming about films is a very normal occurrence, it reflects how our brain processes and consolidates information and experiences. This suggests that how we create films and how we produce information in a way that is easy to understand, originally comes from a natural and internal experience. The method is already rooted in our minds. When watching a film, even if the audience does not understand the language that is being spoken, if there is one, it will still be universally understood to a certain extent, as this sequence is something that we comprehend on a deeper level.

We experience these film-like dreams in a sequence called REM sleep, a theory that was proposed in the 1950s by Professor Nathaniel Kleitman and his student Eugene Aserinsky.[3] REM stands for rapid eye movement. During REM sleep our eyes constantly move around in different directions, our brain is active during this time. This is commonly when we experience dreams. This stage of sleep is generally associated with dreaming and memories. Non-REM sleep is a much deeper state of sleep when our blood pressure drops, and our breathing slows down. Since your brain is much more active during REM, you can have quite intense dreams, too much REM sleep can result in vivid dreams and nightmares. When we fall asleep, non-REM sleep happens first, this is then followed by a short duration of REM sleep, this cycle then repeats. During a typical night's sleep, you alternate between REM and non-REM sleep on an average of 4-5 times, each cycle takes anywhere from 90-120 minutes. As deep sleep helps to restore your body, it is believed that REM sleep aids in restoring your mind, by turning short term memories into long term memories and clearing out irrelevant information.

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[3] Silber, Michael H. "Who discovered REM sleep?" *SLEEP*, vol. 47, no. 1, 4 Sept. 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/sleep/zsad232. Accessed 5 Feb. 2025.
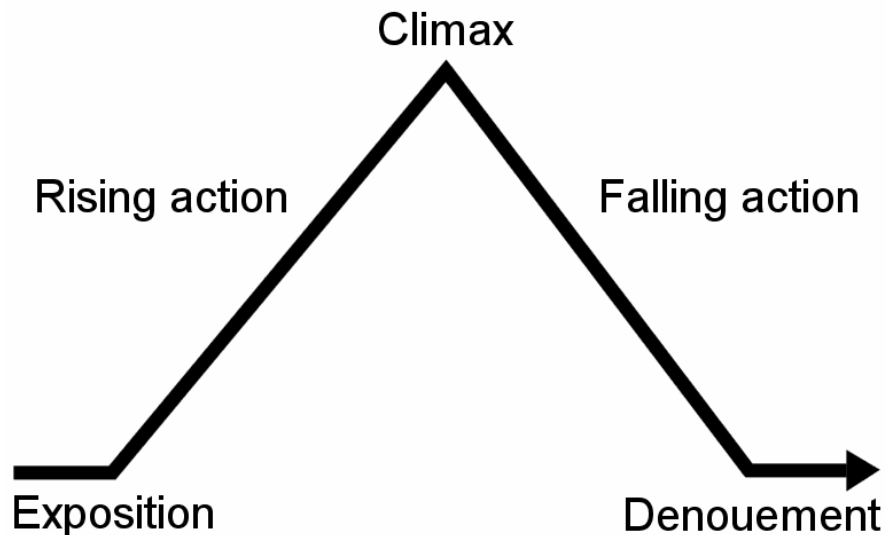
Figure 9. Freytag's Pyramid

The structure of these 4-5 cycles within your sleep is reflected in film formats such as Freytag's Pyramid. Freytag's Pyramid is a structure created by Gustav Freytag, a German 19th century writer. He discusses this pyramid in his book *Die Technik des Dramas*, his work explores the craft of drama along with its primary principles and rules. This is a map that highlights the dramatic structure of how the order of events in a story unfold. Freytag's diagram borrows the idea from the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, that a drama follows three acts that resemble a triangle, and developed the idea from the poet Horace, who expanded those three acts into five. Freytag envisions the rise and fall of action within drama, similar to Aristotle's triangle, but with the addition of two more elements.

The five acts within Freytag's pyramid are Exposition, Rising action, Climax, Conclusion, and Denouement. Many myths, which follow a hero's journey, including the works of Shakespeare, follow this five-act structure.[4]

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[4] Sorkin, Aaron. "Freytag's Pyramid: Definition, Elements and Example - 2025." *MasterClass*, 15 Feb. 2015, www.masterclass.com/articles/freytags-pyramid. Accessed 5 Feb. 2025.

The first element or Act I, is exposition. This is where the setting, time and location are set up, along with any main characters and how they related to each other or even the viewer. This where the story is suggested.

The second is rising action. The story begins to build towards the central conflict but places obstacles in the protagonist's path to their goal. Secondary characters are also introduced during this stage, aiding the advancement of the plot.

The third stage in the pyramid is the climax, this indicates a turn in the story, where the fate of the protagonist is foreshadowed, to whether they will succeed or fail.

Stage 4 is falling action, foreshadowing the final outcome of the story, where the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist will be concluded.

The fifth and final element on Freytag's Pyramid is denouement or the conclusion. This is the end of the story, it is either a happy ending, where the protagonist achieves their goal, or a tragic ending, where they fail. Loose ends are tied up, with a series of events that allows the tension to disperse.[5]

Many films follow this plot structure; however, it can be much more noticeable to some films over others. This difference can be seen most prominently between Surrealist films and more conventional films. While discussing the "norms" of film-making, there is often the mention of rules and guidelines, Freytag's Pyramid is one of the guidelines being alluded. While not all conventional Hollywood films follow a hero's journey, the plot will still follow these five stages to progress their story. Freytag's Pyramid is a very linear structure, starting with stage one, continuing to stage five in sequence. As Ìåñ Dåvìd summarises, 'Cinema's sequential form of narrative, related to REM sleep, helps explain why we appear to have no difficulty divining meaning in cinema's use of montage, and

[5] Glatch, Sean. "The 5 Stages of Freytag's Pyramid: Intro to Dramatic Structure." *Writers.Com*, 31 May 2024, writers.com/freytags-pyramid. Accessed 5 Feb. 2025.

its apparent disdain for the laws of nature as they relate to time and space'.[6] Following these stages closely will result in a plot with a consecutive foundation which is straightforward and easy to understand.

Not only do Surrealist films lean away from the visual norm, they also veer away from the format of these films. Often, when trying to make sense of the surreal and unusual visuals, the audience may lose track or get lost in the narrative, making the story feel more disjointed and less clear. Satoshi Kon's *Paprika* and Christopher Nolan's *Inception* are excellent examples of how films follow the stages of Freytag's Pyramid. Along with how a Surrealist film with a narrative may loosely follow the same structure but can be viewed very differently by the audience.

Inception has a noticeably clear structure to its narrative. Although *Inception* gives the illusion of multiple storylines happening at once, they all play a role in the linear path of Freytag's Pyramid. The scene is set in stage one, where we are introduced to the main character, Cobbs. We are shown elements of what the story will contain, how people can enter others' dreams to gain information. Stage two, the action is rising, Cobbs has a goal but there are obstacles in his way, we now see what the plot is going to contain. We are also introduced to the rest of his team. In the third stage comes the climax, we are in the middle of their mission to plant information in the subject's mind, but the outcome is becoming less and less likely to be successful. We know what could happen if they fail, and we know what could happen if they succeed. Stage four, they give it their final attempt to achieve their goal to plant this information, the ending could go either way, the stakes are high. Finally, in stage five, the story is concluded, the protagonists succeed in their mission, the tension dissipates, and the various characters stories are wrapped up.

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[6] Dåvìd, Ìåñ. "Sequences, Dreams and Cinema." Sydney Studies in English (2016): n. pag. Print.

Not only does this film follow Freytag's diagram in a very clear and effective way, the use of dreams within the story, having different characters separated on these different planes but all acting in a part of this one sequential story, is highly reflective of how our dreams are laid out during the REM sleep cycle.

As is stated in the journal article *Relationship between Dreaming and Memory Reconsolidation,* 'Dreams are highly visual, in full color, rich in shapes, full of movement... Dreams also reflect our interests and personality, just like mental activity during wakefulness'.[7] Film is a predominantly visual medium, while there is now a large focus on other aspects, such as sound, when films were first being created, they were exclusively visual. The visuals and the feeling within films are what we more often remember, this is also very similar with our own dreams. When we wake up, we initially remember a lot of detail, if after time we quickly begin to forget aspects, the parts that remain are often visual but most prominently the feelings. We dream about things that take up space in our mind, this can range from anxieties and situations to our own interests and things that we enjoy. In this same text, they also discuss that, 'During dreaming, dreamers have reduced voluntary control and volition'. This relates to the audience of a film rather than the film-maker. As the viewer of a film, we have no control over what is happening, it is simply something we are to experience, much like how many dreams feel, we may think we have a lot of control but that is rarely the case.

The narrative of *Paprika* also follows the pattern of Freytag's Pyramid, however it is not as obvious at first glance. The frenetic and colourful visuals very easily distract from the story that is unfolding in front of us.

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[7] Zhao, Hongyi, et al. "Relationship between dreaming and memory reconsolidation." *Brain Science Advances*, vol. 4, no. 2, Dec. 2018, pp. 118–130, https://doi.org/10.26599/bsa.2018.9050005. Accessed 7 Feb. 2025.

Figure 10. Paprika

While the specific plot structure of this film may not so obviously follow the guide of Freytag's diagram that is a representation of REM and non-REM sleep, the way in which each sequence leads into the next, often with little predictability, is an excellent portrayal of how it feels when we are experiencing dreams. In these moments the jarring and choppy sequence of events may make perfect sense. It is only after we wake up that we think back and realise how it was so bizarre. The use of juxtaposition to connect most, if not all sequences, within *Paprika* conveys the disorientating impression of a dream. The various stages of Freytag's Pyramid are still followed in this film, but the contrast and unpredictability of how the sequences flow into one another is one of the aspects that makes this film feel so dream-like.

While the use of Freytag's Pyramid for the structure of films alone will not make a film feel dream-like as there are many other aspects that must be considered to achieve such an effect, we can certainly conclude that our own dreams have affected how we create art in our waking life. According to Laura Rascaroli, 'The dreamer and the analyst or, even better, the unconscious and the conscious,

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since a recounted dream is an entirely different text from the original one'.[8] How an audience views a film may be entirely different from how the filmmaker views it themself, this is remarkably resemblant of how we often view our own dreams. Frequently, once we wake up from a dream, we begin to remember it differently from how it really appeared. Sometimes we may not be aware that we are changing what really happened, while other times we know that what we are remembering just isn't quite right, but we can't seem to get any closer.

This chapter has examined the remarkable similarities between how we create and view films and how we experience dreams, both by structure and often subject matter. The sequence of REM and non-REM sleep is closely and often directly reflected in the structure of feature films that we know today. An early example of this is *Un Chien Andalou,* this film began with both Dali and Buñuel having bizarre dreams. They decided to come together and create a film entirely based on these dreams.   The majority of feature length films range around 90 – 120 minutes, while the cycles between REM and non-REM sleep ranges in nearly this exact timeframe. It is a structure that comes to us naturally as we have already been experiencing it way before we ever started creating films. We experience 4-5 of these cycles during a typical night's sleep, which regularly returns in various plot structures in figures such as Freytag's Pyramid. As an audience we will still understand the design of a film regardless of any language barrier. Their structure and how we experience them has always already been with us and is a part of us.

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[8] Rascaroli, Laura. "Oneiric metaphor in film theory." *Kinema: A Journal for Film and Audiovisual Media*, 20 Nov. 2002, https://doi.org/10.15353/kinema.vi.982.

Conclusion

For the Surrealists, Steven Sharot surmises:

> There was a question of what a film dream should convey: the dreamer's belief in the dream as real, however strange the dream content, when she or he is asleep and dreaming, or the feeling of the strangeness and non-reality of the dream when the person reflects upon it after waking.[1]

Everyone experiences dreams differently, so every portrayal of dreams is different to the last. While perhaps using similar techniques, the intention of the film-maker will lead to wildly different results to another film-maker's work. In a further subjective interpretation, many of these sequences can feel rather ambiguous as the audience often perceives the moment in a completely dissimilar way to how it is viewed by the film-maker.

Surrealism and dreams have gone hand in hand since the beginning of cinema. In this thesis I have traced this history through Surrealist film-making techniques as far back as the late 19th century, and in Chapter One, I discussed how the use of Surrealist techniques for portraying dreams is continuous in contemporary media. In Chapter Two, I related these origins of Surrealist film-making to more modern Surrealist films such as *Paprika* and the importance of the use of these techniques; juxtaposition, fragmented narrative, visual symbolism, and so on. However, these techniques can also be found in films that lean towards the norm of Hollywood film-making, such as *Inception.* Both films use a collection of the same techniques, but they yield wildly different results. The way in which we layout films has been with us for much longer than we may realise. In Chapter Three, I discussed how the sequential structure of films is strikingly similar to how we dream, REM and non-REM sleep. The cycle back and forth between these stages of sleep is nearly directly replicated in how a standard 90-minute film is structured.

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[1] Sharot, Stephen. "Dreams in films and films as dreams: Surrealism and popular American cinema." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1, Mar. 2015, pp. 66–89, https://doi.org/10.3138/cjfs.24.1.66.

It is clear that Surrealism has played a crucial role in the representation of dreams, from the sequential structure to the visual interpretations. While Surrealism will more than likely continue to have an effect on how dreams are presented within films in the future, the ever-growing presence of AI will undoubtedly have a substantial influence on these portrayals. The use of AI within these artistic mediums is, in turn, bringing what the original Surrealist dream films intended, by being closer to real life; what is real and what is not, how surreality is entering everyday culture through short form media to a phenomenal extent. AI has an innate artificial surrealness which leans into a very dream-like feeling in an uneasy way. In a recent conference on AI, Ethics and Society, the editorial panel concluded that, 'The image generator has no understanding of the perspective of the audience or the experience that the output is intended to communicate to this audience'.[2] The generator has no comprehension of how an audience perceives art. The representation of dreams within films is entirely reliant on the film-maker's intentions and decisions. Each creative decision was made for a reason, to portray a certain emotion, to evoke a specific reaction from the audience, not simply following a set of rules and guidelines to produce an image for exclusively aesthetic reasoning. Regardless of how we continue making films into the future, dreams will always play a part in media creation.

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[2] Jiang, Harry H., et al. "Ai art and its impact on artists." *Proceedings of the 2023 AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society*, 8 Aug. 2023, pp. 363–374, https://doi.org/10.1145/3600211.3604681. Accessed 20 Feb. 2025.

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