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Exiting and Entering Early Cinema

The foregoing question was posed by the critic Jacqueline Rose in her 2000 paper "On Not Being Able to Sleep." Rose's reflections resonate with Apichatpong's approach in more ways than one. With its focus on the visions experienced in sleep, *Cemetery of Splendor* at once summons and announces a break from long-standing notions of an essential affinity between film and dreams. Some of the most inventive moments of cinema history—from German Expressionism to Surrealism to the postwar avant-garde—have been animated by explorations of the medium's oneiric potential. In discourses about cinema, too, "the dream is one of the most persistent metaphors in both classical and modern film theory," Laura Rascaroli observes.[1] Yet this metaphor tends to reduce sleep to the status of an obscured foundation for, or transparent window into, oneiric activity, commanding little interest on its own. The bodily state of slumber is overshadowed by the enthralling inner landscapes to be discovered on the far shores of conscious reality. Rather than a destination in itself, sleep figures only marginally, as a layover to pass through quickly in the transition from one realm to the other. It rarely receives sustained consideration in its own right. In contrast to this tendency, Apichatpong calls attention to the activity of slumber by placing it front and center. To stop short at the gateway into dreams and stay with the image of somnolent bodies is to tarry in a state usually passed through quickly. In his work, sleep becomes at once striking in its newfound visibility and uncanny in its familiarity.

This altered perspective implicitly reformulates the relationship between sleeping and dreaming, instead of automatically subsuming the one to the other. A similar objective forms the core of Rose's theoretical reflections. "On Not Being Able to Sleep" conducts a close reading and reframing of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the groundbreaking study by Sigmund Freud that, more than any other single text, lays the foundation for modern understandings of the dream. Freud composes a grand synthesis of previous explanations of dreaming in order to supersede them with his own scientific theory of the dream as "a psychical structure which has a

meaning," a theory that would leave its imprint across many disciplinary domains.[2] At the very outset of his study, Freud sets sleep to the side as "essentially a problem of physiology." As such, it bears no relevance to his account of the dream as a fabrication of the unconscious mind and hence a problem of psychoanalysis, warranting no further scrutiny.[3] The readiness with which the fascination with dreams displaces the question of sleep is replicated in this framing gesture, and for good reason. While both of these processes designate an experiential domain beyond volitional control, sleep, unlike dreaming, leaves few traces in memory and yields no intriguing testimony to the mysteries of interior life. This displacement is therefore a strategic operation, as Roland Barthes argues, serving to "recuperate" sleep's nonproductivity, to rescue it from "the disgrace of the 'good for nothing,'" and to absorb it into a regime of use value. With the concept of "dream-work," he writes, "psychoanalysis instituted the idea of the *producing* dream, material for analysis."[4]

The elision of sleep within dreams finds expression in a frequently cited passage from *The Interpretation of Dreams:* "All dreams are in a sense dreams of convenience: they serve the purpose of prolonging sleep instead of waking up. *Dreams are the* GUARDIANS *of sleep and not its disturbers*."[5] But as Rose points out, sleep is, in fact, "the one thing that will not let [Freud] rest."[6] Indeed, throughout the book, Freud keeps returning to the problem of sleep—revisiting his earlier assertion that dreams are the guardians of sleep in order to restate it, reinterrogate it, and finally, revoke it altogether. Sleep moves decisively to the center of his considerations in the book's seventh and final chapter. Here Freud takes a step back from detailing the signifying processes of dreaming in order to assume what he calls a "metapsychological" perspective. He considers the psychical apparatus in its totality as a composite system, made up of separate mental agencies, each with its own functions and purposes. With this change of vantage comes a corresponding change in tone toward increasing doubt and uncertainty, as Freud considers how the differential functioning of the psyche complicates his previous formulation of the relationship between sleeping and dreaming. Does the dreamer in fact sleep? Or are dreams rather the residues of mental activity, evidence of the failure of sleep to be fully established? Over the course of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud comes around to the latter view and finally concludes that the dream, in fact, proves that some part of the mind "does not obey the wish to sleep."[7] While earlier on he can confidently posit that "every successful dream is a fulfillment" of the ego's wish for sleep, by the final chapter it becomes undeniable that the dream also *betrays* this "universal, invariably present, and unchanging wish to sleep."[8] As a process that releases the unconscious wishes normally censored in waking thought, dreaming always has the potential to "threaten to shake the subject out of his sleep."[9] He writes, "it must therefore be admitted that every dream has an arousing effect," oftentimes assuming the role of "a *disturber* of sleep."[10]

The final chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* has been described by some as one of "the most difficult and abstract of Freud's writings."[11] The author himself

intimates as much when he pauses to reflect on the point he has reached in his investigation. Freud writes, "Until now, if I am not much mistaken, all the paths we have trodden have led us into the light, to enlightenment and full understanding; from the moment we propose to go more deeply into the psyche's inner processes of dreaming, all our ways lead into the dark."[12] It is here, Rose keenly observes, that Freud finds himself "forced back inside the very realm or space which he was attempting to master for the future of science—the space which the psychoanalyst, unlike the sleeper, could talk about."[13] Sleep returns both to disturb the theory of the dream as a psychic process and to trouble the scientific enterprise with an awareness of its own limits, signaling the critical difference between "a psychoanalysis which sees its task as waking the soul into reason, and a psychoanalysis which does not know, cannot be sure, whether it itself is awake."[14] From within this darkness, Rose proposes an alternative to the epistemological project of mastering the unconscious. Sleep, she writes, "is one of the ways we pay tribute to the unconscious, to the idea of something vital and uncontrollable in our minds. If sleep cannot be willed, crucially we never know what will happen—or where exactly we are going—when we go to sleep."[15] And by extension, neither can we be sure of the direction in which the path of awakening lies. The obscurity of sleep cannot be dispelled by the work of dreams and what they disclose of an individual psyche. Rather, it preserves within itself all that remains unknown, unremembered, or unarticulated in psychic life.

Rose wrests the problem of sleep from within the pages of the book of dreams. In so doing, she extends an invitation to the reader to follow the ways that lead into the dark by retracing Freud's footsteps and then looking to other guides beyond the point past which he will go no further.[16] To follow their lead is to recognize the fissures between sleeping and dreaming, disturbing their assumed complementarity. Indeed, Freud is not alone in his skepticism toward the stability of the pact between sleep and dreams. He finds company with thinkers like Barthes, for whom "the utopia of sleep is dreamless"; Maurice Blanchot, who views dreaming as a form of insomnia, "a refusal to sleep within sleep"; and neurophysiologist Michel Jouvet, who defines dreaming as a third state of the brain that is distinct from both sleeping and waking, a state he calls *paradoxical sleep*.[17] These theoretical reframings, like Apichatpong's films, clear a space for thinking about sleep on its own terms, a problem for art and philosophy as much as for psychoanalysis.

An approach to the relationship between sleeping and dreaming as an open question, rather than a settled pact, provides the basis for the discussion that follows. The remainder of this chapter revisits the idea of an affinity between cinema and dreams, tracing this idea to the beginnings of motion pictures. I consider several examples that fall within the conventional definition of the dream scene, representing the internal perceptions of figures and characters who are asleep. Not only do these examples speak to an insight shared by early filmmakers into the oneiric properties of the filmic image, its operation according to another order and

logic; they also map the development of a set of strategies for dynamizing space and time, starting with and moving outward from a primary scenario of sleep that is repeated from film to film. I pay close attention to the rites of slumber that frame the activity of dreaming, the positioning of the sleeper in relation to the landscapes spun from their dreams, and the spatiotemporal shifts precipitated by the act of closing one's eyes. In compiling these works from early cinema, along with their corresponding illustrative film stills, I aim for an effect like that of Apichatpong's films, generating a new focus on sleep that magnifies its visibility, while also highlighting its familiarity as an originary scene rooted in the earliest years of filmmaking. The bodies of sleepers germinate throughout the history of cinema, so many markers of the elsewheres and beyonds that the medium claims as its own. As brief as their appearances may be, the very regularity of these appearances speaks to their significance as corporeal signs of passage. The chapter concludes with a consideration of how the functions of the sleeper shift in later decades.

The parallels between the projection of moving photographs and the mental operations of sleeping and dreaming were not lost on the first practitioners of motion pictures. Works such as *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* (Edwin S. Porter, 1906) make these parallels explicit. This early film visualizes the dreams of a central figure who, after overindulging in food and drink, stumbles home and collapses into bed. Sleep does not come easy for this gourmand, as implied by the tiny fairies who emerge from a tureen and jab at his head with pitchforks, but eventually arrives. His bed shakes with a violent energy, crashes through the bedroom's windows, and takes off into the night sky. The sleeper sits up to find himself flying across the tops of buildings. The film comes to an end along with the dream, indicated by the abrupt return to terrestrial reality as the airborne bed comes crashing back down into the bedroom. By means of double exposures and tricks of editing, *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* summons a fantastical scene of illusions. On the one hand, the dream operates as a dramatic conceit that explains impossible actions. On the other hand, it is also reflexively identified with film's capacities to bend the laws of gravity and space. In *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend*, the sleeper's journey serves as a vehicle for experimenting with the unique powers of cinematic technology, arousing visual interest not in what it tells us, but in the tricks it plays on space and time.

The imagery of sleep in early cinema mirrors that of other contemporary visual media—particularly comics, as Scott Bukatman's work has shown. *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* illustrates the link between the two media, as a film based on the popular American newspaper cartoon by Winsor McCay. With each installment, the cartoon depicted a new character's outlandish dreams. In the final panel, the sleeper would awaken with a start, usually in bed like the drunken man in the film. (The cartoon's running joke—that it has the irresistible appeal of cheese on toast to thank for its existence—can perhaps be attributed to popular beliefs about the digestive roots of oneiric activity.) Even so, argues Bukatman, the dreamers presented in it are in fact "*not* real dreamers; they are rather functions of McCay's
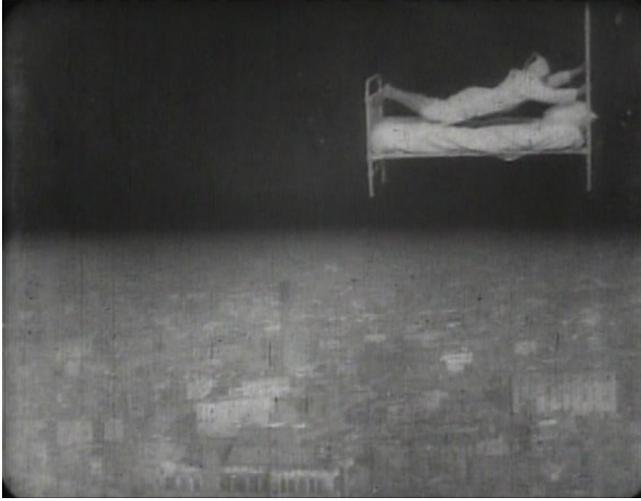
FIGURE 19. *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* (Edwin S. Porter, 1906).

(and his readers') playful imaginations."[18] A similar conceit appears in another comic serial by McCay, *Little Nemo in Slumberland*. The "motionless voyages" taken each night by the little boy Nemo, like those of the rarebit fiends, typically end back in his bed as he emerges from his slumber.[19] These nocturnal rituals of flight and return constitute a bridge between the serial format of comics, the reading practices cultivated by print periodicals, and the newly emerging habit of moviegoing. Across these spheres of popular print and visual culture, the bedroom comes to be visualized as a metamorphic setting, a space rendered dynamic by the act of reverie, and "a fleeting refuge from the solidity of the real."[20]

Figures like Little Nemo appeared elsewhere in early twentieth-century American pictorial culture. Alexander Nemerov has described the trope of "the boy in bed" found in this period, such as in the work of Brandywine School artists like Jesse Willcox Smith. Smith's illustration *The Land of Counterpane* (1905) shows a boy tucked under the covers, his head slumping on his pillow and eyes looking out from heavily drooping lids; across the expanse of his bedsheets a phalanx of tiny soldiers marches. In this illustration, the child is not evidently dreaming, but seems to resist the onset of sleep so as to stay a little longer with the solitude and darkness that nourish reverie. Likewise, in the other examples referenced by Nemerov—all boys with one exception, in middle-class homes that locate the bed in a solitary chamber—the children who imagine as they lie in bed are neither clearly sleeping nor clearly dreaming. What is most striking in these pictures is the association forged between the bedroom and the exercise of the mind's powers to call forth images, such that "the scene of imagination and the topic of imagination fuse into one locale."[21] The mise-en-scène of the bedroom becomes a space of fusion and doubling, and its props—beds, darkness, and pajama-clad figures—become so

many clues that the image cannot be understood to represent a single time-space continuum. In these illustrations, sleep announces its presence not as a performed action so much as a motif of discontinuous reality. Pictures like these circulated in a period when the faculty of imagining—of mentally summoning images—was caught between the old medium of the book and the new medium of film. The latter, Nemerov argues, threatened to appropriate "the book's traditional role as the provider of powerful hallucinations of absent entities."[22] But in so doing, cinema also reanimated the sleepy tropes of books and their illustrations, affirming and identifying with their power to carry the viewer away.

An identification of cinematic technologies with unconscious flights is also found in the work of the French filmmaker and special effects pioneer George Méliès. Among his large corpus of films are several that transpire in the interval of sleep and within the framework of a dream—describing delightful fantasies of enchantment or, conversely, the anxious nightmares of men of science, tormented by their inventions and objects of study. For instance, *A Grandmother's Story* (1908) begins with another boy in bed: after listening to his grandmother's bedtime story, a child goes to sleep. On the blank expanse of wall above his bed, an angel fades into view and awakens the child. The two figures fade out together, and then a dissolve transports us to a land of animated toys and miniature gardens, a fairyland that is perhaps inspired by the grandmother's tale. The boy lies down to rest in the garden, fanned by the wings of fairies, and another dissolve takes him back to his bedroom. The placement of his body on the screen when he falls asleep in the garden is identical to that of the bedroom, so that the effect of the dissolve is a metamorphosis of the setting that surrounds his fixed position in space. When he sits up in bed and rubs his eyes in confusion, the film comes to an end. In another film by Méliès, *The Inventor Crazybrains and His Wonderful Airship* (1905), a single-shot set-up projects oneiric space directly upon the setting of a study in which the inventor nods off after having drawn up a model of a dirigible. The walls of the study fall away, and mischievous creatures dance around and torment the inventor. His drawing turns into an animated object that floats in the sky, gives birth to floating sylphs, and explodes in flames. Throughout these episodes, the inventor himself lies asleep on the floor, tossing violently before he finally wakes with a start. Like the preceding examples, this film also terminates with the conclusion of the dream.

In contrast to *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend*, which fully immerses the fiend within his own nightmare as an unwitting participant and incredulous witness, these two Méliès films maintain markers of division between the virtual space of the dream and the physical space occupied by the sleeper. The child of *A Grandmother's Story* who steps into his dreamland is dressed differently from the boy in his nightclothes, signaling to viewers that they witness a dream version of this character. The snoozing inventor of *The Inventor Crazybrains* remains a constant presence in the foreground of the image throughout his nightmare. Here the inert body of

FIGURE 20. *A Grandmother's Story* (George Méliès, 1908).
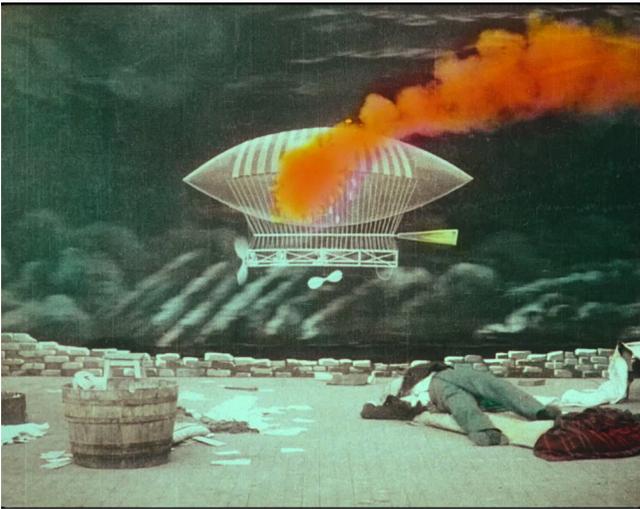
FIGURE 21. *The Inventor Crazybrains and His Wonderful Airship* (George Méliès, 1905).

the sleeper anchors the shift into transformative landscapes, exerting its gravitational pull against nocturnal flights and coding the field of the shot as a projection of the character's internal oneiric visions. The setting of the dream and the contents of the dream merge upon a single plane—not in the inventor's own perception, but for the film viewer only—generating a layered image that is simultaneously objective and subjective. More evocative of *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend* is Méliès's *Hallucinations of Baron Munchausen* (1911), a film that likewise sets up the

action with a scenario of drunken feasting. The baron retires to a bed positioned under an enormous gilt mirror that assumes manifold functions as the film progresses: a screen upon which the baron's dreams are projected, a barrier that he cannot cross despite his efforts, and then a portal through which fiendish figures invade the bedroom and torment him. When the mirror disappears from view, the separation between virtual and physical space likewise dissolves, such that the baron finds himself trapped inside his nightmare. He seems to rouse himself and return to the original setting of the bedroom, but this proves to be a false awakening, yet another oneiric illusion. Pieces from the mise-en-scène, such as mirror and bed, become props in a drama of discontinuous, destabilized reality—a drama wherein the sleeper encounters an antagonist in the form of his dream and struggles to extricate himself from the intricate nets in which it ensnares him. Only after violently ejecting himself from the bedroom altogether does the baron finally succeed in exiting the world of the dream.

Similar scenes of lying down to sleep and false awakenings recur throughout the films of Méliès. A striking number of them refer to dreams and nightmares in their titles: *The Nightmare* (1896); *The Astronomer's Dream* (1898); *The Christmas Dream* (1900); *The Rajah's Dream* (1900); *The Ballet-Master's Dream* (1903); *The Clockmaker's Dream* (1904); *Tunneling the English Channel (or the Franco-Anglo Nightmare)* (1907); and *The Dream of an Opium Fiend* (1908). Moreover, the presentation of sleep as prompt to action can be found even in films that do not take dreams as their main premise, such as *The Life of an American Fireman* (1903). This early example of filmic narration depicts the rescue of a woman and child from a burning house by a group of firefighters. The film begins with an enigmatic overture to the firemen's call to action that also places its sequence of events in a nocturnal time frame. The chief fireman dozes and dreams at his desk. The vision that comes to him in his sleep is projected alongside him in an iris-view superimposition, of a mother tucking in her child for the night; as she extinguishes the bedside light, the image fades to black. But notwithstanding the peaceful mood of this domestic vignette, something in the dream alarms and rouses him. He gets up and exits the frame; the next shot shows a hand in close-up as it sounds a fire alarm. The firemen leap from their beds in reaction to the sound, and the endangered victims to whom they subsequently race to rescue are likewise awakened from their sleep. The fire—the central narrative event that provokes and links together the series of actions—interrupts the sleep of all of these characters, effectively undoing the initial gesture of preparing for nighttime rest shown in the fireman's dream.

The gestures of sleeping and awakening constitute a pattern of repetitions and reversals in a film often noted by early cinema historians for its curiously nonlinear, recursive, and overlapping arrangement of shots. While *The Life of an American Fireman* has yielded important insights into early cinema's modes of representation and (for present-day viewers) unfamiliar sequential logics, the scene with which the film begins has remained somewhat of a puzzle for commentators

FIGURE 22. *The Hallucinations of Baron Munchausen* (George Méliès, 1911).

FIGURE 23. *The Life of an American Fireman* (Edwin S. Porter, 1903).

because of its unclear causal connection to what follows. It has been interpreted in various ways—as the fireman's dream of his own wife and child, or a premonition of danger referring to the woman and child who are saved later in the film.[23] The ambiguity of this composite image generates a narrative puzzle for the viewer; are we witnessing something remembered or something taking place? In its uncertain relation to what follows, it stands apart as an unexplained vision and a cryptic mise en abîme of a dream of sleep.[24]

In this early period, the sleeper emerges as a key recurring figure, and the bed a central topos, for cinema. Together they designate a gateway into a projected space of fictions, fantasies, and other places. Sleep marks the presence of a threshold to be crossed, and this crossing assumes an overdetermined significance as a ritual of departure and return, of beginnings and endings. The operationalization of sleep in this manner involves a set of cues wherein characters settle into bed and close their eyes, indicating an incipient pause in activity and disconnection from the surrounding environment.[25] This withdrawal, moreover, functions as the preparation for and prelude to the passage to another reality that is created by the film. The action pauses in order to resume in another realm. Thus, the scene of sleep functions in a transitive capacity, in the manner of a revolving door—a removal from one space that is also an emergence elsewhere, a retreat that is simultaneously a reentry, a stillness that sets another series of events into motion. In their repetitions and restaging of this scene, early filmmakers anticipate an insight made by Anne Carson, poet of sleep and one of its most astute commentators, who defines it as an exit that is also an entrance.[26] The sleepers of early cinema hover on the cusp of physical and virtual realities, embodying at once the point of departure to an alternate imaginary realm and the point of return to earth. This paradoxical status mirrors the gestures of a medium that holds forth the promise of transport while simultaneously fixing its viewers in place. Scenes like these attest to the aspirations of a young medium to the "motionless voyage" of sleep.[27]

The sleeper in this context embodies a role more than a character, defined by representational function rather than psychological substance. Consequently, their dreams serve primarily as a technique for motivating shifts in perspective and engendering discontinuities in the time-space continuum. The development of cinema's narrational codes in ensuing decades, however, brings about a change in filmmakers' approaches to sleeping and dreaming. As Charles Keil has argued, these actions are gradually dissociated from the amusement of "disparity between the dream world and the waking one."[28] Beginning in the period of narrative integration, as movies adopt more elaborate structures of storytelling, the dream emerges as a key tool for "explaining a character's state of mind and subsequent actions."[29] Reoriented toward the objectives of plot exposition, it increasingly comes to signify as an interior vision conveying psychological content. The significance of the dreams that appear in the American transitional-era films analyzed by Keil resides less in their difference from waking reality than in their power to elucidate that reality, by providing an avenue into a psychological realm of wishes, motives, and desires.[30] In the era of narrative cinema, the dream sequence—self-contained, stylistically distinct, and set apart from diegetic reality—is channelized by the requirements of complex characterization. Thus, the content of the dream as a message about interiority (or what it means) comes to eclipse the action of sleep and the perspectival shift that it performs (what it does).

Keil's analysis demonstrates how the relationship between sleeping and dreaming in the cinema changes through time. The changing historical patterns to which

he refers can also be mapped as competing approaches and divergent effects that endure well beyond the transitional era. The appeal of sleep and dreams as a portal into an alternate world, undercutting "the stolidity of the real," does not vanish entirely but persists in later decades as an alternative to the dominant trajectory he identifies. Returning to the case of *Inception*, for instance, we find evidence of this persistence. The criticism frequently levied against the film—that it drains its dreamscapes of any charge of the unconscious or irrational—speaks precisely to its predominantly topographical approach to dreaming as a mechanism for splintering and branching off lateral realities. In this regard, the film shares more in common with early cinema than with antecedents from later decades—returning to the treatment of the scene of sleep as a revolving door, both exit and entrance, to spin it at a more disorienting speed.

Turning to a more classical example in this vein, in *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), we see again a transition from a prosaic reality to a fantastical imagined world that is signaled by the action of lying in bed and closing one's eyes. Dorothy's transport from her drab Kansas hometown to the Technicolor land of Oz is presented as a journey suddenly precipitated by a blackout. Caught in a tornado, Dorothy is struck on the head by the window in her bedroom as it flies open from the force of the gale outside. She falls down on her bed, and the film cuts to a tight close-up of Dorothy's face in profile as she lies there inert and unconscious. This image begins to rock from side to side, as if buffeted by currents of wind. The feeling of dynamic motion is enhanced by the superimposition of a moving shot of the sky over the close-up, so that clouds seem to stream rapidly across Dorothy's visage. More layers thicken this welter of movement, as the facial close-up blurs and doubles while continuing its rocking rhythm. Just as the shot begins to slip entirely from legibility, a tiny house flies into the frame and spins upward in spiraling circles.

The unstable flux of the image reminds the viewer of the whirlwind raging outside as the shot unfolds, but it remains unclear if this image is to be read as an interior or exterior space. Is Dorothy caught inside the eye of the tornado, or are we the viewers caught inside her head? The profile of Dorothy's face fades out completely, leaving behind the image of roiling clouds in an open sky. The camera begins to track backward, revealing the shot to be the view from the bedroom window; it continues to track until the entire bedroom enters into view, with Dorothy on her bed positioned in the lower left corner. She awakens with a start, looks out the window at the effects of the storm, and realizes that her house is floating in the vortex of the tornado. Finally the winds subside, and the house touches back down; opening the door and stepping outside, she finds herself in the Land of Oz. The movement that takes Dorothy from the one place to the other draws on a set of familiar conventions from early cinema: the journey taken during sleep, visualized as a precipitous flight through the sky on a bed much like that of the central figure of *Dream of a Rarebit Fiend;* the bedroom as the projection site for an illusory world that subsequently engulfs waking reality; and the awakening of the sleeper to a different order of reality.

FIGURE 24. *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939).

FIGURE 25. *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939).

FIGURE 26. *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939).

Salman Rushdie equates the moment when Dorothy collapses into bed with the crossing of a threshold. Now, he writes, "we have passed through the film's most important gateway."[31] Despite the many visual cues that couch her subsequent adventures in Oz within the dramatic conceit of "it was all a dream," it is not quite accurate to describe this passage in terms of a transition from the objective realm of the Kansas farm to the subjective realm of Dorothy's dream. The cause of her loss of consciousness, after all, is a hard blow to the head; the faint that ensues, unlike REM sleep, ought not to give rise to dream visions. This lapse in verisimilitude, nonetheless, introduces additional nuance to the representation of sleep. Beyond participating in a tradition of visualizing the scene of sleep as a place for flights of reverie and the conjuring of elsewheres, *The Wizard of Oz* also brings to light another layer of associations that hover around the figure of the girl in bed. If the iconography of boys in bed is informed by Romanticist notions of childhood as "the special preserve of innocence and imagination," as Kathleen Pyne has pointed out, that of the girl in bed reflects a more ambivalent legacy.[32] For the girl, the innocent peace of slumber is shadowed by the disturbing suggestion of violent injury, as illustrated in the ready slippage between sleep and blackout. Later in the film, Dorothy experiences yet another sleep that is not strictly a sleep. The Wicked Witch of the West, attempting to thwart Dorothy's progress toward the Emerald City, casts a spell on a field of poppies that fills them with a poisonous scent. "Poppies will put them to sleep . . . sleep . . . now they'll sleep," she croons. Evoking the fairy tale of Snow White, who also sleeps under the spell of an evil sorceress, the episode was perhaps devised in response to Walt Disney's popular adaptation of this tale as an animated film two years prior to *The Wizard of Oz*. With this allusion, the film situates its protagonist's sleep on an even broader continuum that encompasses the states of entrancement, intoxication, and magical suspension. A shot of Dorothy passed out among the poppies echoes the image of the insentient Snow White surrounded by flowers as she lies in her glass coffin and awaits the kiss that will break the spell.

In the mythologies of enchanted princesses (like Snow White, but also Little Briar Rose, who also succumbs to a death-like slumber), sleep tells a tale about female sexuality, one replete with heavy-handed metaphors—flowers, kisses, awakening. *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), the landmark film of the American avant-garde by Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid, incorporates these same metaphors in the drama it spins from a woman's sleep. The film begins with a walking woman (played by Deren) who stops to pick up a large flower that has been left on the sidewalk. Continuing her walk, she arrives at her house just as a shadowed figure disappears around the bend of the street. After letting herself in with her key, she conducts a quick inspection of the cottage's rooms—the kitchen, where a knife has been left on the table, and the upstairs bedroom, where a phonograph is still playing—and then settles into an armchair in the living room for a nap. She places the flower, a poppy, such that it nestles in her crotch, and her

FIGURE 27. *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939).

hand drifts across her body in a sensual caress. The shots that follow cut between an extreme close-up framing her left eye and her point of view through the living room window onto the sidewalk: her eyelid flutters closed, the image darkens, and somnolence descends. A robed figure who recalls the disappearing pedestrian from earlier enters the window view, just as the camera rushes backward into a tube, in an involuting movement suggestive of a retreat into the woman's dreaming mind. Then another cut takes us straight into the dream, onto the sidewalk outside the house with the robed figure, who again disappears around the bend just as the woman again arrives as the house. From this point on, the basic series of actions performed by the woman before her nap is repeated, with variations, by her dream-double. Not only does the dream replay reality on a loop, it also folds back over itself in a spiraling logic. The double looks out the window and spies yet another version of herself, and so on. Another dream unfolds from within the dream, and again, until Deren's character has three sets of doubles. When they conspire to murder the sleeping woman, who is also present in the oneiric scene, it becomes manifestly clear that awakening from this dream will be no straightforward matter. In this destabilized zone, an exit might prove to be deceptive.

The intricacy of *Meshes of the Afternoon*'s formal structure is contradicted by the simplicity of its semantic elements, prosaic in their substance and fable-like in their presentation. Pared down and repeated, these elements assume an overdetermined status. Connotative meanings stand out in even starker relief, producing a certain

FIGURE 28. *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid, 1943).

quality of obviousness—of "cumbersome heavy symbolism," in the words of John David Rhodes—that weighs upon the film and strains its reception.[33] While Deren adamantly rejected symbolic readings of her films, such readings have proven difficult to resist and nearly impossible to obviate given the heaviness of the metaphors, such as the poppy with its all too ready-to-hand associations.[34] The sense that this vignette encodes some deeper psychosexual drama, involving erotic and thanatotic urges, is reinforced with the introduction of a second character.[35] A man—played by Hammid, Deren's collaborator and husband at the time—seems to interrupt the oneiric drama. At the moment when the murderous double plunges the knife at the original Maya, her eyes open with a start. A reverse shot shows the man's face in close-up, pulling back from an embrace that has evidently roused her. Just as his kiss awakens the woman, so the man's entrance banishes the errant atmosphere of the dream and brings the restoration of a normal, objective perspective. We seem to have arrived at the expected ending, with the return to the waking world and the kiss that both seals the compact of marriage and signals resolution. But as the couple begins to make love, the perspective fractures yet again and the interrupted gesture of violence is resumed. The falseness of this awakening is revealed in what Rhodes calls a "sudden explosion into full-scale gender warfare."[36] This is followed by a second ending that calls into further question the distinction between dream and reality: the man enters the house to find the woman in the armchair, dead, covered in broken glass and seaweed. At the same time that *Meshes of the Afternoon* returns to the scene of sleep to mine its formal possibilities, it recasts this scene in a gendered framework, calling deliberate attention to the intimations of menace and violence that cluster around the figure of the sleeping woman. Later in this book, I further consider these intimations as they extend into portrayals of drowsy intimacy.

Even while referring to *Meshes of the Afternoon* as an effort to reproduce the forms of subjective experience by cinematic means, Deren resisted the attribution of psychological significance to its thematic contents. Its radical dislocations of time and space must not be recontained or domesticated within a framework of marital psychodrama. To approach *Meshes* in this way would be to apply the methods of dream interpretation, to affect to interpret the dream(s) within the film. For her part, however, Deren singled out for contempt those critics of a Freudian bent. This resistance to an excessive focus on what the dream means simultaneously registers an insistence on what the act of sleep does, its capacity to generate multiple discontinuous realities while holding them together in one place. The urgency invested by Deren in the artistic project of exploring these capacities comes across in her note on the famous sequence in the film that cuts together a series of disparate spaces (beach, field, sidewalk) in the strides of the murderous double toward her victim.

> It was like a crack letting the light of another world gleam through. I kept saying to myself, "The walls of this room are solid except right there. That leads to something. There's a door there leading to something. I've got to get it open because there I can go through to someplace instead of leaving here by the same way that I came in."[37]

Deren's comments on this scene provide an apt description of the film's scenario as a whole. From the moment the woman nods off, reality splinters and a threshold materializes. *Meshes of the Afternoon* revitalizes the disruptive potential that early filmmakers discovered in sleep, attesting to the historical dialogue between avant-garde cinema and early cinema. In her adamant refusal of readings that mine the film's oneiric events for psychological meaning, Deren also rejected the kind of dream interpretation that mainstream narrative films invited their audiences to perform. A paradigmatic example of the latter can be found in the 1945 thriller *Spellbound* (directed by Alfred Hitchcock), containing a surreal dream sequence famously created by Salvador Dalí that encrypts the hidden origin of the puzzling events of the story. At the film's therapeutically framed conclusion, the dream sequence is decoded, the mystery unlocked, and the dreamer freed from the grip of his repressed memories. The dream becomes object-like, a film within the film, as it is recounted, replayed, and intently reanalyzed, becoming independent of the sleep from which it emerges.

Conversely, the shifting functions of these activities can be detected in portrayals of dreamless sleep wherein the sleeper does not take off in transformational flights, remaining stuck and flattened in place. Thus, Elena Gorfinkel locates somnolence within postwar art cinema's archive of bodies arrested in states of weariness, waiting, and idleness. Like these bodies, the sleeper is a figure trapped in the meshes of the body's internal limits along with external socio-historico-economic circumstances that exhaust its capacities. In Apichatpong, to

whom the following chapters return, we find a filmmaker who fluidly navigates between the diverging itineraries of sleeping in the cinema. His work confronts the conditions that give rise to sleep as one more instantiation of the tired body, expressing its "drift, dispossession, and 'enduration,'" to cite Gorfinkel.[38] At the same time, for Apichatpong, sleep is invested with the possibility of a break from these conditions, as a place from which other exits and entrances beckon to undreamed elsewheres.