

Was it Diegetic, or Just a Dream? Music's Paradoxical Place in the Film Inception

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This file includes the abstract, and extensive keyword list, acknowledgements, and bibliography for the video essay, “Was it Diegetic, or Just a Dream? Music's Paradoxical Place in the Film Inception” by Christopher Doll, *SMT-V 4.1* (2018). This essay may be found at <https://vimeo.com/societymusictheory/videocast4-1doll>.

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Abstract for “Was it Diegetic, or Just a Dream? Music’s Paradoxical Place in the Film Inception” by Christopher Doll, *SMT-V* 4.1

Between “diegetic” film music (heard by the characters) and "nondiegetic" film music (heard only by the audience) is a paradoxical space called the "fantastical gap." A film such as *Inception* (2010) makes traversal of this gap into an overt theme, obscuring our sense of place to such a degree that even the literal plot of the movie is open to interpretation, and thus also illustrating the extent to which filmmakers can manipulate an audience's understanding of the filmic world through the blurring of the diegetic/nondiegetic divide.

Extensive Keyword List

Film music, diegetic, nondiegetic, Music that emanates from within the world of the film, “diegesis,” external to the characters’ world, navigate between, broad, hazy border, “fantastical gap,” paradoxical place where seemingly anything is possible, intricate science-fiction fairytale, multiple levels of shared, lucid dreaming, Édith Piaf, “Non, je ne regrette rien,” old French song, timed signal for the characters to awake, temporal experience slows down, distinguish dream from reality distinguish dream from reality, sounds slower when dream-distorted, hulking 3/4 pattern, massive brass ensemble, Hans Zimmer, low-brass punctuations, Hollywood tradition, nondiegetic space, diegetic/nondiegetic distinction, repeating-note motive, one-measure and two-measure 4/4 settings of the brass motive, helter-skelter, erratically driven automobile, dream-level above, astounding shift in gravity, deep, overtone-rich A, protracted outbursts, film music, movie music, bottommost rung of dreaming, limbo, two simultaneous layers of music, nondiegetic walking string melody, normal 12/8 diegetic song, complex auditory layering, single musical idea by itself can be mystifying, Warner Brothers, slowed-down, 3/4, dream-distorted song, prominent metric alteration of the main brass motive, character bobbing his head in sync with the music, cross-rhythm in 4/4, character Arthur, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, nodding in rhythm, /4 pattern, impossible mix of at-pitch and lowered-pitch, distorted 3/4 song, stylized diegetic cue, fantastical gap between diegetic and nondiegetic, combination of duple and triple meters, multi-spatial music and multi-spatial story, impossible, looping flight of stairs, paradoxical architecture, Zimmer’s score and Christopher Nolan’s film, traversal of the fantastical gap is absolutely integral, diegetic/nondiegetic distinction, Robin Stilwell, synthesizer, headphones, musical map of stair scene.

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