

THE SPATIALISATION OF DALI'S SURREALISM: WHY CINEMA SUCCEEDS WHERE ARCHITECTURE FAILS



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BARC0134 25-26

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INTRODUCTION

Surrealism is frequently discussed as a literary or pictorial movement, yet far less attention is given to the way in which its fundamental concepts operate spatially. This is conveyed in its current description, “a 20th-century avant-garde movement in art and literature which sought to release the creative potential of the unconscious mind”.¹ It was first conceived in 1924 after the release of the writer André Breton’s *Surrealist Manifesto*. He was primarily interested in attempting to extract the mystery of one’s subconscious. Initially examining literature, he described an extract from the proclaimed author Dostoevski as a “school boy description”, arguing that most forms of successful literature neglect the subconscious and therefore instill boredom.² The repressed mental world of the reader was vital to Breton who argued that from a temporal perspective “the dreams of sleep are not inferior to the sum of the moments of reality”.³ Breton’s ideas were not entirely new at the time and, by his own admission, were heavily aligned and influenced by neurologist Sigmund Freud’s writings on psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, Breton’s surrealist manifesto sparked a large-scale artistic movement prompting the creation of some of the most memorable 20th century pieces of work.

One artist crucial to the development of surrealist ideas was Salvador Dali, who became famous from his paintings, but who also acts as a rare example of a surrealist who attempted to express his philosophies in the realms of both film and architecture. It is in the nuanced differences between how these mediums spatialise surrealism where my interest lies. This essay sets out to underline four fundamental surrealist principles through Dali’s lens: memory, juxtaposition, ambiguity and anxiety. After defining Dali’s personal approach through his paranoiac-critical method, I establish case studies of his work across these mediums such as *The Face of Mae West* (1935), *The Mae West Room* (1974), and *Spellbound* (1945). I use the aforementioned surrealist terms in an attempt to unpack how his paranoiac criticism is inevitably exercised differently between these examples. From there I express how I feel his work is most successful at spatialising surrealism through a cinematic lens and in contrast how it struggles to do this when employed in an architectural context.

¹ Oxford Languages, s.v. “surrealism,” accessed February 17, 2026.

² André Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism” (1924), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane, 12.

³ Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism,” 15

CHAPTER 1 : DEFINING DALI'S PARANOIAC CRITICAL METHOD

The natural place to establish surrealist criteria would be Breton's manifesto. However, when Dali's painted work first came to light within the surrealist movement, there was immediate backlash from an early surrealist's perspective, with Breton himself stating, "There will be insurmountable obstacles to the physical execution of the pictorial work ... But where I could admit to rigour for a poetic essay, it would be impossible in the design of a painted work".⁴ Max Morise (another surrealist closely aligned with Breton's manifesto) also complained about Dali's work, arguing that active memory is required in the process of painting, contradicting the idea of automatism and subconscious creation, concluding that within Dali's paintings, "the image is surrealist, but the expression is not".⁵ This establishes the birth of Dali's paranoiac-critical method, from which he aimed to offer a consistent interpretation of an irrational subject, in his own words attempting to "manifest the images of concrete irrationality in terms of authoritative precision images".⁶ Dali believed that there was a key difference between hallucination and paranoia, the former being a passive state of mind (aligned with Breton's automatism) and the latter being active whilst remaining delusional and removed from reality, and hence, in his opinion, still aligning with the surreal. He argued that "surrealist activity occurs at the moment of perception, not at the level of production", and that his job was to analyse his subconscious mind like a "vulture".⁷ The paranoiac-critical method essentially aims to explore one's subconscious from an expressive distance, using a conscious effort such as painting to define repressed thought and therefore diverging from Breton's automatism. It is the utilisation of a conscious mind to unlock the subconscious which Dali defines as 'paranoia'.

The discovery of this method was arguably much more engaged with Freud's views than Breton's, as art and design scholar Emma Finucane writes, "The dream, as Freud himself put it, is the royal way ... in which the average person demonstrates creative powers of whose existence he has no idea when he is awake ... So thanks to Freud, Dali learned how to set his mind free and in a sense lose control ... when Dali got into this state, it was in a sense controlled and therefore critical".⁸ When Breton recognised the popularity and growing publicity of Dali's paranoiac-critical method he very quickly changed his tune. In 1936 he contradicted his previous thoughts and wrote that the method "has immediately shown itself capable of being applied with equal success to painting, poetry, the cinema, to the construction of typical surrealist objects, to fashions, to sculpture and even if necessary, to all manner of exegesis".⁹ It

⁴ Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism," 43.

⁵ Max Morise, "Les Yeux enchantés," *La Révolution surréaliste* 1 (1924), quoted in Dawn Ades, *Surrealism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974), 94.

⁶ Emma Finucane, *The Paranoiac-Critical Method of Salvador Dalí: Discrediting Reality* (BA thesis, National College of Art and Design, 1997), 7.

⁷ Simon Weir, "Salvador Dalí in Rem Koolhaas' *Delirious New York*," *The Journal of Architecture* 27, nos. 2–3 (2022)

⁸ Finucane, *Paranoiac-Critical Method*, 20.

⁹ Breton, quoted in Weir, "Dalí in *Delirious New York*."

is within this contradiction that I remove Breton's manifesto from my later analysis of Dali's film and architecture, and therefore I am unable to simply argue that: architecture is impossible to create spontaneously and therefore can't be surreal. However, from this reference to Breton it is also very interesting to question why painting, poetry, cinema, fashion and sculpture abide by Dali's paranoiac-critical method but architecture isn't mentioned.

CHAPTER 2 : ESTABLISHING A CRITERIA FOR SUCCESSFUL SURREALISM

The overlap of Freud and Dali's philosophies of the subconscious prompts me to delve deeper into the Freudian relation to the surreal. Finucane writes, "For Dali, meeting Freud was like meeting God".¹⁰ One significant overlap between psychoanalysis and surrealism would be the 'uncanny', a Freudian term used to describe the transformation of something 'heimlich' (homely) into something 'unheimlich' (unhomely). It is from here where the majority of Dali's interest in the surreal stems. It is important to note the architectural association with the word 'homely' and how the collapse of this word yields the 'uncanniness' through which, in Dali's mind, brings light to surrealism. However there are four other terms I find to be frequently responsible for an uncanny and hence surreal effect. It is from these terms that my criteria can be built. The first of which, **memory**, can explicitly be seen through an architectural lens in Poe's description of the *House of Usher*, "While the objects around me . . . were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy—while I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this - I still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up".¹¹ From this description of gothic architecture the effect of the uncanny is born from a journey back in time within the narrator's subconscious. Memories of his infancy give way to the surreal effect of the 'familiar' transforming into the 'unfamiliar' right before his eyes. Therefore memory is essential for surrealism. This idea was initially conceived by philosopher Walter Benjamin and described by art historian Hal Foster as an "aura" resulting from the "return of the repressed"¹² images involving the "perception of a forgotten human dimension".¹³ In other words the subconscious often twists and morphs memory into uncanny and therefore surreal imagery. This idea of the 'auratic experience' was described by some surrealists as "outmoded". Hal Foster expands on this notion in his passage:

"For the outmoded not only recalls the present to the past; it may also return the past to the present, in which case it often assumes a demonic guise... The Freudian uncanny may help us to see why: once repressed, the past, however blessed, cannot return so benignly, so auratically— precisely because it is damaged by repression. The demonic aspect of this recovered past is then the sign of this repression, of this estrangement from the blessed state of unity-whether with a childhood toy or (ultimately) with the maternal body. In surrealism this demonic aspect is often inscribed on the thing (the toy, the body) in the form of distortions."¹⁴

This paragraph focuses on the repression of memory in order to contrast warm nostalgic images such as a "childhood toy" with chilling images of demonic monsters, highlighting the significance of my next term essential for the effective surreal: **juxtaposition**. Breton also finds value in this word by highlighting that mannequins and ruins are surreal images due to their fundamental

¹⁰ Finucane, *Paranoiac-Critical Method*, 7.

¹¹ Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher," quoted in Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 225.

¹² Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 7.

¹³ Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 206.

¹⁴ Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 141.

visual contrast, the prior morphing a human figure with lifeless material and the latter being a man made space embraced by nature. However Dali's paranoiac-critical method far surpasses Breton's imagery with his paintings adding a layer of 'distortion' to this juxtaposition. He blends multiple opposing images into a single seemingly coherent form, eventually contrasting this tangibility with my next term, **ambiguity**. The distortions mentioned in Foster's paragraph and seen in Dali's work can be ignited by juxtaposition but are always met with ambiguity. This is why formal and proportional elements of Dali's work often require interpretation upon viewing. This effect lends itself to the medium of painting and cinema but becomes significantly harder to portray within architecture, something which I explore in more detail later.

Ambiguity in the context of surrealism also has the tendency to induce **anxiety**, the final term I find to be essential to the success of Dali's critical paranoia. Hal Foster writes, "This return of the repressed renders the subject anxious and the phenomenon ambiguous, and this anxious ambiguity produces the primary effects of the uncanny".¹⁵ This suggests that successful surrealist work often generates a disoriented and subsequently anxious response for the viewer. An example of Dali's personal anxious response to his paranoiac-critical method can be seen when he analyses a dream in his autobiography: He recalls catching a fish called the "slobberer" which he squeezes in his hand to prevent from slipping away. The fish's head then emerges from his hand and as he examines it, he "utters a shrill cry of terror and throws the fish far away." He remembers being horrified at the realisation that the face of the 'slobberer' was exactly the same as one of a grasshopper, and later associates this insect with personal anxiety, appearing in paintings such as the *Last Days of Spring* (1929) and *The Great Masturbator* (1929).¹⁶ I believe that Dali's recollection of his dream and how it is later expressed in his work unveils the sheer individuality of critical paranoia. In addition to this, the four terms I believe are key to the success of surrealism all orbit around an extremely personal foundation. What causes anxiety and memory is entirely dependent on one's prior experiences in the conscious (trauma) or unconscious (dreams) realm e.g. Dali's grasshopper. Juxtaposition is also inherently subjective, with personal experience leading to distinctive associations between two things. Leaving us with ambiguity which requires individual interpretation to complete the surrealist effect. Hence Dali's paranoiac-critical method was simply an attempt to record his personal subconscious. His ambition was mostly to understand his own surreality, and as a result of sharing his hidden mind he hoped to make people more aware of their own. Therefore I want to analyse Dali's work through two critical lenses: Firstly its success in relation to the uncanny: regarding attention to memory, juxtaposition, ambiguity and anxiety and secondly how successful it is at both addressing and affecting the individual subconscious from a paranoiac-critical perspective.

¹⁵ Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 7.

¹⁶ Finucane, *Paranoiac-Critical Method*, 20.

CHAPTER 3 : WHEN PAINTING BECOMES A CONTROLLED PARANOID SPACE

At this point I want to explore how the nature of viewing paintings benefits Dali's paranoid-critical method. Due to their two dimensions, painted spaces are unable to be resolved by movement and can't be materially tested. Therefore subconscious interpretation is essential from the moment you see the image and ambiguity becomes foundational in the viewing process. Even outside of surrealism, painted art always attempts to mimic material honesty and in turn trick the eye. Therefore in processing a painted image the human mind has no choice but to accept a level of deception. It is within this deception where ambiguity can be exploited and Dali achieves this with his frequent use of a fixed perspective. Neuroscientist Susana Martinez Conde summarises my point, "On a flat canvas, there is no actual foreground or background: a flat picture involving perspective is a type of illusion... we experience the third dimension always as a mental construct".¹⁷ I believe this 'mental construct' is itself subconscious and therefore surreal.

Dali himself admits taking full advantage of this when he writes about "pictorial means of expression" in the *Conquest of the Irrational*, "The illusionism of the most... irresistible mimetic art, the clever tricks of paralyzing foreshortening... can become sublime hierarchies of thought when combined with new exactness of concrete irrationality as the images of concrete irrationality approach the phenomenal real".¹⁸ Here he describes painted illusions, mimicking and foreshortening as essential to achieve a 'concrete' depiction of 'irrationality'. He goes on to compare his own work to that of "great realist painters" pointing out that Velazquez and Vermeer also exploit painted architecture in order to achieve complex ambiguous imagery. The only difference is that these artists use realism to conceal paradoxical spaces whilst Dali juxtaposes realism with distortions to expose irrationality. Velazquez's *Las Meninas* (1656) (Fig. 1) is a great example of irrationality coated in realism entirely reliant on two dimensions to maintain its paradoxical effect, in turn addressing the viewer as both the observed and observer of the scene.

Painting as a medium also becomes surreal as the illusions of depth and material variety juxtapose its flat surface and consistent texturing. Dali elevates this contrast via the creation of 'double images'. In these cases juxtaposition becomes the subject, ambiguity is necessary and anxiety persists as the viewer becomes trapped in interpretation. An example of where this is particularly successful is his *Face of Mae West* (1935) (Fig. 2) where he utilises a fixed perspective to give the viewer a choice between spatialising or flattening the image. He restricts paranoia to two dominant readings, maintaining powerful juxtapositions between facial morphology and interior furniture without over complicating distortion.

¹⁷ Susana Martínez-Conde et al., "Marvels of Illusion: Illusion and Perception in the Art of Salvador Dalí," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 9 (2015).

¹⁸ Salvador Dalí, *The Conquest of the Irrational* (New York: Julien Levy, 1935), quoted in Emma Finucane, *The Paranoid-Critical Method of Salvador Dalí: Discrediting Reality* (BA thesis, National College of Art and Design, 1997), 9.



Fig. 1. Diego Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, 1656, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. (left)

Fig. 2. *Face of Mae West*, 1935, gouache on paperboard, Art Institute of Chicago. (right)

He takes this further with his *Endless Enigma* (1938) (Fig. 3 & 4) which merges a woman mending a ship's sail, a reclining philosopher, a greyhound, a fruit dish, a mythological beast and the face of a one eyed moron to produce mountainous, oceanic dreamscapes. He employs endless painted tricks of foreshortening and "pronounced anatomical distortions"¹⁹ with this approach requiring, "the extensive use of the well-known optical phenomenon of figure-ground reversal" to sell the illusion as the "concrete irrational".²⁰ The forced perspective means that the surreal space becomes unbreakable. It can be argued however that the success of this image is drawn from an individual distracted by an overload of distortion, taking away from the dreamscape's immersive qualities (from which *Las Meninas*'s success is warranted). This limitation is particularly apparent in his *Sleeping Woman, Horse, Lion* (1930) (Fig. 5) where Finucane argues that the excessive pressure placed on the seamlessness of his distortions forces a reading of the image and in turn undermines ambiguity. The distorted forms inflict cognitive strain rather than curious interpretation. She claims that it is at this point where Dalí "strays from the demands of his theory".²¹ Dalí's difficulty producing this specific double image is reflected in the number of times he attempted it, continuously making sketches and revisions of the same subject. Here the flat canvas becomes limiting in the quest for the 'concrete irrational', and may explain Dalí's shift to the medium of cinema at the time of making this painting.

¹⁹ Finucane, *Paranoiac-Critical Method*, 74.

²⁰ Finucane, *Paranoiac-Critical Method*, 76.

²¹ Finucane, *Paranoiac-Critical Method*, 74.

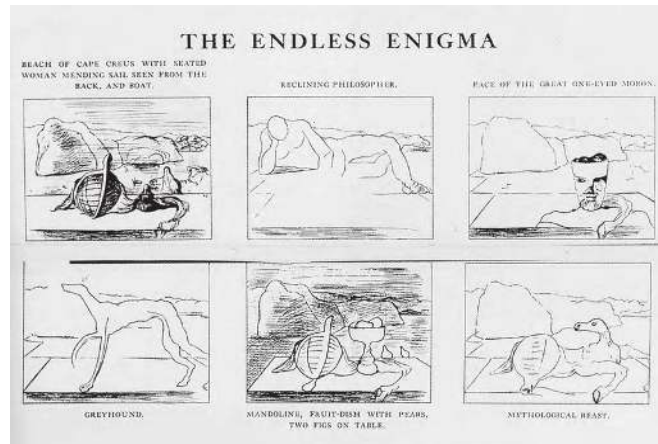


Fig 3. Salvador Dali, Sketches of 'The Endless Enigma', 1930, printed illustration.



Fig. 4. Salvador Dalí, *The Endless Enigma*, 1938, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid.



Fig. 5. Salvador Dalí, *Sleeping Woman, Horse, Lion*, 1930, oil on canvas.

CHAPTER 4 : THE COLLAPSE OF A CONTROLLED GAZE WITHIN THE BUILT WORLD

In 1974 Dali partnered with architect Òscar Tusquets to convert his successful painting, the *Face of Mae West* (1935) into an inhabitable interior. His goal was to blur the lines between facial features and an apartment space. This specific space was clearly constructed with exhibitional intent so therefore one could argue that this work is purely artistic rather than architectural and should instead be considered sculptural. However, personally I believe this space emerges from Dali's intense curiosity about the built environment, serving as his way of working within the medium of architecture as it plays a key part of his larger museum project. As architectural theorist Robin Evans notes, "architects labour...always working at it through some intervening medium," a condition that becomes apparent in the *Mae West Room* (1974) (Fig. 6 & 7), as just like an architect Dali uses both drawings and his own painted image, *Face of Mae West*, to dictate the construction of a tangible space.²² Unlike a sculpture he designs this work to be both viewed and inhabited. Guests are encouraged to find a correct perspective in order to resolve the room, however this doesn't take away from the fact that a guest must first enter, orient themselves and move through an orchestrated composition of structure in order to grasp what the interior is trying to achieve. For me this work shifts into the realm of architecture as soon as it demands physical occupation and spatial decisions to be made by those who surround it.

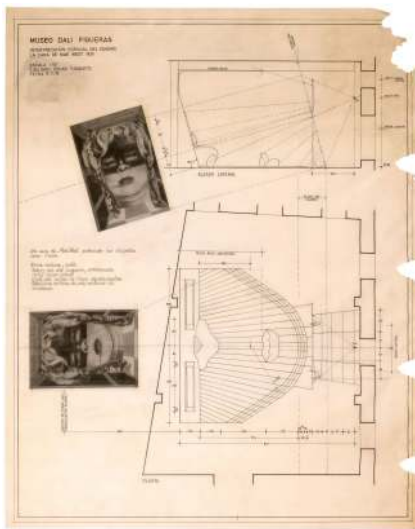


Fig. 6. Salvador Dalí, plan and elevation drawings for the Mae West Room. (left)

Fig. 7. Salvador Dalí, *Mae West Room*, 1974, installation view 1, Teatro-Museo Dalí, Figueres. (right)

²² Robin Evans, "Translations from Drawing to Building," in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays* (London: Architectural Association, 1997), 156.

The *Mae West Room* seems to work seamlessly when photographed from a frontal perspective. The curled blond hair sweeps along the entrance and rounds the room's edges, doubling as elaborate curtains. The red lips are just as enticing as in the painting work, inviting the mind into the space by simultaneously functioning as a sofa. The curved wooden steps generate harsh ringed shadows to help define Mae West's jawline. From this front-on perspective, watching people rest on Mae West's lips, gaze at her framed eyelids and walk over her curved jaw also elevates the painting's surrealist effects by breaking through the dimension of time. However it is through the architectural medium's extensive immersion where Dali loses control. It only takes a few steps away from this frontal perspective to spoil the room's magic (Fig. 8). The stairs begin to feel impractical, the hair becomes detached, the walls lack structure and the sofa looks isolated. Even when entering the room everything loses cohesion, function disappears and aesthetic falters.



Fig. 8. Salvador Dalí, *Mae West Room*, 1974, installation view 2, Teatro-Museo Dalí, Figueres.

Dali's excellent artistic enticement within this inhabitable space ignites one's subconscious desire to move. I believe the ability to exercise this urge to explore is what causes the space to break down. Freud writes, "The better oriented in his environment a person is, the less readily will he get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it".²³ I believe Dali's inability to contain the viewer through the architectural medium grants them the capacity to find orientation and therefore undermine his surrealism. Unlike in his paintings Dali can no longer trap viewers in perspective and hence spatial anxiety is unable to persist. This lack of control also allows for material revelation, diminishing the effectiveness of his double images. Dali can no longer blend materials with paint and the viewer's ability to inspect furniture strips down formal interpretation. As you walk up through the entrance of the room the

²³ Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," quoted in Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 225.

ambiguity between the wooden steps and wrinkled skin dissolves. Visual theorist Norman Bryson writes that, “images manage to minimise or to conceal their independent material existence; environments expose it”.²⁴ I believe this is exactly why the *Mae West Room* is an example of photogenic architecture, functioning well as an exhibitional space but failing to accommodate moving bodies.

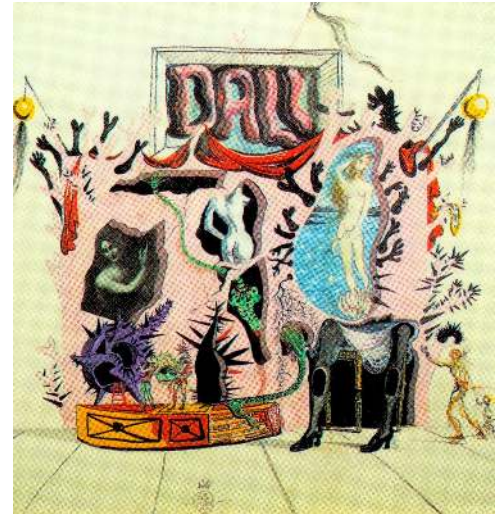


Fig. 9. Salvador Dalí, *Dream of Venus* pavilion, New York World's Fair, 1939, installation view.

Fig. 10. Salvador Dalí, design rendering for *Dream of Venus*, 1939, gouache and ink on paper.

Dali produced many architectural drawings to help with the construction of the *Mae West Room* (1974), and if an interior project isn't enough to merit an architectural critique he also made a series of paintings for his exterior facade of the *Dream of Venus Pavilion* (1939) (Fig. 9 & 10). I believe that in both cases the two dimensional illustrations of his vision hold much more success from a spatial surrealist perspective than his final architectural result, with architect Rem Koolhaas writing that, “Dali risks going from the sublime to the ridiculous” in regards to the 1939 project.²⁵ This makes me question whether the translation between mediums itself is to be blamed for limiting Dali's architectural effectiveness. Robin Evans draws attention to this:

“architects labour, never working directly with the object of their thought, always working at it through some intervening medium, almost always the drawing, while painters and sculptors, who might spend some time on preliminary sketches and maquettes, all ended up working on the thing itself which, naturally, absorbed most of their attention and effort... The sketch and maquette are much closer to painting and sculpture than a drawing is to a building, and the process of development”.²⁶

²⁴ Norman Bryson, *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 11.

²⁵ Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1994), 97.

²⁶ Evans, “Translations from Drawing to Building,” 156.

This extract forces us to speculate whether the architectural medium's sheer practical distance from a creator's first conceived thought becomes the limiting factor (in these examples) of Dali's spatialised surrealism. Unlike painting, sculpture and film, the process of building removes the artist's physical input from the final outcome. As a result, the observed paranoia is less immediately transferable and the sharpness of its image is lost in the translation process. Evans emphasises this point, "Not all things architectural can be arrived at through drawing. There must also be a penumbra of qualities that might only be seen darkly and with great difficulty through it."²⁷ This explains Dali's struggles with the built environment, as the strings of his subconscious can no longer be directly attached to the outcome of his imagery, therefore control over his paranoia is lost and hence his surrealism loses focus. As shown with the *Mae West Room* (1974), the camera becomes the solution to Dali's lost spatial focus. Ironically this brings us full circle, as photography experiences the same spatial limitations as painting. Therefore it is no surprise that Dali found great interest in cinema which allows motion through fixed perspective. Art historian Juan Antonio Ramirez highlights this filmic potential for surrealism, "In the case of movies... it would be difficult to find another instance in the history of architecture in which the different orders of fiction and reality have been so thoroughly enmeshed in such complex and fascinating ways".²⁸

²⁷ Evans, "Translations from Drawing to Building," 165.

²⁸ Juan Antonio Ramírez, *Architecture for the Screen: A Critical Study of Set Design in Hollywood's Golden Age* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), 156

CHAPTER 5 : ORCHESTRATING CINEMATIC MEMORY TO SPATIALISE SURREALISM

Dali's exploration in the cinematic universe was a quest for control. He wanted to be able to move through his paranoia and move past the constraints of the canvas whilst having the same level of authority as an artist does when painting. In 1920 the meticulous production designer Joseph Urban stated, "I want to make pictures that are moving compositions in the same sense that a great painting is an immobile composition. At any point in a photo-play, a photographic 'still' should reveal people and scenery in perfect artistic coordination".²⁹ Given the application of painted logic in production design, along with Dali's struggles with the openness of architecture and his limitations with the fixed nature of a canvas, it is no coincidence that he experimented with cinema in an attempt to concretely illustrate his paranoia. Dali's curiosity would also have been heightened once it became apparent that Velazquez's painted paradox of shifting the observer to the observed is an innate quality of a cinematic environment. Architectural philosopher Roland Barthes points this out, "Before a camera... I am neither subject nor object, but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a spectre".³⁰ In this case the magic of film is its ability to break the dimension of time and allow those watching to temporarily replace their personal reality with a sequence of imagery. This 'micro death' is another way of describing a surrender to an alternate reality. The 'death' is experienced by all who expose themselves to a certain film and therefore the personal, uncontrolled interpretation of the surreal now becomes a shared lived experience. In other words, through the medium of film Dali is now able to build a singular perspective not from a viewpoint like in his paintings, but from projecting a series of events through shared time and subsequently mutual memory.

Within the cinematic environment's ability to generate shared memory also comes the potential to control audience interpretation and hence anxiety. For this reason and in accordance with my criteria, adding a new dimension to the surreal presents endless opportunities for effective world building, but also greatly increases the difficulty in doing so. An essay by Percival Reiners brings to light the struggles to generate a successful cinematic world, "expression of emotion, must always be, in Mr. Urban's mind, complemented by scenery. To do this, the mind of the artist must grasp not only the dramatic struggle of one character but that shared by all the characters, and he must express not only architectural verisimilitude but also atmosphere and mood."³¹ To achieve such effects would require, as Ramirez puts it, a "super director". Given Dali's expressional expertise being largely in a two dimensional world, and his prior failure (by his own admission) to control built spaces such as *The Dream of Venus* (1939), the ability to move through his paranoia would most certainly require the collaboration of one of these so called

²⁹ Joseph Urban, quoted in Juan Antonio Ramírez, *Architecture for the Screen: A Critical Study of Set Design in Hollywood's Golden Age* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), 69.

³⁰ Roland Barthes, quoted in Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 206

³¹ Joseph Urban, quoted in Juan Antonio Ramírez, *Architecture for the Screen: A Critical Study of Set Design in Hollywood's Golden Age* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), 71.

'super directors'. Luckily for him, this opportunity arose in 1944 when presented with the Freudian thriller *Spellbound* with legendary director Alfred Hitchcock at the helm.

Hitchcock was a master of control and manipulating perception using techniques such as the Kuleshov Effect to allow specific emotions to be generated regardless of genre or backdrop. The Freudian subject matter along with Hitchcock's control provided Dali with the perfect opportunity to break down the barrier between paranoia and reality. Dali was tasked with the production design for a dream sequence (Fig. 11 & 12) triggered by the psychoanalysis of John Ballantyne's mind (the main character) in order to search for a lost memory. At this point in the film, the stakes have risen and the recollection of this lost memory is of paramount importance. The character's desire to recall certain events is only matched by that of the audience. Therefore when the dream sequence is sparked viewers are not only removed from their personal realities but also from the character's. As a result Dali is forced to shift his paranoiac-critical method from his own mind into that of John Ballantyne's, by extension treating the audience as one with the character and gaining the opportunity to mould a shared surreality for all concerned with the film.

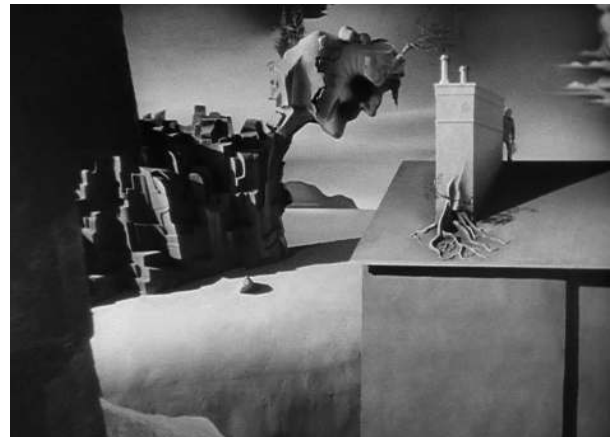


Fig. 11 & 12. Salvador Dalí and Alfred Hitchcock, dream sequence set, *Spellbound*, 1945, film stills.

In the dream sequence itself, Dalí's elaborate, symbolic design of disembodied eyes, disproportional architectural planes and demonic figures contrast wonderfully with Hitchcock's controlled, precise camera movements and rhythmic editing. This juxtaposition alone is an indicator of successful surrealism at work. The sequence is simultaneously intimate and alien to the character and hence the audience, with Dalí's design being careful to detail the seeds of familiarity (established earlier in the film) from which the irrational paranoiac imagery can spawn. Dalí's expansion from these seeds allows the sequence to become uncanny not because it abandons reality altogether, but because Hitchcock's controlled cinematic perspective grounds the Dalinian ambiguous environments with coherent logic that mirrors the structure of the character's subconscious (eventually revealed at the end of the film). Therefore throughout the sequence there is always an element of the 'heimlich' amongst the 'unheimlich', and hence a consistent level of uncanniness and unwavering anxiety.

A large reason for this effectiveness can be attributed to a cinematic technique called Matte Painting, which allowed Dali's designs to be painted over or in front of the camera lens (Fig. 13 & 14). The technique can be compared to the architectural practice of trompe l'oeuil, which aims to display hyper realistic imagery onto flat 2 dimensional surfaces in order to create the illusion of depth. Both practices are attempting to achieve the same effect (adding illusive depth) using similar methods (painting on flat surfaces). However in the realm of cinema, the viewer is stripped from his option to change perspective. Instead they remain seated whilst the illusion is ingrained on the screen in front of them. Within a cinema, everyone experiences the same film but not necessarily the same architecture. A film is able to control the gaze where architecture can't. Therefore Dali's matte paintings in *Spellbound* are unable to be broken down by movement, resulting in a less physically engaging but more believable spatial experience. Visual effects historian Réjane Hamus-Vallée writes, "When the eye is constantly deceived, the brain realizes that it is confronted with an object and not a trompe-l'œil painting. Consequently, spectators can neither revel in the artist's virtuosity, nor question the meandering of their own perception (because no disillusion follows the illusion)".³² When watching Dali's dream sequence the viewer is unable to understand the 'disillusion' by walking through and around a painted surface and therefore the curiosity of uncovering this optical phenomenon is greatly diminished. The audience is subsequently left with no choice but to accept the reality presented to them and as a result become even more immersed within this fictional world. Consequently, through the medium of cinema Dali gains complete control of the audience's minds. He utilises their memories of Ballantyne's experiences to bypass individually nuanced interpretations of the surreal. On top of this he complements Hitchcock's cinematic emotional control to elevate juxtaposition, ambiguity and anxiety. From the perspective of my criteria and Dali's paranoiac-critical method it becomes almost impossible to flaw *Spellbound's* dream sequence.



Fig. 13 & 14. Salvador Dalí, matte painting designs for Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, 1945, production photographs.

³² Réjane Hamus-Vallée, "Matte Painting or the Quest for the Perfect Illusion," *Hybrid 2* (2015)

CHAPTER 6 : THE SURREALIST NATURE OF PRODUCTION DESIGN

Dali's *Spellbound* success can be attributed to the way in which production design in the early 1920s began to prioritise psychological effect over spatial coherence. The notion of the 'painter architect' first articulated by Leon Battista Alberti in the fifteenth century offers a useful framework here. This theory proposes that architects trained as painters approached space differently, composing structures with an awareness of pictorial framing rather than purely functional inhabitation. This idea can be extended to the world of production design as the birth of special effects in the 1920s resulting in an influx of painters competing with architects for roles in filmmaking. This prompted a contrast in approach to set design which was conveyed by the early art director William Menzies, "The painter composes the picture as the camera will see it, but the architect designs a building which can be photographed".³³ Painters like Dali are taught to prioritise a single viewpoint, designing their sets to follow the camera. Contrarily architects, purely concerned with the inhabitation of space, desire for the camera to orbit their sets. Ironically the painter's attention to each camera frame proved to be more successful within the industry, *Spellbound* being an example of this.



Fig. 15. Tod Browning, surrealist set from *The Devil Doll*, 1936, film still.

Sets could now be less spatially and financially taxing, stepping away from the strict confines of traditional architectural proportions and unveiling surrealist potential in the design of cinematic spaces. Subsequently the industry explored the unnatural scaling of sets such as in *The Devil Doll* (1936) (Fig. 15) in order to realistically portray fantastical characters. This is taken a step further when sets, like in *Spellbound* (1945), begin to explore subtle spatial deformities, utilising unorthodox shapes, hard angles, slanted windows and asymmetrical furniture all to induce a more potent emotional response for the audience. In 1942 just prior to Dali's work on *Spellbound*, architect Pierre Koenig stated two advantages of sets that employ elements of structural distortion, "1. It eliminates the possibility of any straight elevation shots which might

³³ Menzies, quoted in Ramírez, *Architecture for the Screen*, 160.

prove uninteresting; 2. It automatically denies that settings for the movies are designed in a naturalistic style".³⁴ This communicates the importance of surrealist forms within set design, demonstrating how incomplete and impossible architectural works can become seemingly inhabitable, grounded and emotionally elevated just by the presence of a camera (Fig. 16). This juxtaposition and distortion is what paves the way for the successful spatialisation of the paranoiac-critical method within cinema, and it is no surprise that Dali described filmmakers such as "The Marx Brothers, Cecil B. DeMille and Walt Disney" as great American surrealists.³⁵



Fig. 16. Example of a 1920s set with surrealist proportional qualities, reproduced in Juan Antonio Ramírez, *Architecture for the Screen*, 2004.

³⁴ Koenig, quoted in Ramírez, *Architecture for the Screen*, 162.

³⁵ Ramírez, *Architecture for the Screen*, 168.

CONCLUSION

From my research and analysis of Dali's surrealism across mediums it has become very clear that his work is far from an aesthetic language but more so a quest for perceptual control and understanding. Painting succeeds as it immobilizes the viewer through fixed perspective and cinema expands on this by guiding fixed images through time. However in regards to architecture and tangible spaces it becomes significantly harder to sustain this perceptual authority. Once a body is encouraged to move freely through a space, orientation replaces ambiguity and materiality undermines the double image. The *Mae West Room* (1974) demonstrates that an attempt to create a surrealist interior succeeds as an image, set or even in the context of an exhibition, but its paranoiac logic disintegrates at the moment of inhabitation. For Dali cinema acts as the solution for this as psychological inhabitation is now able to maintain a fixed gaze. It allows Dali to construct a form of temporal architecture where perspective remains controlled even as space unfolds. I have discovered that Dali can only prompt ambiguity, generate memory, emphasise juxtaposition and hence induce anxiety through the precise prediction of one's gaze. Within an architectural body the direction of one's vision cannot be assumed, individuality begins to dominate and surrealist interpretation becomes extremely nuanced. The critique and analysis of one's paranoia can no longer be anticipated as their curiosity and interest darts in all directions. Therefore unlike in Dali's cinematic worlds, within his inhabited spaces the exploration of one's paranoia can no longer be explicitly ignited and therefore a surrealist response cannot be guaranteed.

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