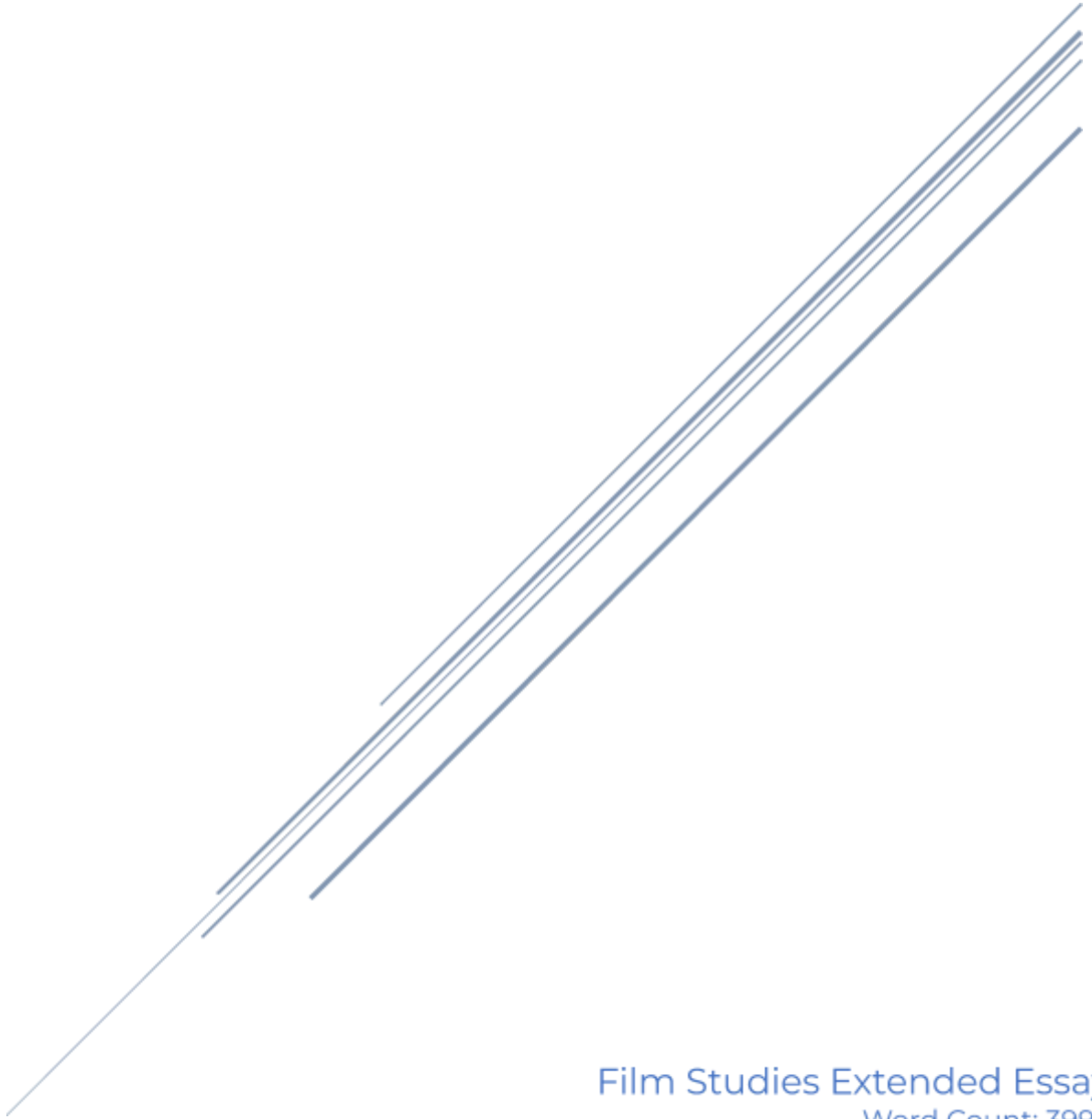


DREAM THROUGH FILM

Research Question: How does the use of film techniques reflect the role which dreams play in a character's reality in three films directed by different directors?



Film Studies Extended Essay
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Introduction

For centuries, dreams have been the “fragmented fabric into the human experience” (Stowell). Following the invention of modern cinema, the mystic nature of dreams and their relationship to a character’s unconscious mind have been portrayed on screen. Through sounds, imagery, and other cinematic techniques, films construct an alternate world where physical reality and the human mind intersect.

The process of dreaming appears to be “related to the world of the supernatural beings” (Freud) in early human beliefs. After more scientific investigations, dreams are found to have “exerted on the formation of [dreamers] conceptions of the universe, and of the soul” (Freud). In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud argues on how dreams carry important messages regarding the unconscious mind. These deeper thoughts are closely related to the dreamer’s childhood and their innate desires. Freud demonstrates that through interpreting dreams, humans are able to bring their deeper unconscious thoughts to the level of consciousness. The recreation of dreams on screen allows us to analyze the techniques used by film directors to capture dream’s unique characteristics, while relating the content of dreams to the dreamer’s unconscious mind.

Research Question: How does the use of film techniques reflect the role which dreams play in a character’s reality in three films directed by different directors?

To understand the portrayal of dreams in modern cinema, three films of different time periods and regions will be analyzed. *Un Chien Andalou* directed by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí was initially released in France in 1929. The story revolves around several unnamed men and one unnamed woman. The film uses dream logic – irregular time frames and abstract

symbols to portray suppressed sexual desires, human aggression, and cultural identity. The motif of repressed sexuality and aggression can be directly linked to the Freudian theory of Psychosexual Development and Free Association (Juni).

Italian director Federico Fellini's *8 ½* (initial release 1963) was about how a famous director, Guido, struggles to finalize the plot for his new science fiction movie and in the meantime struggling with his personal relationships and beliefs. Through dreaming, Guido revisits his childhood and constructs several bizarre images in his mind, which are all embodiments of his unconscious mind. It is worth noting that *8 ½* was an autobiographical work of Fellini himself, and many events in the film can be linked to real events in Fellini's life. Fellini was also under the influence of Carl Jung's theory on archetypes and the collective unconsciousness. Guido's dreams and his troubles have roots in his childhood and his relationship with his society. This corresponds with the Jungian theory of the unconsciousness (Carl Jung Resources).

Inception (initial release 2010) was directed by British American director Christopher Nolan. Nolan waited 10 years before making the film, he reasoned that more advanced film technology is critical to his construction of the dream world. (Ratliff) In the film there were extensive use of deep focus cinematography and wide-angle shots. The plot of *Inception* follows the missions of Dom Cobb and Arthur, two "extractors" who obtain information from a subject's subconsciousness by journeying through their dream world. In the story, Cobb struggles to overcome his own guilt since his wife Mal committed suicide from failing to distinguish between dream and reality. *Inception*, similar to *Un Chien Andalou* and *8 ½*, also highlights the critical role of dreams in understanding a character's internal mind. Layer by layer, Nolan not only

delivers an exciting action sequence, but questions the audience into thinking whether our reality is an idea or a physical truth, Nolan also raises the question whether the distinction is important and answers these questions through the journey of Dom Cobb.

All three films present dreams as the key to a character's unconscious mind. Dreams also have the ability to connect distant time, space, and people. Each film also presents dreams as the amazing creation of the mind and of imagination, especially through comparing dreaming with filmmaking. Nevertheless, each film presents a different relationship between a character's dream and their unconscious mind. *Un Chien Andalou* portrays the dream world as mainly influenced by the dreamer's repressed sexual desires. In *8 ½*, dreams are pathways to a person's hidden emotions, and it can link a person's present perspectives to their memories. *Inception* centers around the idea that dreams reveal a character's past and their core motivations. Dreams are used as a metaphor for subjective reality.

The Nature of Dreams

Dream, Imagination, Creation, and Cinema

According to Enforex.com, the plot of *Un Chien Andalou* was inspired by a conversation between Buñuel and Dalí about the dreams they had. “Dalí said that he had dreamt about a hand crawling with ants, while Buñuel said that his dream had been about the moon being covered by a cloud, almost like an eye being slit with a razor blade. From there they went on to wonder what other ideas can be pulled from suppressed human thought.” (Ideal Education Group S.L.).

In the winter of 1929, Dalí became more disenchanted with surrealist paintings he was creating before. Dalí was eager to achieve “the osmosis he sought between reality and surreality through cinema” (Short). The two imageries in the directors’ dreams, alongside with other motifs and symbols, forms the seventeen-minute silent film, a film that the Spanish authority Agustin Sanchez Vidal has called “an endless enigma” (Short). Luis Buñuel has said to audiences and critics to not attempt to interpret the film because it is simply a product of many dreams from two minds (Richardson).

Similar to how *Un Chien Andalou* is the expressive of the director’s hidden desires, essentially a self-reflective piece, the film critic organization Cinephilia & Beyond called 8 ½ Fellini’s “Daring, Self-Reflexive Masterpiece as a Most Intimate Exploration of Cinema”. The story is about a storyteller who struggles to tell a story, drawn from Fellini’s own experiences after the international success of his previous movie *La Dolce Vita*. The film was originally titled “The Beautiful Confusion” but was later changed to 8 ½ (corresponding to this film being the eight and a halfth film Fellini ever made) since Fellini thought that this title better reflects the autobiographical nature of the film.

The film itself is filled with symbols from Fellini’s past, such as him skipping catholic school to the beach and his personal relationships (the fact that Fellini had a wife and a long-time mistress is reflected in Guido).

Since the year 1959, the director met frequently with the Jungian scholar Dr. Ernst Bernhard. According to Jungian theories, an extrovert like Fellini “will recoil into fantasy if life is too stressful, and it is the interpretation of those fantasies and dreams that is the gateway to a

person's self-understanding" (Mikulec). Indeed, Fellini reflected his anxieties, stress, memories onto his own film, using Guido's conscious and unconscious mind as a playground.

The concept of a distinct "world" or "ground" of dreams was seen throughout *Un Chien Andalou*, as the entire film took place in a bizarre and illogical dream world. This idea is also prominent in *Inception*, as the "extractors" are seen physically travelling into a distinct space representing a subject's dream world. In *Inception* it is clearly explained that the dream world is where emotional concepts symbolically become physical realities. During his interview with WIRED, the director Christopher Nolan talked about the logic behind the dream world he constructed in *Inception*: "I wanted to deal with the world of dreams, and I realized that I really had to offer the audience a more emotional narrative, something that represents the emotional world of somebody's mind. So, both the hero's story and the heist itself had to be based on *emotional concepts*." (Nolan)

A common observation made by critics, is that the film itself is a dream, or that the film is an allegory for filmmaking, with Nolan incepting his ideas into the audiences' minds. Cobb is the director, Arthur is the producer, Ariadne the production designer, Eames the actor, Yusef the special effects, Saito the studio executive, and Fischer the "target" – or the audience (The Take). To this "grammar of the dream" and "grammar of filmmaking" (Nolan) overlap Nolan responded: "The way the team works is very analogous to the way the film itself was made. I can't say that was intentional, but it's very clear there. I think that's just the result of me trying to be very tactile and sincere in my portrayal of that *creative process*." (Nolan)

When the interviewer asked about the symbolism architecture play in the film, Nolan responded:

“... yes, the film is about architects, builders, people who would have the mental capacity to construct large-scale worlds—the world of the dream. ” (Nolan)

In all three films, the directors utilized dreams as a metaphor for human’s creativity, imaginations and the thought process. Cinematic techniques allow them to recreate the vivid and dynamic dream world which transcends time and space in two dimensions (the movie screen).

Match Cut



Figure 1. Scene 1 of *Un Chien Andalou*, a man cuts open a woman’s eyeball, with the camera match cutting to a wisp of cloud approaching the lucid moon, then cutting back to the eye.

The match-cut at the beginning of *Un Chien Andalou* shows the process of a man cutting open the woman’s eyeball. The man first opens the woman’s eyelid, making the woman’s eye appear rounder. Then, the scene cuts to the shot of a full moon, peacefully residing in the midst of flowing clouds. The scene then cuts back to the eye, which is sliced open with a razor in the man’s hand and liquids flow off. The match-cut delivers chaos within calm reality. The horrifying action of slicing the woman’s eye can be interpreted as an embodiment of the aggressive nature of sexual desires, as described by Freud. According to Freudian psychology, repressed sexual desires are key drives for human unconsciousness.

Cuts, Shots, and Music in 8 1/2

The story of 8 ½ takes place under the atmosphere of *dolce far niente*, which is an Italian phrase for “sweet idleness”. The film has an autobiographical nature from Federico Fellini, the director of the film. Since that Fellini himself has made exactly eight and a half movies before 8 ½ and the hero Guido is also a successful director who was the same age as Fellini. (Collet)

In contrast with the Freudian interpretation of dreams (on how dreams are supposed to conceal repressed desires), the Jungian theory on dreams suggests that dreams are natural expression for people’s imaginations, resembling mythic narratives. Jung also rejects the Freudian belief on how dreams are supposed to be secretive, as well as dreams being the product of discharging our tabooed sexual impulses. (Hurd, The Dream Theories of Carl Jung)

One of the recurring dreams of Guido in 8 ½ represents his fascination for an ideal woman named Claudia, who is the key to the script for his film that he is struggling to finish. In the scenes where Guido enters his dreams and encounters his muse Claudia, Fellini utilized **dissolve** as Guido switches from his dull reality (resting on a hotel bed) into his dream world. **Dissolve** is a transition that moves between shots by overlaying one shot and fading the first image out while strengthening the second shot. It is worth noting that dissolve was utilized multiple times in the film, always when Guido is transforming from reality to dreaming.

The sequence was also filmed in **Point-of-View shot**, where Guido is staring at the far away, elevated Claudia covered with flowing mists. In Point-of-View shots the camera records exactly what the character is seeing at that moment. Points-of-View shots barely appear in any

other scenes of the movie. This highlights how dreams reveal Guido's most innate thoughts. Fellini also used slow, mysterious **background music** to accompany Guido's transition into his dreams. The dissolve technique combined with music suggests imagination, freedom, and boundless thoughts. Comparing Guido's feelings towards Claudia and the relationship between the woman and men in *Un Chien Andalou*, even though both films depict dream sequences involving male and female, Guido in *8 ½* expresses an idealistic admiration for a perfect female image that only appears in his dreams. Idealization and fantasy are products of the human mind, or perfection born from imaginations. On the other hand, the imageries in *Un Chien Andalou*, such as one man's attempted rape of the woman, and ants crawling out of the man's hands reveal sexual desires and aggression.

Cross - Cut

In the latter half of *Inception*, Dom Cobb and his team enter the dream world of their subject Fischer to plant an idea inside his mind. In the dream world, the dreamer can enter a deeper dream and there can be layers of different dreams, each deeper level of dream representing the deeper level of the dream-owner's unconsciousness. To show how each layer of dream are closely intertwined, Christopher Nolan utilizes a crosscut, shifting from intense actions from one dream to the intense actions of another dream.

Crosscut is also known as parallel editing, it is often used by filmmakers to show what is happening at the same time in different spaces.



(Inception)

Figure 2. As shown above, in the first dream the white van was being chased by “dream guards” on motorcycles and under the fight the dreamer Arthur’s head was tilted. This directly influences the dream he constructed which is in a hotel. Since that Arthur was the one who constructed the second dream, when his head is tilted the frame of the dream world was also rotating. By cross-cutting back and forth between the two spaces, Nolan effectively establishes the relationship between the dreamer and the dream world.

Nolan utilized parallel editing to switch between layers of dreams in the last 30 minutes of *Inception*. The fast shift in scenes creates the intense and heist atmosphere for the movie’s climax. To keep the audience on track of the different layers, Nolan used distinct **colour schemes, settings, and mise-en-scene** between the layers.

Dream, Time, and Space

Intertitle

Intertitle is being used three times in *Un Chien Andalou*. The film begins with an intertitle which read “once upon a time” which reminds audiences of a cliché, chronological storyline. However, the story unfolds in a non-linearly fashion, with the time jumping to the future and going back to the past as the film progresses.

The second intertitle which says “eight years later” is edited between the beginning eye-cutting sequence and the next scene. A change in setting is observed between the two shots, now the camera follows a cyclist riding on a city street.



(*Un Chien Andalou*)

Above: The intertitle transition in *Un Chien Andalou* from 1:37 to 1:41, the setting changes from nighttime, under the moon to a city street in daylight

The third intertitle of the film which captions “sixteen years ago” is edited between a quarrel scene between two men.



(Un Chien Andalou)

Above: The action sequence between the two characters cuts to the intertitle, then cuts into a shot that is apparently under the same setting as before

As the second intertitle narrates the time moving into the future, the third intertitle suggests that the time transforms back into the past, even earlier than the point in time in which the movie started with. However, the next scene shows the same **mise-en-scene** as before with the same characters performing almost a continuation of the actions from the previous scene, supposedly from the future. The bizarre timeline seen in *Un Chien Andalou* conveys how while dreaming, people's unconscious can visualize their memories and expectations about the future.

In *Un Chien Andalou*, the concept of time is presented in a linear fashion and the time first moves forward and then backwards with no clear reference to the plot development. The effect of this setting can be seen as encompassing how dreams enable the dreamer to be in any time period, and any physical place which exists within their subconsciousness. This concept is also present in *8 ½* mainly as Guido accesses his childhood memories in his dreams, which extends the time frame of the film.

Guido's Childhood Through the Shots

Through dreaming, Guido returns to his childhood. The **eye-level shot** of Guido playing with his cousins and his grandmother speaking in “the Romagna dialect, making it to some degree unintelligible to many speakers of Italian” as indicated by the original screenplay (Fellini, Federico, et al.) It is worth noting how Fellini was born and raised in Rimini of Italy's Romagna region, again his personal element within the movie. Additionally, the **background music** “ricordo d'infanzia” (Italian for ‘Childhood Memory’) played this scene has a faster tempo than the other background music in the film. This highlights Guido's happy and carefree childhood, which further contrasts his present turmoil in reality.

The storyline of Guido retreating into his childhood through dreaming develops in a chronological order. In Guido's early childhood he usually spent the nights in his grandmother's villa with his many cousins, the background sounds are loud and energetic. Later on, Guido was sent to a strict Catholic school. In those scenes there was minimal background music and a lack of dialogues. Additionally, some **point of view shots** were again utilized in this part of Guido's dream sequence. Even though the main plotline revolves around Guido, the camera was more often placed in a **third-person perspective**.

Guido sometimes escaped his strict Catholic school to the beach and watched a prostitute called Saraghina dancing rumba alongside his friends.



(8 ½)

Above: Three types of shots(point of view shot, extreme long shot, and medium-long shot) were utilized during Guido's encounter with Saraghina.

An **extreme long shot** was used showing how eager the kids are to escape the Catholic school and find Saraghina on the beach. Then, a Point of view shot was used to represent Guido's memory of dancing Saraghina, to portray the kids' reaction to Saraghina's dance, a **medium-long shot** was used. Fellini switches between these three types of shots in this sequence and builds a vivid dimension that only exists in Guido's memories. In effect, this captures dreams' unique ability to connect different time, and construct a three-dimensional space based on what the dreamer had once experienced.

***Inception* and Lucid Dreaming**

Dreams have a unique nature of being able to weave together distinct elements within the dreamer's life and making them coexist in an independent space and time. This characteristic was presented many times throughout *Inception*. As mentioned before, architecture plays an important role in the construction of dream worlds in *Inception*. In the film, the dream worlds of Cobb, Ariadne, and Fischer are very different due to their different memories and perspectives.

During Cobb's **flashback** of his time together with Mal, he tells how him and Mal spent over 50 years together in their shared limbo, but in reality, only several hours have passed. Indeed, the seemingly bizarre concept which people can construct their own dream space is an exaggerated representation of the process of lucid dreaming. This shows how the dreamer's memories, emotions, hidden thoughts, desires (these are all components of someone's subconscious) are able to be weaved together by the dreamer's thought process during their sleep.

In modern neuroscience dreams are believed to be a medium in which the brain processes the information people experience during the day, when people dream, they also go through a deeper thought process which combines the information within the different levels of their brain. In *Inception*, Cobb explains how the people in his dream world are "representations of his subconsciousness", which explains why his late wife can appear over and over again, which also explains why the dream world can be designed according to the dreamer's will. Despite the fact that an individual cannot truly control their environment and time, the dream world solely exists within their mind, which enables dreamers to use their imagination and weave the elements they experience in reality together, this explains why dreams allow a person to transcend into any time and any physical space.

Dream and Reality

Symbolism

In *Un Chien Andalou*, a recurring surrealist **motif (symbol)** was the human hand. Whether it is ants climbing out of the man's hand or **focuses** on the hand on the doorknob. According to Sabrina Stent, PhD in French studies from the University of Birmingham, the repetition of hands in the film was “a symbol of fetish: what hands can do and how they can generate both intense pleasure and intolerable pain” (Stent). Additionally, the “repetition of wounded and severed hands in the film represents castration fear, and more specifically, a disembodied phallus” (Stent). Notice how the hand focus in the film is all the hands of a male character. If we look at the shot of ants climbing out of the hole in the man's hand, this symbolizes the agony of undergoing dismemberment.

The Castration Complex, meaning “act feared by male children, namely the removal of the penis” (Encyclopedia.com) was proposed by Freud and alongside with the Oedipus Complex, forms the organizing principle of psychosexuality.

According to Buñuel and Dalí, *Un Chien Andalou* is loosely based on repressed human emotions and their own repressed sexuality during their youth (Short). Midway through the film, where a male was attempting to initiate sexual intercourse with the woman, a **high angle shot** was used to depict how the man is set back by the weight of two cords attached to two slabs, two melons, two Marist Brothers played by real actors, and two grand pianos with dead donkeys on them. These heavy weights prohibit the man from moving forward to the

woman in the corner of her apartment. The high angle shot establishes a neutral but elevated view looking over, representing the society overlooking specific individuals. The objects attached to the man can be seen as the religious and moral codes which formed the repressed feeling within individuals' unconsciousness as proposed by Freud.

Un Chien Andalou presents the universal reality about repressed sexuality in the dream world. The film focuses on the fact that dreams convey many truthful things about a person's hidden thoughts, and hidden thoughts that are universal to all humans.

Objective Reality vs. Subjective Reality

Fellini defined *8 1/2* as a comedy, towards the end of the film, Guido has more and more wild, even ridiculous dreams due to the stress and troubles in his life: "Guido is living in a big house like his grandmother's villa, the house is populated by all the significant women in his life. Each woman treats him either like a child, a father, or their lover. This is an idealized dream in Guido's unconsciousness, in reality, he cannot manage, or successfully sustain these women who are flooding his memories (Saraghina), his present troubles (his wife Luisa and his mistress Carla), and the woman who lives in his fantasies, Claudia." (Mikulec)

Fellini used this dream sequence to convey, and even to mock his own male absurdity and hypocrisy. This happy and blunt imagination clearly contrasts with Guido's quiet yet complicated life. "While each parallel contains some autobiographical truth, each contains an element of Fellini's **fabulist subjective truth** as well." (Collet)

Fellini portrayed his fantasy in a mocking tone, he is recognizing the fact that these thoughts are far from reality but in a way, his subjective truth is equally important and valuable compared to objective reality. This perspective can also be shown through the movie's ending, the final dance, what Fellini called **“the dance of life”** (Mikulec).

The ending of 8 ½ is where Guido attempts to escape from the set of his new sci-fi movie, he imagines shooting himself with a pistol and then enters a dream sequence where all the characters in the movie come together and start a marvelous parade, with loud circus-like background music. While this is obviously Guido's (or Fellini's) fabulist subjective truth, the final dream sequence conveys a sense of self-acceptance. The recognition of his own absurdity and honesty. During one of his interviews when Fellini was asked about his style and his confidence in filmmaking, Fellini commented: “Self-acceptance can occur only when you've grasped that the only thing that exists is yourself, your true, deep self which wants to grow spontaneously, but which is fettered by inoperative lies, myths and fantasies that propose an unattainable morality or sanctity or perfection—all of it brainwashed into us during our defensive childhood.” (Mikulec)

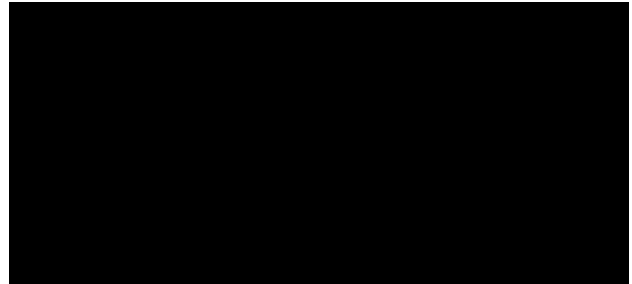
The “brainwashed” and “defensive” are similar to the ideas conveyed in *Un Chien Andalou*, except that in *Un Chien Andalou* the subject was primarily sexual desires, while in 8 ½ it is about the broader concepts of personal perspectives and self-acceptance.

Cobb's Spinning Top in *Inception*

In *Inception*, each extractor had their own totem which would tell them whether they are in a dream or reality. Cobb's totem is a top, if it spins on, it indicates that he is in a dream; when

it spins and stops; it indicates that he is back to reality.

One of the most debated topics about *Inception* is its ending. Where Cobb has seemingly returned home to see his kids, he spins his top on the table, then walks away to embrace his kids. The camera focuses on the top spinning on the table, the film cuts into darkness while the top is still spinning.



(Inception)

Above: Cobb's top still spinning, the film cuts into darkness and ends

By the film's ending, Cobb's transformation is obvious. There were several previous scenes where Cobb nervously spins his top after waking up from a "dream extraction". This is due to the fact that his own wife Mal died from committing suicide, having the false belief that the reality which she is in is a dream. Since then, Cobb has been mournful but also cautious about whether he is in a dream or reality. His fear for being overtaken by an idea is evident in his conversation with Ariadne:

Cobb: Never recreate places from your memory. Always imagine new places.

.....

Cobb: Because building dreams out of your own memories is the surest way to lose your grip on what's real and what's a dream. (Nolan)

However, at the end of the film Cobb doesn't seem to care about whether his subjective reality is a dream or not. He habitually spins the top but soon walks away to embrace his kids before checking the result.

Another sign of Cobb's transformation is from the line "to take the leap of faith" (Nolan, Inception Shooting Script). In the film, this line occurred three times. The first time at the beginning of the story, when Saito invites Cobb to work with him in extracting Fischer's dream:

Saito: You don't. But I can. **So do you want to take a leap of faith**, or become an old man, filled with regret, waiting to die alone?

The second time is when Mal was setting on the ledge, about to jump off:

Mal: I'm asking you **to take a leap of faith**. (Nolan)

For both these times where these words are spoken, Cobb is the listener, not knowing his own faith, uncertain of his faith. However, the third time where these words are spoken, they are spoken by Cobb himself, while attempting to bring Saito back from his prolonged limbo.

Cobb: I came back for you...I came to remind you of what you once knew...

Cobb gestures at the table. Saito follows his gaze down to the polished surface of the table...

Cobb: That this world is not real.

The top IS STILL SPINNING PERFECTLY, AS IF IT WILL NEVER TOPPLE. Saito looks at the top. Then back to Cobb.

Saito: You came to convince me to honor our arrangement?

Cobb: Yes. And **to take a leap of faith.**

After Cobb spoke of these words, he and Saito returned to the first-class cabin, where their dream started. (Nolan)

The fact that Cobb can now say these words shows his acceptance of his subjective reality, his faith to his own world and consciousness. Nolan uses the final scene of *Inception* to highlight how there is truth in subjective reality too, and subjective reality is just as true as objective reality.

Conclusion

Even though *Un Chien Andalou*, *8 ½*, and *Inception* were produced at distinct time periods from different regions of the world. All three films capture dreams' connection with a person's unconsciousness; compared dreaming with filmmaking, and portray dreams' unique characteristic of connecting distinct time and space; as well as recognition for the importance of subjective reality. These films present dream, and the dream world in different angles: *Un Chien Andalou* focuses on dream and psychosexual development under the influence of Freudian theories; *8 ½* dissects how dream relates to a person's childhood and personal ideals in correspondence with Jungian theories; *Inception* utilized advanced film technology to construct a logical, layer by layer dream world based on lucid dreaming theories and modern neurosciences.

Overall, all four directors employed many cinematic techniques into recreating their vision of the dream world - a place where one's reality meets their fantasy.

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