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2017

Projection Series #8

The Long Dream of Waking



Projection Series #8:
The Long Dream of Waking
11 November - 24 December 2017
Approximate running time: 73 minutes

Screening: weekends, 1pm
Assistant Curator: Tendai John Mutambu
Assistant Len Lye Curator: Sarah Wall
Projection Series coordinated by Paul Brobbel

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The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery/Len Lye Centre's state-of-the-art 62-seat cinema encourages audiences to experience the films of Len Lye and the wider world of local and international cinema. The cinema welcomes you to see historical experimental film, contemporary artists' moving image and regular film festival programming. At the heart of the Govett-Brewster/Len Lye Centre's cinematic programme is the Projection Series, our regular film programme surveying the landscape of historical and contemporary fine art filmmaking. The eighth instalment of the Projection Series, *The Long Dream of Waking*, presents four films that explore states of consciousness between sleep and wakefulness, illusion and reality.

Cover: Maya Deren & Alexander Hammid
Meshes of the Afternoon 1943 film still
Courtesy of Light Cone, Paris

Len Lye Centre Cinema
Photo: Patrick Reynolds

The Long Dream of Waking

Curated by Tendai John Mutambu and Sarah Wall

Films are often associated with dreams, both are a form of escape from the everyday world. From inception, common names for cinemas were Dream Theatre and Dreamland Theatre, with the US centre of film production, Hollywood, known as the 'dream factory'.¹ French surrealist Robert Desnos likened the darkness of the cinema to that of the bedroom before sleep, writing the screen might be 'equal to our dreams'.² Taking its title from an unpublished 1940s poem by Len Lye, the focus of this Projection Series is the representation of dreams by filmmakers. The crises and character shifts generated by dreams and memories are often represented in films by a dreamlike atmosphere. In the irrational space-time of dreams, we can freely move between distant locations and spaces, and characters appear and disappear.³ Distinctions between past, present and future collapse, giving rise to a temporal ambiguity, and it is difficult to determine whether what we are experiencing are dreams, memories or fantasies.

Emerging from the centre of the Surrealist movement of 1920s Paris, *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) broke conventions of narrative logic with its irrational dream-like structure. Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí believed that cinema possessed an immediacy unavailable to other art forms and therefore was ideal for representing the unconscious, dreams, and emotions.⁴ When Buñuel collaborated with Dalí on the writing and filming of *Un Chien Andalou*, his aim was to capture the 'storm of dreams that floods sleep in waves', some of the 'billions and billions of images that surge every night and dissipate almost right away, enveloping the earth in a cloak of lost dreams'.⁵ Buñuel has written that when working on the film they rejected any idea of an intellectual, objective or representational nature. Made before he joined the surrealist group, in his rejection of rational images for irrational ones and in his exploration of the strange, incongruous and unknown, in *Un Chien Andalou* Buñuel demonstrated his allegiance to the fundamental principles of surrealism.⁶

The film's famous sequence showing the close-up of a razor slicing a woman's eyeball sets the violent tone of *Un Chien Andalou* and its link to sex, desire and aggression. The violence was an absolute provocation, made all the more overwhelming as everything that preceded deliberately reassured and lulled the viewer: the fairy-tale promise of the opening title card reading 'Once Upon a Time', a man meditatively sharpening his razor, smoking, looking out into the night with a woman sitting quietly at his side.



What follows is a series of disjointed episodes designed to shock with their juxtaposition of images and of situations – grand pianos with dead cattle are dragged across a room; ants crawl out of a hole in a man's hand; his mouth is erased and replaced with armpit hair. The sense of disorientation is reinforced by its complete disregard of rational sequence through the use of titles – 'Eight years later', 'Towards three in the morning' – and by sudden changes in location, collapsing any distinction between the exterior world and dream world.

Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) is a meditation on the extremes of consciousness. While Deren repudiated surrealism and psychoanalytic interpretations of the film, as well as any auto-biographical readings, it is difficult to dispute film historian P. Adams Sitney's assessment that *Meshes* 'was made possible through a Freudian insight into the processes of the surrealist film'.⁷ The opening scene shows a mannequin arm reaching down from the sky and placing a white poppy on a pathway, where it is picked up by a woman (played by Deren). Walking along the pathway, the woman catches sight of a mysterious figure up ahead, disappearing around a corner. Arriving at a house she unlocks the front door and enters. It appears empty but there are indications someone recently left: a newspaper is spread open on the floor, a record turntable spins, a telephone has its receiver off the hook, an unfinished cup of tea and a loaf of bread with a knife rest on the kitchen table. She ascends the stairs to the bedroom where she reclines in an armchair near a window, falls asleep and begins to dream.

As her dream spills into the outside world, the story starts to loop and external realities seep into her subconscious. The sleeping woman has three recurring dreams, in each one she chases a robed, mirror-faced figure before re-entering the house. No dream is identical; slight but increasingly disturbing variations occur, showing her world becoming progressively disordered and menacing, foreshadowing the woman's death. Her declining emotional state is further emphasised by the use of radical film techniques; handheld-camera shots, jump cuts, multiple exposures, close-ups, and moving, tilted frames. For Deren, the essence of film lay in its capacity to manipulate movements in time and space. Shot and edited for rhythmic and visual effects, *Meshes of the Afternoon* is filled with ambiguous images and visualisations of aggression, fear, desire. As the film reaches its climax, the woman, awakened by her lover, throws a knife at his face which is transformed on impact into a mirror which reflects the sea; it shatters, its shards falling onto a sandy beach. He re-enters the house to find the woman still in the armchair, swathed in seaweed and her throat cut by the shattered mirror.

Bells of Atlantis (1952) by Ian Hugo is based on a prose poem from *House of Incest* (1936) by the French-born author Anaïs Nin. The surrealist novella from which it derives looks into the narrator's subconscious as she tries to escape from a dream in which she is trapped, attempting to cope with the trauma of her own birth.⁸ For Nin the ephemeral and fragmented world of dreams was a source of 'atmosphere [...] climate and texture', which artists were tasked with pursuing and unravelling to reveal meaning and the relation of dreams to life.⁹ A dream 'could not be told literally for then it became as flat and one-dimensional as representational realism'.¹⁰ Writers and artists had to find a form of expression for it – a way of conveying its sensations by – in the words of the psychoanalyst Carl Jung – 'proceed[ing] from the dream outward'.¹¹

Hugo's *Bells of Atlantis*, produced in collaboration with electronic music pioneers Louis and Bebe Barron and experimental filmmaker Len Lye, does just that. Alongside the abstract colour effects by Lye, whose direct film *A Color Box* had earned cult status amongst the European avant-garde, the Barrons produced one of the earliest uses of electronic music in cinema. The film's otherworldly sonic qualities sit, fittingly, alongside Lye's and Hugo's superimposition of image and colour. The result is a surreal mix of the aural, visual and literary, made to evoke what Nin perceived as

Previous: Luis Buñuel *Un Chien Andalou* 1929 film still
 Courtesy of the British Film Institute

Right: Ian Hugo *Bells of Atlantis* 1952-3 film still
 Courtesy Light Cone, Paris



the latent memories of primal sensation experienced through coming into consciousness.¹²

"I remember my first birth in water," is the film's opening line, narrated by Nin who appears as the mythical queen of Atlantis. *Bells of Atlantis* is a lyrical passage into another realm, told as a story of how consciousness emerges from an indeterminately fluid state – used by Nin as a metaphor for the subconscious. Visually, the camera moves gently in opposing directions over the three layers of superimposed images, combining underwater film and live-action above water. In his earlier stages of filmmaking, Hugo worked with found images, which he reordered or superimposed to find poetic resonances by way of juxtaposition. By the 1950s, his filmic experiments had earned him the status of a respected avant-garde filmmaker, influencing the likes of Stan Brakhage who noted that without Hugo's *Jazz of Lights* (1954), with its dreamlike flow of sensations, he could not have made his landmark film, *Anticipation of the Night* (1958).

The Long Dream of Waking concludes with *The Lost Dreams of Naoki Hayakawa* (2016) – a twenty-five-minute long filmic collaboration by Ane Hjort Guttu and Daisuke Kosugi. The film depicts the story of the eponymous Naoki Hayakawa, a Japanese art director at an advertising agency in Tokyo, working in an environment where all-consuming labour conditions have become a source of psychological alienation. Like many others in the industry, Hayakawa works 16 hours daily, including weekends. The pressure of long work hours causes him to fall into an indeterminate state of consciousness. In this mental condition – somewhere between

sleep and wakefulness, reality and fantasy – Hayakawa’s bizarre yet sublime dreams soon take control. When informed of this condition, his bosses see in this occurrence an extension of his imaginative capacities and a creative potential to be further exploited. A crisis is triggered in the film’s central character as he realises that not even the products of his subconscious mind are immune to the labour market’s exploitation.

Hayakawa, played by Kosugi, relies greatly on his imagination, from which he earns a living. But as his dreams become more intense they start to dissolve the division between his fanciful, imaginative musings and the austere greyness of his surrounding office environment. The chaos of Hayakawa’s inner worlds is based on Kosugi’s own dreams and experiences with project-oriented working conditions that mark an all too familiar reality for today’s creative class for whom life and work have little or no distinction. In their collaboration with composer and musician Mari Kvien Brunvoll, Hjort Guttu and Kosugi draw inspiration from 1920s and 1930s surrealist films to produce an enthralling mix of documentary and fiction.

The Projection Series’ eighth instalment reflects on how the imagination creates an escape from the mundane world of the rational, the conscious, the real. It reminds us that film is an ideal vehicle for such reflection, with its capacity to evoke, through sensuous atmospheres and textures, strange and fantastical worlds beyond our conscious existence.



Ane Hjort Guttu and Daisuke Kosugi,
The Lost Dreams of Naoki Hayakawa 2016 film still
 Courtesy of the artists

1. Stephen Sharot, 'Dreams in Films and Films as Dreams: Surrealism and popular American cinema,' *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 24:1 Spring 2015, p66.
2. *Ibid.*, p71.
3. Renata Jackson, *The Modernist Poetics and Experimental Film Practice of Maya Deren*, Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002, p195.
4. Ignacio Javier López, 'Film, Freud, and Paranoia: Dalí and the Representation of Male Desire in "An Andalusian Dog",' *Diacritics*, 32:2, Summer 2001, p110.
5. Quoted in Raphaëlle Moine and Pierre Taminiaux, 'From Surrealist Cinema to Surrealism in Cinema: Does a Surrealist Genre Exist in Film?' *Yale French Studies*, no. 109, 2006, p110.
6. J.H. Matthews, 'Surrealism and the Cinema,' *Criticism*, 4:2 Spring, 1962, p126.
7. Robin Blaetz, *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, p308.
8. The author likens the trauma of birth to being '[e]jected from a paradise of soundlessness [...] thrown up on a rock, the skeleton of a ship choked in its own sails.' Anais Nin, *House of Incest*, Sky Blue Press, 2010, p6.
9. Anais Nin, *The Novel of the Future* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986), pp118-119.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Anais Nin, *The Diary of Anais Nin 1955-1966*, New York: Mariner Books, 1977, p133.
12. Nin, *The Novel of the Future*, pp118-119.



Luis Buñuel
Un Chien Andalou 1929

17 min., digital transfer, 35mm
black and white, silent | Rated M

The Projection Series opens with arguably the most celebrated image in surrealist cinema: the close-up of a razor slicing a woman's eyeball in Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou*. Buñuel wrote that *Un Chien Andalou* originated in an encounter between a dream of his and a dream of Dalí; Buñuel had dreamt of a tapering cloud slicing the moon in half (we see this image near the beginning of the film), and Dalí's dream was of a hand crawling with ants, also included in the film. With *Un Chien Andalou*, Buñuel signalled film's potential is not restricted to portraying the physical, exterior world, but also can evoke the interior worlds of dreams.

Courtesy of the British Film Institute



Maya Deren & Alexander Hammid
Meshes of the Afternoon 1943

14 min., digital transfer, 16mm
black and white, sound | Exempt

Meshes of the Afternoon is Maya Deren's first completed and most celebrated film. A collaboration with her then husband, cinematographer Alexander Hammid, Deren also appears in the film as the lead protagonist who finds herself in an environment of shifting, interlinked dream words. Deren plays multiple versions of herself – sleeper, stalker, lover, killer – an inner struggle that ends in suicide. Originally silent, Deren later commissioned Teiji Ito (her third husband) to write music for the film, adding his composition to the film in 1959.

Courtesy of Light Cone, Paris



Ian Hugo
Bells of Atlantis 1952

10 min., digital transfer, 16mm
colour and sound | Exempt

Based on a prose poem by Anaïs Nin, *Bells of Atlantis* looks into the narrator's subconscious as she tries to escape from a dream in which she is trapped, attempting to cope with the trauma of her own birth. The film was produced by Hugo in collaboration with electronic music pioneers Louis and Bebe Barron and filmmaker Len Lye, whose abstract colour effects create a dreamlike superimposition of images. *Bells of Atlantis* is a surreal mix of the aural, visual and literary, made to evoke what Nin perceived as the latent memories of primal sensation experienced through coming into consciousness.

Courtesy of Light Cone, Paris



**Ane Hjort Guttu and
Daisuke Kosugi**
*The Lost Dreams of
Naoki Hayakawa* 2016

25 min., digital transfer, 16mm scanned
to HD video, colour and sound | Exempt

The film tells the story of the eponymous Naoki Hayakawa, a Japanese art director at an advertising agency in Tokyo, working in an environment where all-consuming labour conditions have become a source of psychological alienation. Like many others in the industry, Hayakawa works long hours – the pressure of which causes him to fall into indeterminate states of consciousness. In this mental condition – somewhere between sleep and wakefulness – Hayakawa drifts in and out of bizarre yet sublime dreams that threaten to take control of his mind.

Courtesy of the artists and
the Norwegian Film Institute



Luis Buñuel *Un Chien Andalou*
1929 film still. Courtesy of
the British Film Institute

Ane Hjort Guttu and
Daisuke Kosugi,
*The Lost Dreams of Naoki
Hayakawa* 2016 film still