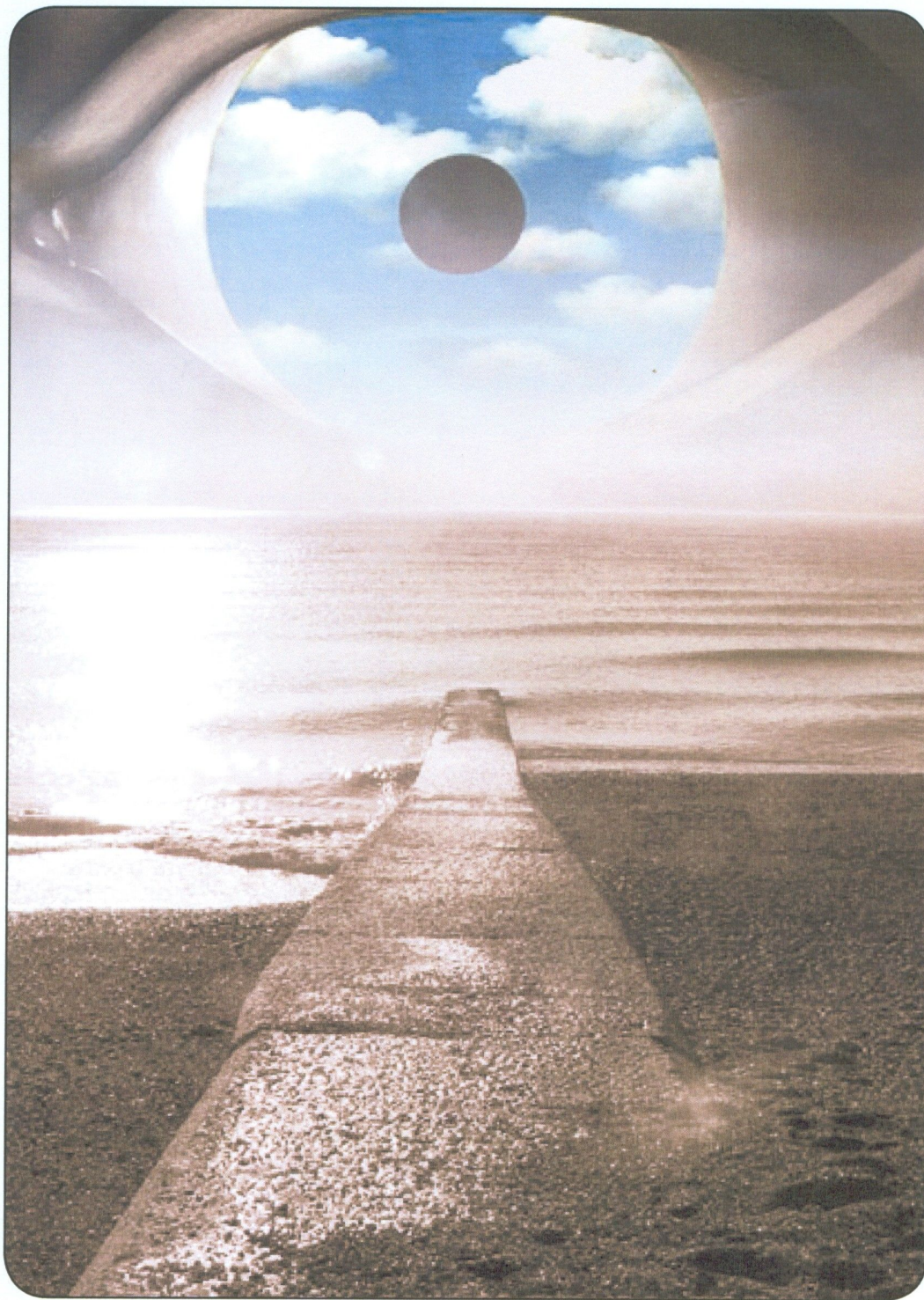


# RATIONALE & DOCUMENTATION



a short motion picture by **bryce mcnamara**



# CONCEPT

I have always had a fascination with dreams and the way in which dreams are represented and interpreted within the Surrealism art movement. While I do not consider my television piece to be 'artistic', I do feel that it has drawn quite heavily from artistic influences. Thus, the primary concept and starting point was to portray a dream through the medium of television. In avoiding clichés, the dream sequence would ideally incorporate both negative and positive dream experiences or sensations. Dreams are often obscure and disjointed. In avoiding a dream sequence that is too dark, I chose to mingle the surreal and obscure dream experience with an element of something positive and beautiful.

The concept involves a central character awakening into a dream.

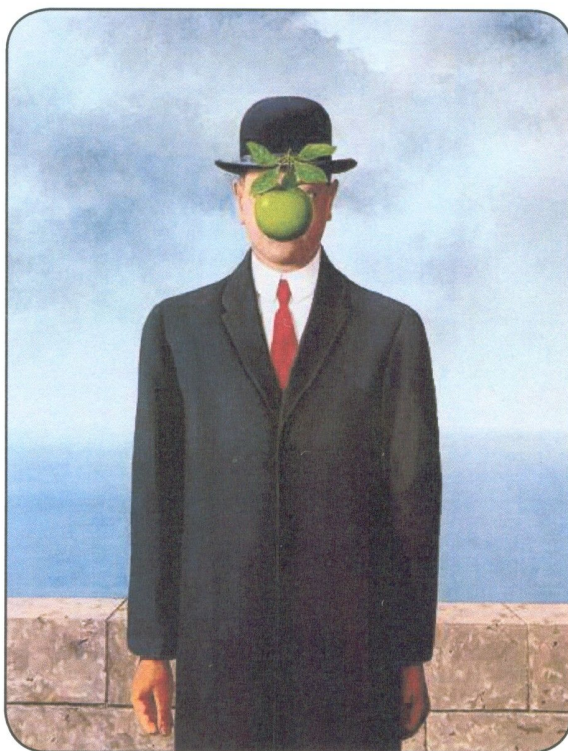
I wanted to create a sense of claustrophobia that I have often experienced in my own dreams. This was done by confining the dreaming character in a small box which is revealed shortly after he disappears underneath his bed covers. This confined space is then contrasted with the wide expanse of ocean and beach, the primary scene for the dream sequence. The space associated with the ocean represents the vast space of the sub-conscious mind, a space of all possibility – where all of one's life experiences are brought together and intermingled. Furthermore, I chose to use the ocean as a primary setting in my piece as the ocean has often been linked to dreams through art. In conceptualising this piece, I found the work of Belgian Surrealist artist, René François Ghislain Magritte, very interesting and stimulating. I was inspired to use the placement of arbitrary objects within the dream sequence without providing any con-

textualising with regards to the purpose of such objects (for instance: the defaced Barbie doll covered in sand; as well as the unknown figure sitting with the chair and the umbrella up on a cliff). In doing this, an emphasis is placed on the dreamlike and obscure nature of the piece, providing an uncertainty as to what exactly is going on. Furthermore, I am highlighting the idea that our dreams are comprised of fragments of information from our lived, conscious experiences. These experiences are then assembled randomly by the sub-conscious during the dream state. The dreaming character breaks out of the box finding himself on a desolated beach (representative of his own sub-conscious imagination). From this point onwards it becomes apparent that small white feathers are blowing along the ground and

are caught in the hair of the dreaming character. These feathers represent a constant link to reality and are symbolic of softness, sleep, and dreaming.

He is then drawn towards a cliff where he experiences a vision of a cloaked person sitting underneath an umbrella. He is drawn towards this image. Throughout this particular sequence I am trying to create a sense of nostalgia or of some past memory that the central character seems to be reliving in his dream. In order to reinforce this, reverberating segments of voices are used over the visuals. These allude to a past experience being re-imagined in an

almost macabre dream state. When the dreaming character finally approaches the cloaked person under the umbrella, they have vanished. There is a strange sense of satisfaction, peace, and fulfillment at the very end as the dreaming character holds and spins the umbrella. The character then walks towards the edge of a cliff overlooking the ocean, while holding the umbrella. This part of my piece is completely open to interpretation. There is what appears to be a camera flash revealing the very last dream shot captured as a picture





in a frame. In order to close the piece I wanted to link it to the quote at the beginning: "I dream my painting and then paint my dream" (Vincent Van Gogh). The framed picture at the end could perhaps be interpreted as a means of attempting to capture and represent a dream. It also highlights the idea of nostalgia and could be seen as a real-life reference to the nostalgic scene being referenced in the actual dream sequence itself.

## SOUND

This piece relies just as much on the audio aspect as it does on the visual. During the stages of conceptualisation I decided that I did not want any direct talking in the piece. Instead, I wanted to dream character to remain silent throughout the piece, so as not to detract from his experience. As I wanted to partake in all aspects of this particular piece, I chose to compose and record a piano track that would correspond to the visuals being shown. The soundtrack is therefore original, and was recorded on a grand piano in order to record maximum resonance and ambience. The sound was then reworked slightly in Cubase. In order to reinforce the dreamlike and slow-pace of the piece, I chose to work a slight reverb into the original recording. The recording was then layered and separated carefully into left and right channels.

The piece uses a variety of other interesting sounds. I chose to use quick and jarring sounds over quick shots of eye-close-ups and other images as a means of jolting the viewer into the dream experience. Many of the sound effects that I created originated from recordings of radio waves that were shortened and cut together at a very quick pace with an interesting result.

At the beginning of the piece (and throughout), I inserted a layered recording of voices reciting words from Radiohead's track "How to disappear completely" (Off their 'Kid A' album). Although

the words are not really meant to be heard, the lyrics from this track interested me as I felt they corresponded well with the undertones of Satrean 'nausea' throughout the piece. There is a sense of aloneness, which is often central to the dream-state. These 'voices' allude to the idea that the dreaming character is being spoken to, or called upon. They also serve to establish the idea of the intermingling of thoughts.

I made use of ambient ocean sounds which replaced the original recordings of the ocean made during the ocean shoot. I felt that pre-recorded sound offered a much higher quality and was easier to manipulate during the piece due to its uniformity. During the ocean scene I chose to incorporate recordings that I made during a trip to the beach (June, 2006). I felt that these sound snippets – with a touch of reverberation – worked well at establishing an idea of a real, experience event being conjured up by the mind's subconscious during a dream-state.

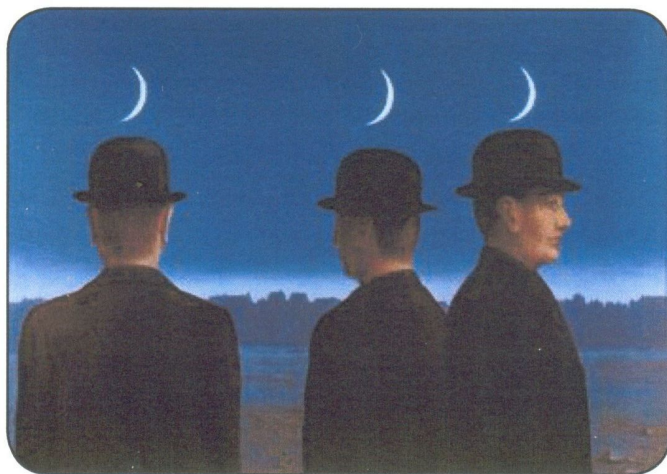
## VISUAL / GRADING

Ideally, I would have loved to have shot this short piece using 35mm film. I feel that the organic and crisp feel of film would have contributed tremendously to the overall

aesthetic of my piece. However, because I was working with the video medium, I incorporated a variety of techniques in Avid in order to move towards a more filmic aesthetic. The first aesthetic change that I made was mimicking the black bars of widescreen film. I felt that an anamorphic widescreen appearance would be a bit too extreme, so I customized the

widescreen effect so that it would not dominate the piece too much.

Heavy grading was central to this piece. Each and every scene is graded with a specific meaning in mind. The 'bed scenes' are graded with a light blue and a white tinge on the sheets. This reinforces the idea of moonlight and sleep. The blue grading of the 'bed scene' also provides a sharp and jolting contrast with the yellow





and orange tints presented in the short flashes of eyes throughout. The contrast represents the two realms of reality and the dream realm depicted in my piece.

The beach scene also makes use of an interesting blue and slight violet hue. I chose blue as I wanted to make the dream space (the beach) appear cold and somewhat unnerving. This worked well, I feel, with the blowing white feathers as it sometimes appears that there are small flakes of snow blowing around the central character. The purple grading and contrast used becomes more intense towards the end of the dream sequence as the dream seems to become more obscure.

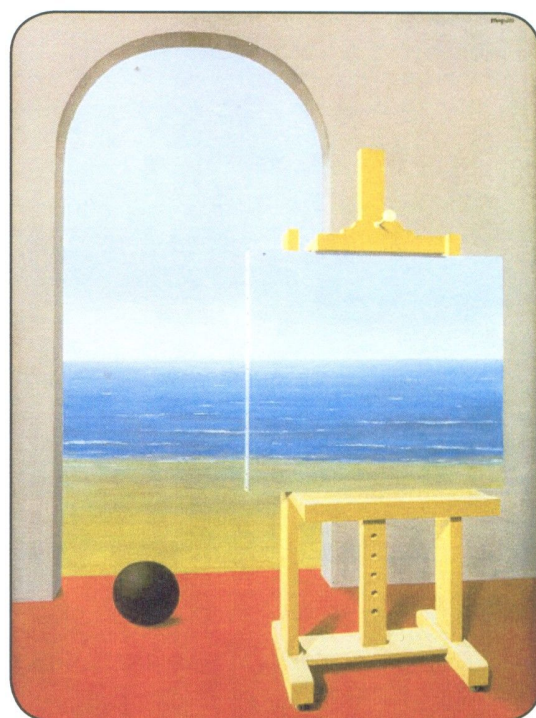
## SELF-REFLECTIVE

In producing this particular piece, I chose to partake in a project that is not journalistic at all. My decision to make a creative piece based on the idea of dreaming, meant that I was working outside of a safe-zone. During the formative stages of the project I was often unsure as to what exactly it was that I was doing. This constant feeling of anxiety as the deadline approached made me re-evaluate my concept and structure on numerous occasions. Although I had a basic idea regarding what exactly it was that I wanted to achieve, at the same time I felt that there was no way that I could pre-script or pre-structure the piece entirely prior to shooting. I wanted ideas to develop as the process continued, as I directed and shot the various scenes and sequences.

I knew that I needed one central character to use as the 'dreamer'. For this character I chose a very close friend, Gareth Latter (a Law student at Rhodes University), who has had previous experience in the performing arts. I felt that Gareth's photogenic appearance as well as his very natural dead-pan facial expression would work very well in a dream sequence. Having known Gareth for quite a long time, it made scheduling shoots very convenient and effortless. One problem that I anticipated was that of directing Gareth. Although I tried to explain in general the idea and motivation of the piece, I myself was often not too sure with regards to exactly what it was that I wanted to achieve on a given shoot. To my surprise I found that he worked very well with the limited direction that he was given. This was per-

fect, because he began to develop his own character and persona for the piece quite naturally by himself, rather than having that character imposed on him.

From the very beginning of the conceptualisation process, I knew that I wanted to compose the music for my own piece. This was only done towards the final stages of the production process, owing to a variety of difficulties experienced. Initially, I thought that perhaps I should settle with pre-recorded music by another artist, however, I soon abandoned this idea and became motivated to record something myself. My initial piano recording was done at the



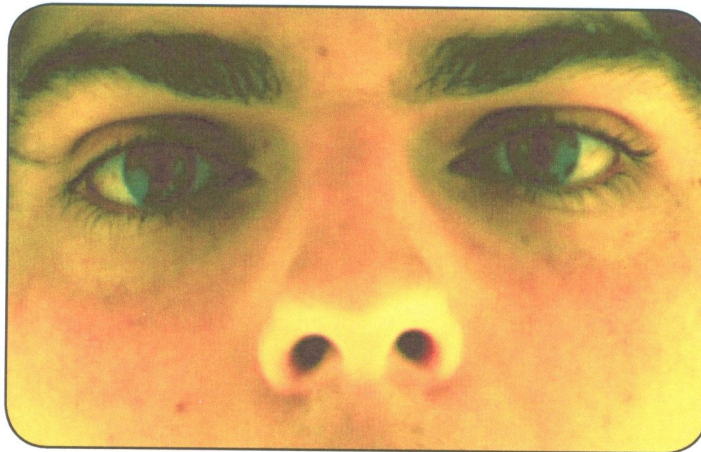
Rhodes University Music Department in the piano practice rooms. I recorded the audio directly onto the camera via a small mixer and a rifle microphone.

The recording quality, as I expected, was not great and I found that a variety of other sounds were being picked up. Furthermore, the piano that I was using had a lot of off notes which was frustrating. However, I used this initial and rather rough piano track as a test with the footage to assess whether what I was playing would work with the visuals. I found that there was potential for it to work well, I would need to rethink the music that I was improvising. I drew up a list of the various scenes and the projected emotions that I wanted to create around each of these



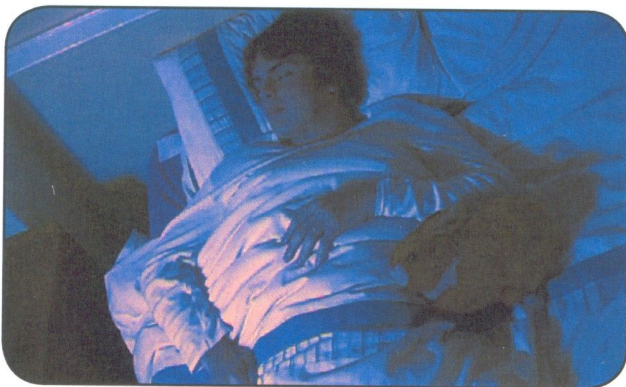
scenes and visuals. I used this list at a final recording on a piano. This time the recording was done by fellow television student and Sound Technology student, Jans de Jager. I was able to record on a grand piano using four microphones connecting through a mixer directly into Cubase.

This made the recording much clearer and pleasing to the ear. I improvised a piano theme based on the soft and sombre emotion that I wanted to establish at the beginning of the piece and then return to at the end. At a later stage I worked with the tracks in Cubase and made slight adjustments such as adding a subtle reverb, as well as playing around with phasing effects. The final product, I felt, worked very well with the visuals and worked well with the ambience and feeling of the piece, rather than providing a simple backtrack and thus rendering the piece a music video (which it most certainly is not).



to make. This version included a brief animated sequence of the main character (which was to be animated in Macromedia Flash and then translated into a high quality video format). The chance of using an animation and a variety of short dream sequences became slim as I realised that I had 6 minutes to work with. I

experienced further problems when we were told to cut our pieces down to 5 minutes. At this stage in the production I was worried that my piece would essentially 'bomb' as I figured that 5 minutes would not be enough time to convey my intended idea. I was, however, quite determined to make the idea work. I found that many of the shots that I had used in the piece were somewhat lengthy or superfluous. These were either removed entirely or shortened. I realised that because of the 5 minute time limit, the piece would need to incorporate quick cutting in areas that would



Another challenging part of this project was working on Avid. Although challenging, I feel that I made a good decision in choosing to use Avid for this piece. Through countless technical troubleshooting, I have developed my knowledge of Avid rather thoroughly over the past two months. I have learnt that Avid is a very fluid system when one realises the importance of knowing the keyboard shortcuts in the system.

Initially, the dream sequence would be very slow-paced and required approximately 10 minutes of running time to complete what I initially intended

not only serve to jolt the audience somewhat, but also serve as a transition to another sequence within the piece. I became relieved to find that I would be able to convey my idea in 5 minutes (although this meant omitting some material). I am very pleased with the outcome of this project and I would like to continue working on both a shorter and longer version of this piece.