Animation Design, Degree Project — Stage 2

"Dream: *Perfect*"
a short animation film
on dreams as narratives.

Project Report

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Approval Sheet

The animation design project three titled "Dream: perfect" by Palash Vaswani is approved in partial fulfilment of the requirement for M.Des Degree in Animation design (2007-2009)

Project Guide   ....

Chair-person   ....

Internal Examiner   ....

External Examiner   ....

Mirror-pond of stars...
Suddenly a summer
Shower
Dimples the water
        -Sora

Acknowledgement

First and foremost I would like to thank my project guide, **Prof. Nina Sabnani** for her valuable guidance and support throughout the project. Her encouragement and motivation contributed tremendously to my project. She gave me freedom to explore my subject and for that I thank her profusely.

I also like to thank **Prof. Sumant Rao** without whose help and suggestions this project would not have been possible.

A special mention goes to my friends Varun, Taruja, Girish, Soumya, Juny, Sameer, Dhuri, Karthik, Milind, Ratika, Hemanth, Kavita, Prajwal, Sachin, Vaibhav, Kunal and all others for their support, motivation and constant feedback throughout the project. Finally I am greatly indebted to my parents and my sister for always being there for me.

Contents

"Tonight I will show you how dreams are prepared. People think that it's a very simple and easy process, but it's a bit complicated than that. As you can see, a very delicate combination of the ingredients is the key. First we put in some random thoughts, then we add little bit of reminiscences of the day, mix it with some memories of the past, love, friendships, relationships and all those ships, together with the songs u heard in the day and the things you saw."

– From the film "The science of sleep (2006)" by Michel Gondry

INTRODUCTION

There was a group of close friends. Life was mostly fun for them. But sometimes a phase comes in everyone's life when things start changing. The happy go lucky group was no more the same. They were in troubled times. Happiness and sorrow became frequent. No one actually knew whether they were happy or sad. They wanted to know that what they wanted from life. Soon, they had a dream.

A dream where the world was made of stars. Shining, glittering diamond like stars. They were scattered everywhere. The whole scene looked like a fantasy. In the midst of the diamond jungle there were special stars. In each one of them, sat a group member. Sitting in the stars, they were smiling at each other and saying "Everything is fine, everything is alright". I was surprised by the fact that the imagination of our unconscious mind can be so meaningful that it can totally change the way we look at things. I knew that I had to explore dreams as the story line for my project.

When we sleep, we leave aside our worries and tensions and we travel deep into the wonderland; a wonderland which is created by our tiny little brain. Here we meet our thoughts, travelling free and unrestricted from the worldly ties. We see our memories, our friends, our loved ones, people we know and we fall in love with the wonderland that the brain has created.

Whatever our 5 senses absorb on a daily basis, gets stored somewhere. It stays in our minds and comes in our dreams. It might look different altogether but we know what it means to us.

I have chosen my topic dreams, as narratives, because I want to explore dreams in my film. I think they are an integral part of us, and are very important to us . Most importantly, they are closely related to reality.
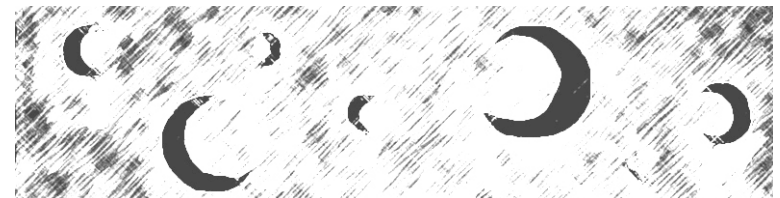
Synopsis

A Time comes in our lives when we find ourselves stuck in the hardest situations and it becomes a painful experience for us. We try our best to find a way out. Some people look for the real answers and some people find an escape in their dreams. They create their own fantasy land where everything they've ever wished for comes true. Reality might break them apart but dreaming keeps them alive. Or they are not yet ready to accept the reality. Many of us are like this and we want to dream about the perfect life that we want; and for it we dream; we dream the reality we dream our conflicts; we dream our memories and we dream for what we wish for. We don't even think of what might happen if our dream breaks? After all dreams are made of the ingredients of what we wish for and what we fear.

My short film "dream: perfect" is a story of a guy who lives in his dreams. He is in love with a girl he can never be with and is unable to bear the pain. Somewhere in his mind he has created the perfect world where he has everything he wants in life. He knows that it can never happen in reality so he dreams about the perfect life he wants with the partner; friend he has loved most in his life.

Dreams

DREAMING is defined as the subjective experience of imaginary images, sounds/voices, thoughts or sensations during sleep. Dreams represent a world of imagery in which our darkest fears, deepest secrets, and most passionate fantasies break out from the unconscious mind and only at this time become present to our own consciousness. There are several key questions that need to be addressed; for instance, "Why do we dream? What do dreams mean? And, where do dreams come from?" The answers to these questions are not that simple; however, recent studies and research has come a long way into divulging the human psyche and what dreams really are.

Dreaming usually occurs in the R.E.M. stage (rapid-eye movement) of sleep, in which brain activity is high and signaled by rapid horizontal movements of the eyes. Sometimes dreams occur during the other stages of sleep; however, these are much less memorable and less clear. They can sometimes last for a few seconds, or as long as twenty minutes. Dreams are a symbol and link to the inner core of the human subconscious. They can vary from normal and mundane, to surreal and bizarre. Dreams can often times drive creative thought, or provoke a sense of inspiration. Scientists believe everybody dreams, but sometimes we forget. We tend to forget when we naturally pass out of sleep through the traditional cycle. If a person is awoken directly from REM sleep (i.e. by an alarm clock), they are much more likely remember the dream from that REM cycle. Although it's most likely that not all dreams will be remembered because they occur in REM cycles, which are interrupted by periods of "delta sleep" which in turn have a tendency to cause the memory of previous dreams to fade.

Psychologists have also concluded that our daily activities while we are awake can have an effect on our dreams. However, scientists are unsure as to what degree of an impact this makes, it is nonetheless substantial enough. It is also possible to intentionally direct dream content; this is called lucid dreaming, because the person is aware of dreaming while the actual dream occurs.

Facts about dreams

Dreams are fascinating experiences. Man has wondered for centuries about dreams and what dreams mean. There has also been much research into dreaming –when it occurs, why we dream what we do, etc. Here are a few facts about dreams:

1.Researchers have discovered that each of us have at least four or five dreams a night.

2. People who have been blind all their lives still dream. But, their dreams are formed based on their four other senses (touch, smell, taste, and sound).

3. One of the earliest forms of dream analysis was performed by the Romans. Dreams were often submitted to the Roman Senate for interpretation. The Romans thought their dreams were messages from the gods.

4. The average dream lasts between 10 and 15 minutes.

5. If you awake right after REM sleep, you may be able to recall your dream more vividly than someone who has slept through to the morning.

6. You cannot be dreaming if you are snoring.

7. The five most common dreams are that of falling, being chased, our teeth falling out, being back in school, and your spouse cheating on you.

8. A 1980 study showed that 42% of people felt they had had a dream about something that later came true.

9. Dreaming is necessary. If people are prevented from dreaming, they can suffer from personality disorders and psychological problems.

10. Humans are not the only ones who dream. Many animals dream and scientists believe that all mammals dream.

11. Studies have shown that as many as 70% of all females and 65% of all males have had reoccurring dreams.

Source: www.analysedreams.co.uk/FactsAboutDreams.html

APPROACH TO CONTENT

**I chose** to make a film on dreams because I was always fascinated by the fantasy world we create in our minds. I wanted to tell the story of a guy who lives in his dreams and was confused for the narrative structure of the story. How do I frame it? So to explore the styles of narration and psychology behind dreams I watched films, read some books and articles and did a brief study on the artists who worked on the theme of dreams.

Watching Films

Being John Malkovich
Director: Spike Jonze

A puppeteer discovers a hidden doorway in his office, which turns out to be a portal into John Malkovitch (the famous actor)'s mind. Upon entering the portal, one gets to be inside Malkovitch's mind for 15 odd minutes. "Being John Malkovich" is one of the strangest movies that I have ever seen. It raises the question that, are we actually who we are or we are just mere puppets of someone else's thoughts.
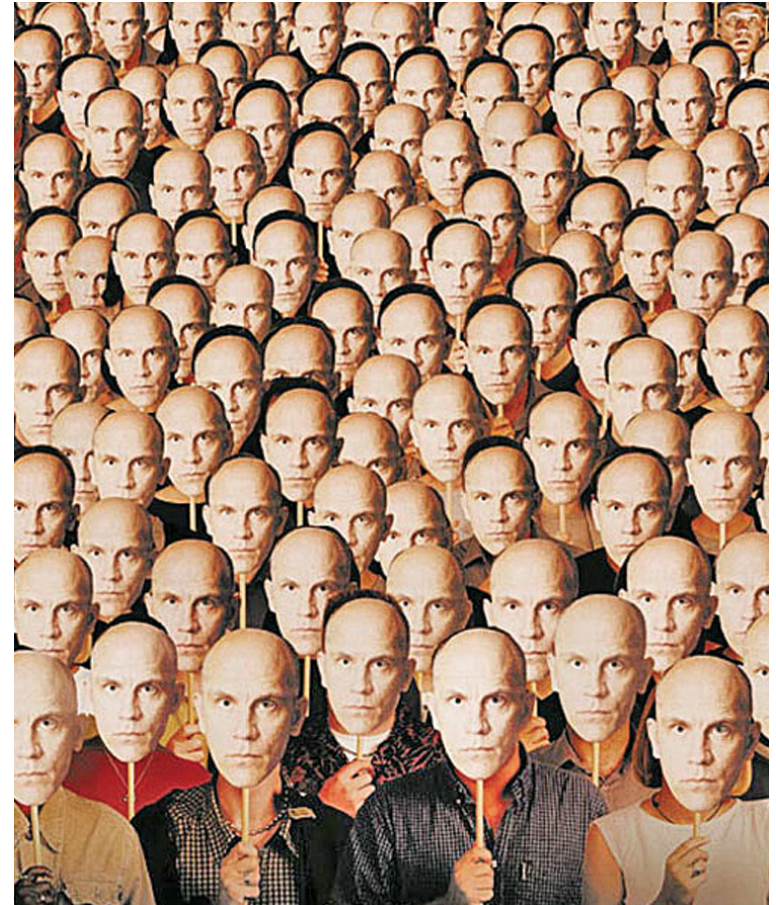
Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind
Director: Michel Gondry

A man, Joel Barish, heartbroken that his girlfriend Clementine underwent a procedure to erase him from her memory, decides to do the same. However, as he watches his memories of her fade away, he realizes that he still loves her, and may be too late to correct his mistake. He tries to find her in his mind.

What Dreams May Come
Director: Vincent Ward

Chris Neilson dies to find himself in a heaven more amazing than he could have ever dreamed of. There is one thing missing: his wife. After he dies, his wife, Annie killed herself and went to hell. Chris decides to risk eternity in for the small chance that he will be able to bring her back to heaven.
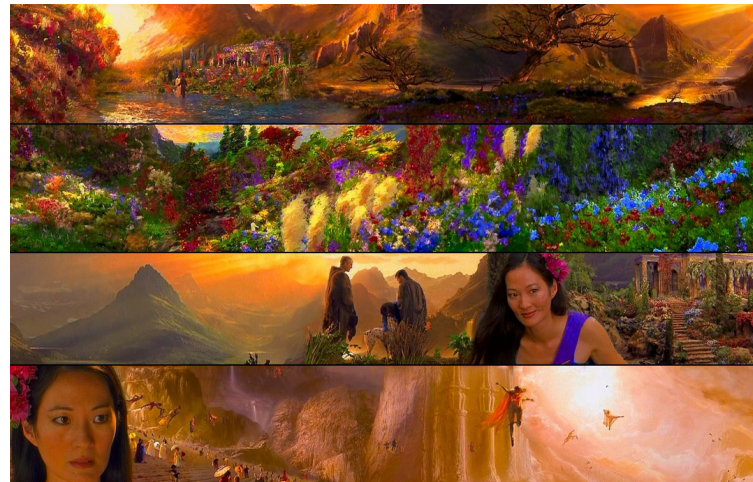
The Science of Sleep
Director: Michel Gondry

Following the death of his father in Mexico, Stéphane Miroux, a shy insecure young man, agrees to come to Paris to draw closer to his widowed mother Christine. He lands a boring job at a calendar-making firm and falls in love with his charming neighbor Stéphanie. But conquering her is no bed of roses for the young man and the only solution he finds to put up with the difficulties he is going through is escape into a dream world.

The Fountain
Director: Darren Aronofsky

The Fountain is a 2006 American science fiction/fantasy film directed by Darren Aronofsky that follows three interwoven narratives that take place in the age of conquistadors, the modern-day period, and the far future. The film stars Hugh Jackman and Rachel Weisz, whose characters' romance exists in all three time periods. The Fountain explores the themes of love and mortality, drawing influences from the The Fountain of Youth and The Tree of Life. The film is framed with visual language by using transition scenes, light, and shapes.

Films by George Melies

He was very innovative in the use of special effects. He accidentally discovered the stop trick, or substitution, in 1896, and was one of the first filmmakers to use multiple exposures, time-lapse photography, dissolves, and hand-painted colour in his films. Because of his ability to seemingly manipulate and transform reality with the cinematography, Méliès is sometimes referred to as the "Cinemagician." His famous films The Eclipse and A Trip to the moon are science fiction films made at that time. These are considered to be some of the most important early science fiction films, although their approach is closer to fantasy.

Reading

Animation Unlimited – Innovative Short Films since 1940
Liz Faber and Helen Walters

Animation Unlimited features 50 seminal short films by key animators from around the world, from early pioneers such as Oskar Fischinger and Mary Ellen Bute, to contemporary animators such as Michael Dudok de Wit and Tim Hope. The short films which I examined are:

1. The Nose (1963) – Alexeieff and Parker
2. Panspermia (1990) – Karl Sims
3. Triangle (1994) – Erica Russell
4. Spook Sport (1939) – Mary Ellen Bute
5. Head (1975) – George Griffin
6. Albatross (1998) – Paul Bush
7. The Man with the Beautiful Eyes (2000) Jonathan Hodgson
8. The Exciting Love Story (1989) – Borivoj Bordo
9. Sink (1999) – Tomioka Satoshi

These films were complex, abstract and often obscure, occupying a space between filmmaking, fine art and graphic design. These animators have taken their inspiration from their surroundings as well as music, literature and nature and have incorporated a fantastic range of materials, from paint to photography, or sand to dead moths.
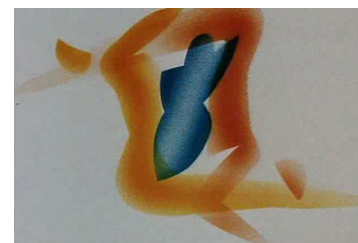
Circular Ruins
Jorge Luis Borges

"The Circular Ruins" (original Spanish title: "Las ruinas circulares") is a fantasy short story by Argentine writer and poet Jorge Luis Borges. An experienced wizard retreats from the world to a location that possesses strong mystical powers: the circular ruins. There, the wizard tries to create another human being from his own dreams. But finally he understands that he too is a mere appearance, dreamt by another." The story also seems to symbolize writers as creators who engender one another and whose existence and originality would be impossible without their predecessors.

The Interpretation of Dreams
Sigmund Freud

Freud observes that, while scientific opinion has come to dismiss the idea that dreams can be interpreted, "popular opinion" has "stubbornly" held on to the notion that dreams do indeed have meaning. He asserts that, contrary to the reigning scientific opinion, he will prove that it is possible to interpret dreams using a scientific method

He explains that dreams have an "ulterior motive" whereby their meaning is other than it appears on the surface. He proposes a method by which a patient is encouraged to relax the normal impulse to "censor" unwanted thoughts

to more easily call to mind the associations that the dream evokes. Freud refers to this state of mind as "uncritical self-observation"; the process was later called "free association."

Freud then proceeds to analyze a dream of his own by isolating its separate elements and describing the amalgam of personal associations that cluster around each element. He concludes that this dream "represents a certain state of affairs as being as I would wish it to be."

Freud's fundamental conclusion about dreams is that "wish-fulfillment is the meaning of each and every dream, and hence there can be no dreams besides wishful dreams." Further, dreams are not meaningless but are in fact "constructed by a highly elaborate intellectual activity."

The History of Dreams in Ancient Cultures
Internet

I found internet as a helpful source of information for my topic. I surfed through the various sites connected to dreams and for the kind of information related to it. It was a useful source as I came across many articles related to it. I read this interesting article on the importance of dreams in ancient cultures, their thoughts and visions on dreams. It talked about dreams in Egyptian culture, Greek mythology, The Babylonians and the Hebrews. The Egyptians were great believers in dreams and their powers and influence. The Dream Book is a papyrus that contains dream examples and dream interpretations and it is believed to date back to the early reign of Ramesses II. The Greeks also believed in good and bad dreams and the process of inducing dreams and visions. The Babylonians believed that good dreams are sent by the gods and the bad dreams being sent by demons.

Source: www.analysedreams.co.uk/DreamsInAncientCultures.html

René Magritte
Painter

René François Ghislain Magritte (1898 – 1967) was a Belgian surrealist artist. He became well-known for a number of witty and thought-provoking images. When I saw this painting I was awestruck by the mystery element in it. Each and every painting of his was based on falsity of representation. The paintings I liked the most are:

The Treachery of Images, famous for its inscription *this is not a pipe*. The picture shows a pipe that looks as though it might come from a tobacco store advertisement. Magritte painted below the pipe: *"Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (This is not a pipe)*, which seems false but is actually true. The painting is not a pipe, but rather an image of a pipe.

Golconda is an oil painting on canvas in 1953. The piece depicts a scene of identical men dressed in dark overcoats and bowler hats, who seem to be floating like helium balloons (though there is no actual indication of motion), against a backdrop of buildings and blue sky. It is humorous, but with an obvious criticism of the conventional effacing of individuality.
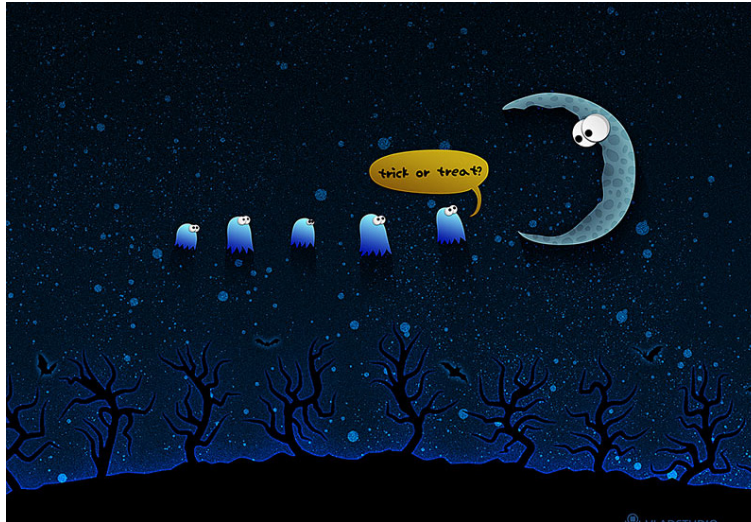
Conclusion

Reading about dreams and watching movies enlarged my view and understanding of my chosen subject. It contributed immensely towards the construction of my ideas which were initially quite simplistic. And irrespective of the work on the story line, I became aware of the human psyche behind dreams. Going through the works of various artists widened my visual sense on the representation of dreams.
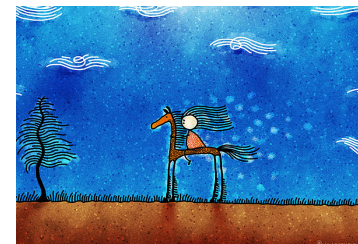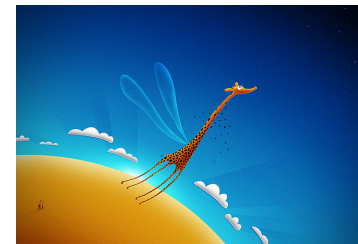
Concept exploration

At the end of the my research I started building the concept for my film. My initial concepts were:

Concept 1
Do we dream or dreams dream us. This is was my first concept where I thought of constructing a whole world of dreams where they are assigned to people. This idea amused me but my whole point of telling a story about dreaming was somewhere getting lost. This idea was good for a fantasy world animation but I wanted my film to rest on the thin line between dreams and reality

Concept2
This story was about a dream that is in love with a person who dreams it daily. The dream wants to stay forever with him, waiting to turn into reality.

Concept3
Ancient cultures give importance to dreams and this was my concept. I thought of building a story about cultures and dreams.

Concept4
We all wish for certain things in life and dreams are perfect to fulfill our wishes. This concept was about a person who wanted to be somebody else in his dreams. By showing various states of his mind in the abstraction and combining his desires, I thought of making it a narrative.

Concept5
I thought of making the whole plot as a thriller. So this concept is about a person who tries to solve a murder case in dreams. Dream becomes a map for him which finally leads the story to the end. But was it a thriller I had in my mind when I chose the topic as dreams in my project? I had to be true to myself and make a story, which is close to my heart.

Concept6
This is a story of a guy who is in love with a girl. In reality he can't be with the girl so he arranges a perfect dream to be with her. In the film, it is shown that in reality this guy is repeatedly arranging things in order so that everything falls in place for the perfect dream. This concept is based on the theory that if we see things continuously for a long time then they are bound to come in our dreams. But problem with this story was I was trying to make it logical by proving a theory in the film. So I changed the story to make it more true to what I want to tell in the film.

Final concept

Story

This is a story about Abir; a guy who lives in his own world of dreams. He has created his own world of dreams to escape from the worldly sorrows and pains. He is in love with a girl but they are not together now. Abir misses Riya's company so badly that he is unable to get her out of his mind. Once they were closest to each other but today things are different. She is married to somebody else. Abir is not ready to accept the fact that she is not with him. Reality is painful for him so he prefers staying in his dreams. He knows that it can never happen in reality so he dreams about the perfect life he wants with the a girl he has most loved in his life.

Film starts with a shot of Abir cleaning up the table. It is raining outside; the sky is full of grey clouds. In the background thundering sounds are audible along with a strong gush of wind. It is dark inside with dim lights. Abir is looking at the wall; which is full of the pictures of their being together. A slow song is playing in the gramophone gifted by Riya. He looks outside the window and look at the dark clouds. He takes his hands outside to feel the rains. Suddenly all grey clouds disappeared and the sky became full of colors; and he saw Riya. Beautiful as she is; smiling and looking at him with her eyes full of affection for him. This is the world of his dreams where he wants to be. But suddenly everything disappears and the music has stopped. Abir goes and plays the disc again.

He takes out two wine glasses and sits at the table on which a lit candle is flickering. In the background there is a wall which has pictures of Riya and the reminiscences of the time they spent together. He looks at the wedding card lying on the table which is dated 2 years back. It is the wedding card of Riya and Rishab. He again transits into his dreamland where he see himself and Riya travelling on a bike. The road is full of flying colors which look like trees.They come to a place which is full of stars; shining diamond like stars. Abir is climbing up the ladders to a star and right next to it there's an another star on which Riya is sitting; looking like an angel. Suddenly the sky is filled up with the candles and we see Abir and Riya sitting next to the table. They both are looking at each other. Abir takes up the wine glass for a toast and suddenly his glass breaks.

His dream is broken and he sees a broken wine glass on the table. Somebody is ringing the doorbell. He gets up and walk to the door. He passes the table which is already set for the guests. He opens the doors and sees Riya and Rishab standing at the door, smiling. He is shocked for a moment and then realizes that he has called them for lunch. He sees them happy together and slowly feels happy too. After all this is all he wanted, her happiness. He has always imagined that she will be happier with him but now he sees the reality. He smiles at them, and invites them inside the house.
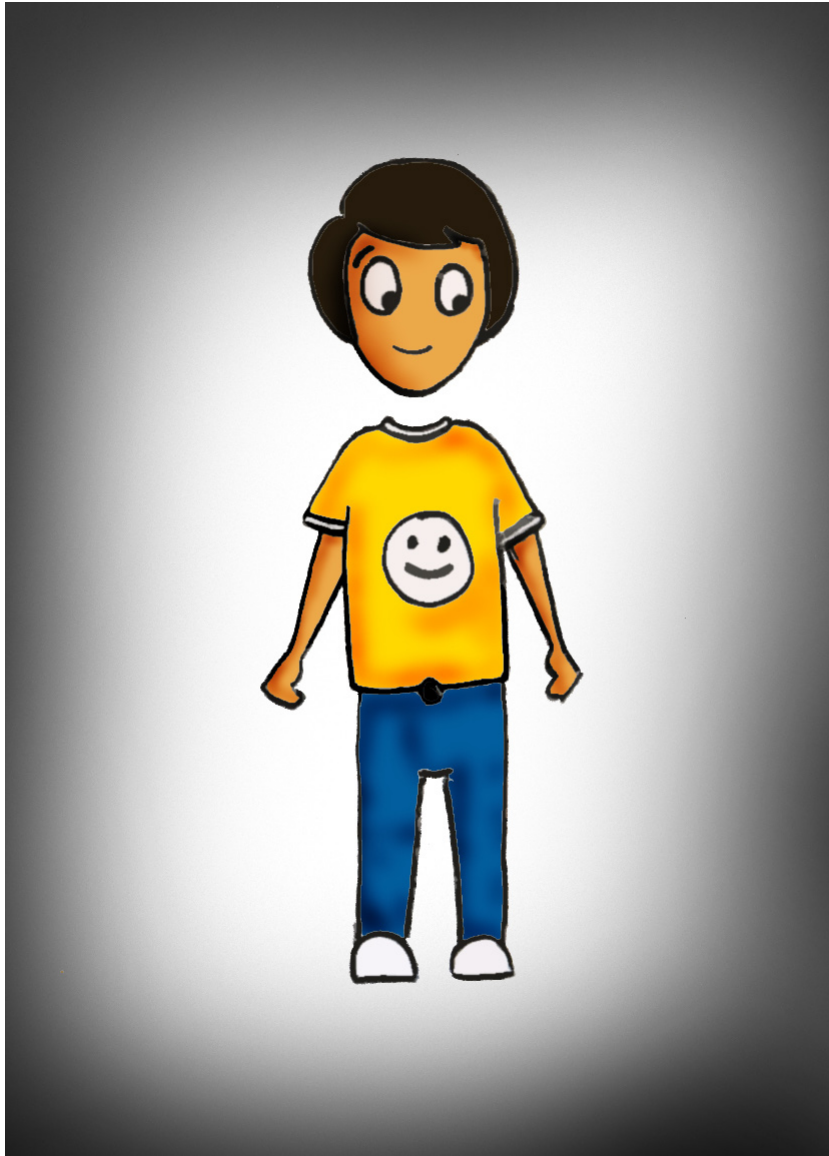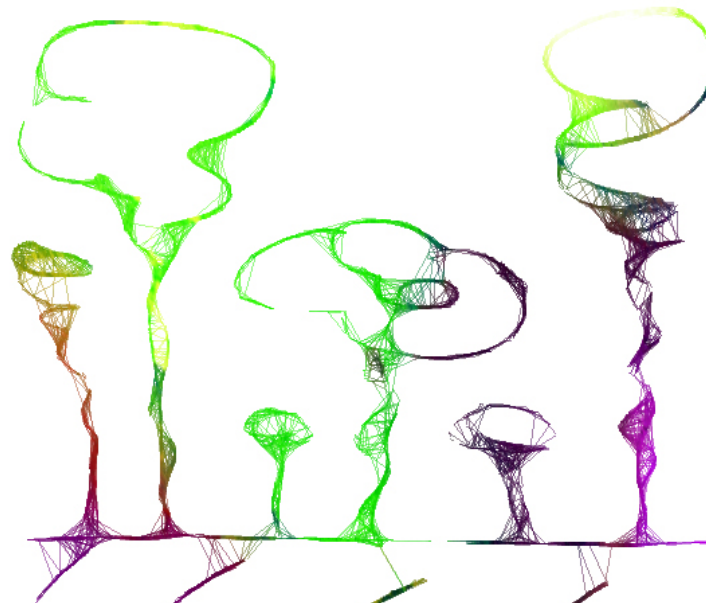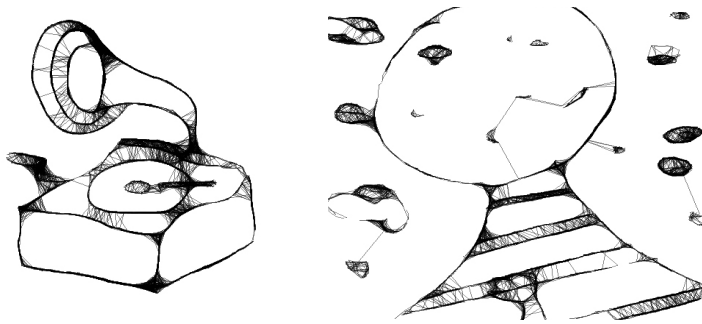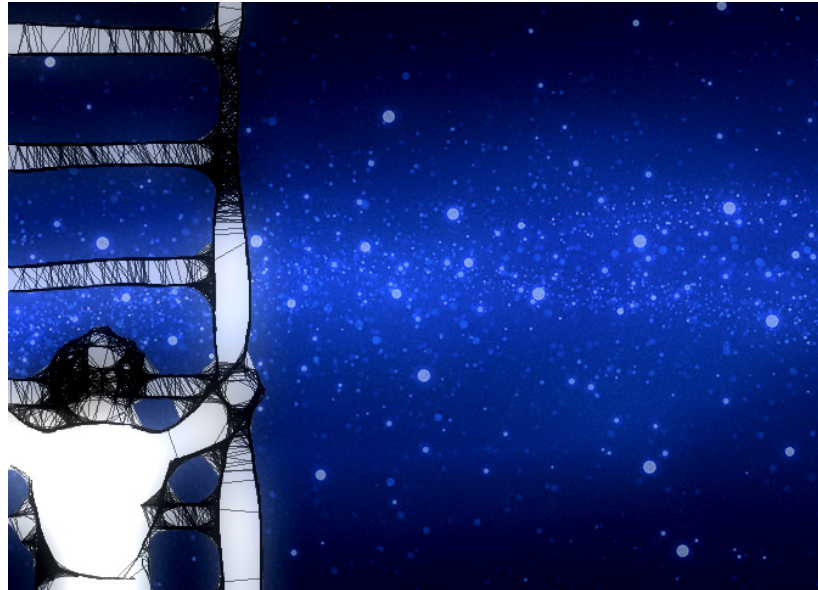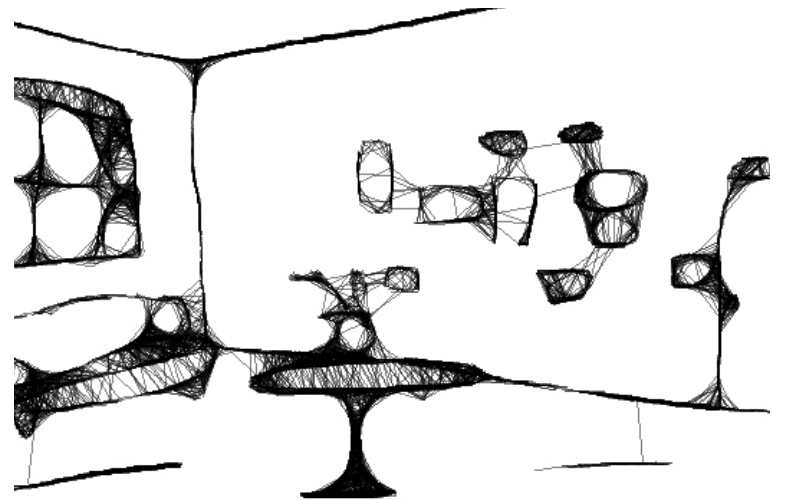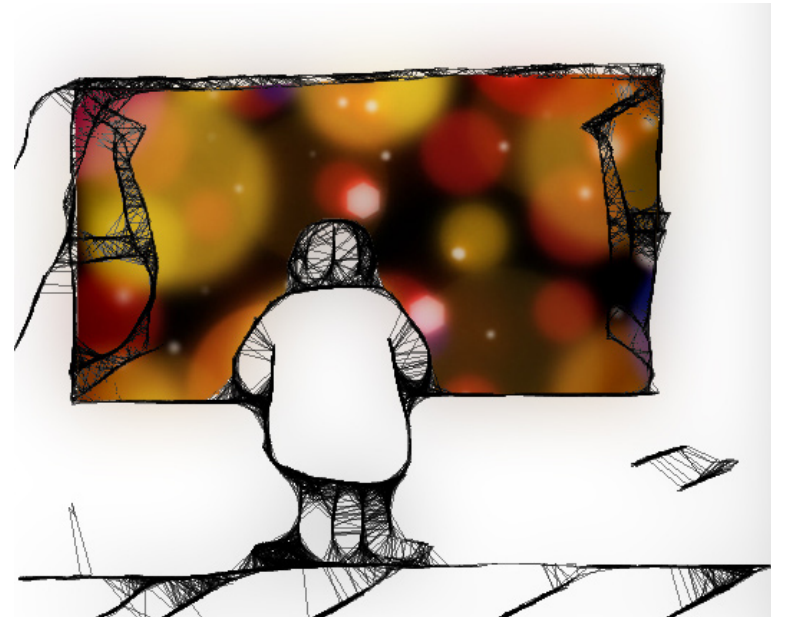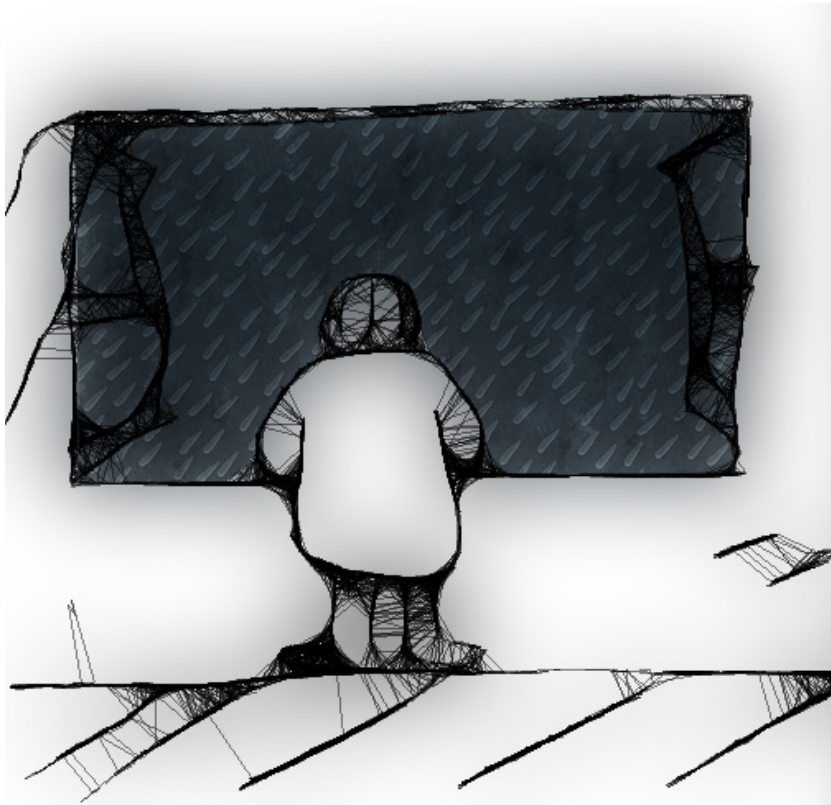
Initial Sketches
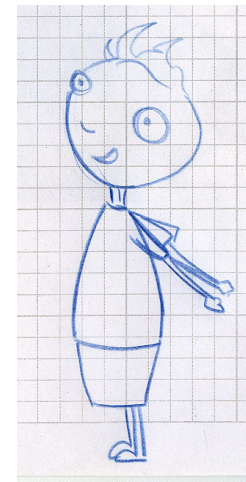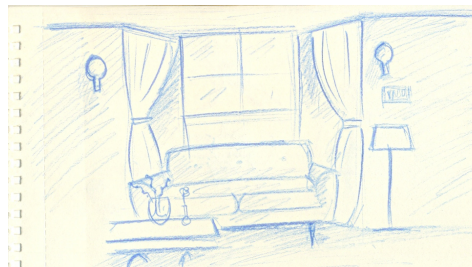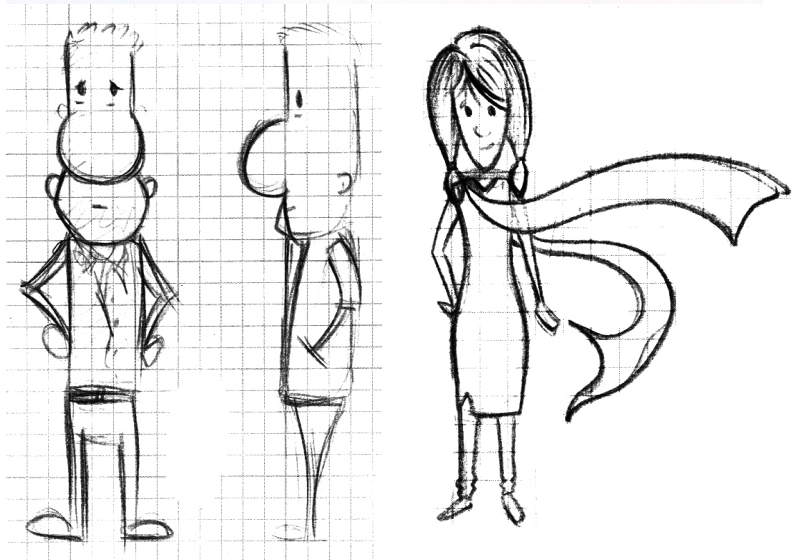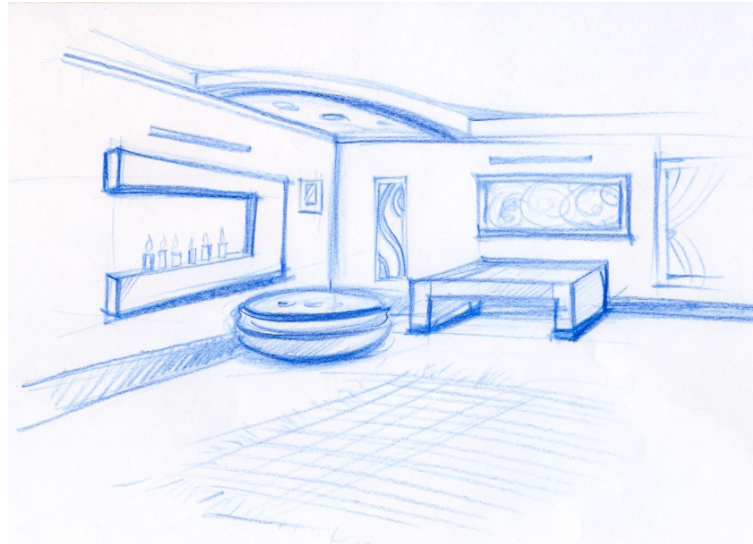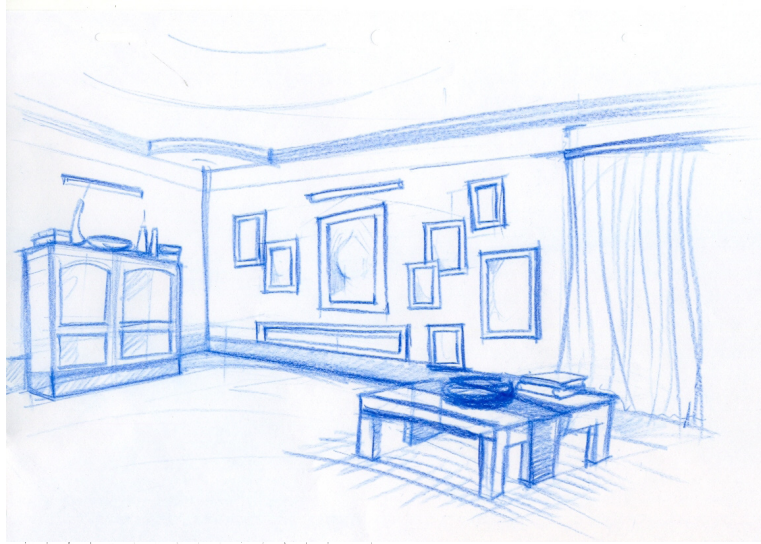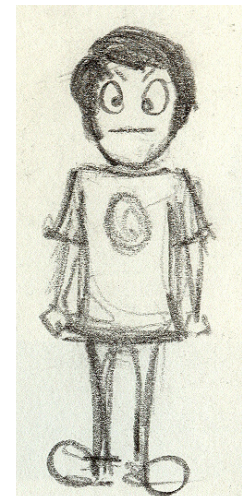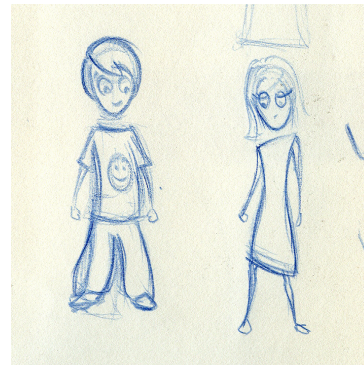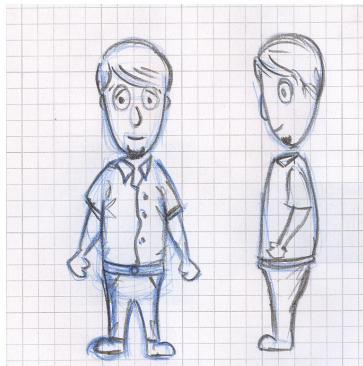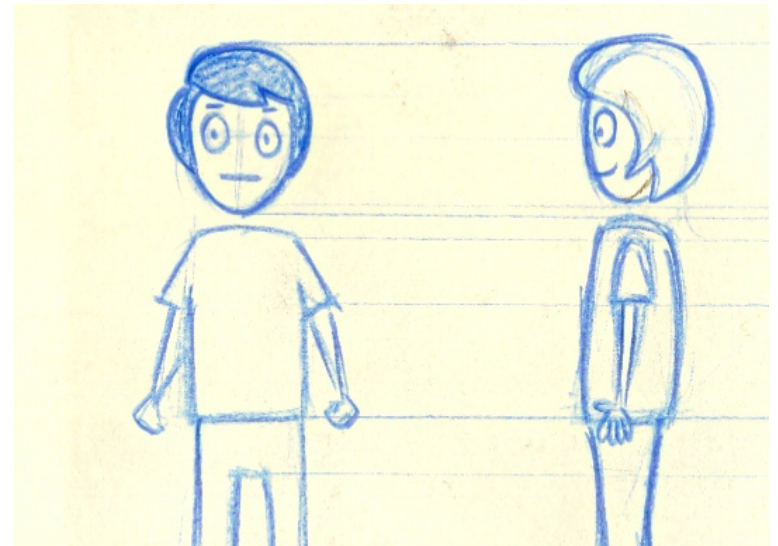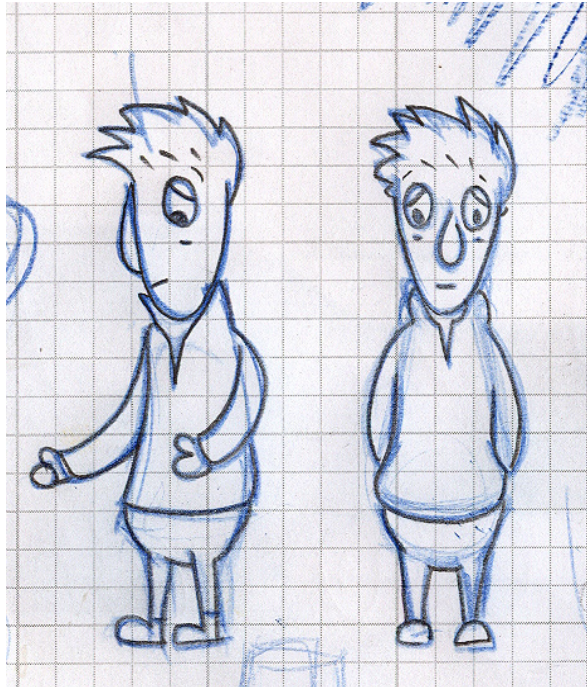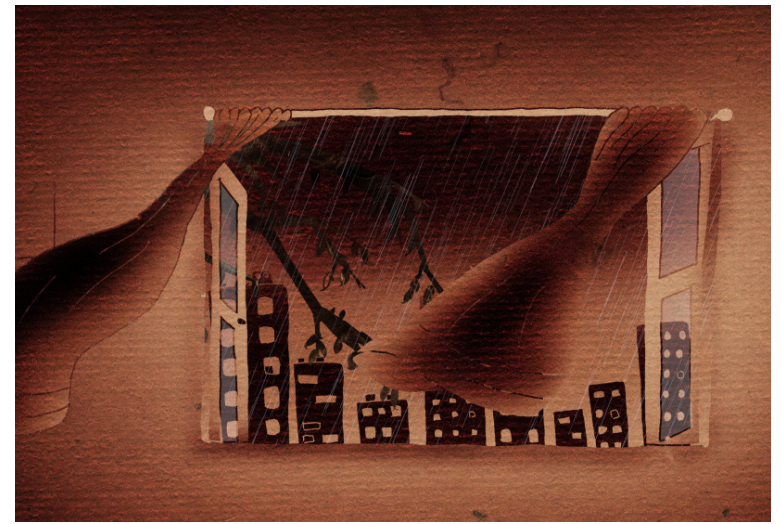
dream:perfect

a film by palash vaswani

Final Approach

The film has majorly two contrasting sequences which have been treated differently in terms of colours and texture. The sequences which depict real life have been given a gloomy look. They are dark and sad because the character in these sequences is lonely and depressed. Textured paper, scanned in high resolution, has been used as the background in the animation. Shadows and higlights have been prominently rendered in the objects to give a three dimensional effect.

On the contrary, the dream sequences are colourful and vibrant. They are like a wave of fresh air and joy in the goomy life of the character. Liquid flowing colours have been used as the background for the dream sequences to show the uncertainity and vagueness of a dream. Colours diffusing against white background bring out the joy that the character feels when he is dreaming.

dream:perfect

Characters

There are three main characters in the film, Abir, Riya and Rishab.

Abir is the guy in his early 30's. He works in MNC but spends his free time at home. He is in love with Riya but is sad about the fact that they both are not together. He has created his own world of dreams and prefers to stay in that dreamland. He is absent minded and always in his own world.

Riya is the girl in her late 20's. She is happy-go-lucky. She was once with Abir, but the things are different now and she has accepted the reality. She is married to Rishab and they both are a happy family.

Rishab is Riya's husband. He is in his early 30's.
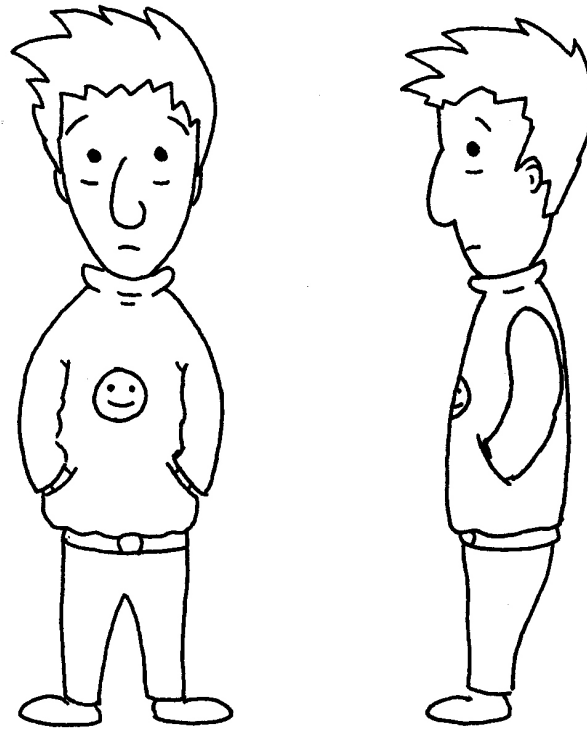
Abir

Rishab

Riya

Storyboards

[Scene 1]

Top view of the table. Camera pans from left to right. Its raining outside and the sounds are audible. Slow song plays in the background.
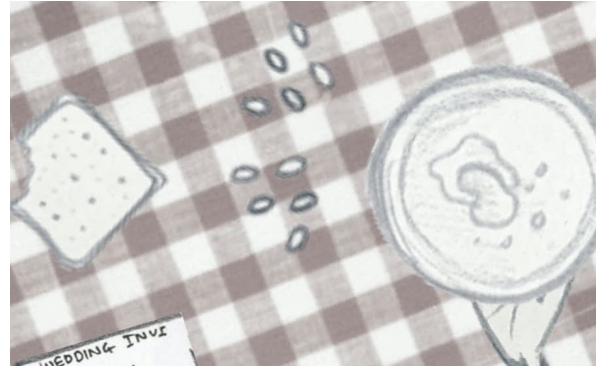
[Scene 1]

A hand comes in the frame and picks up the plate. Title of the film is seen on the table.
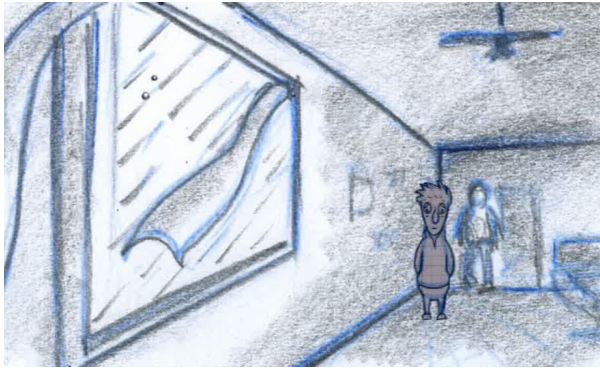(Cut to scene 2)

[Scene 2]

Abir is shown in silhouette. He passes the frame and walks to other side of the room. In the background we see a rough weather outside. (Cut to scene 3)
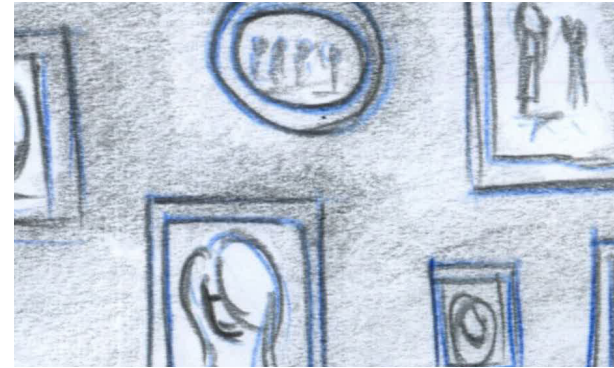

[Scene 3]

Shot of a gramophone playing the music.
(Cut to scene 4)

[Scene 4 shot 1]

Abir walks towards the window.

[Scene 4 shot 2]

Camera pans slowly on the wall, which is full of the pictures of their being together
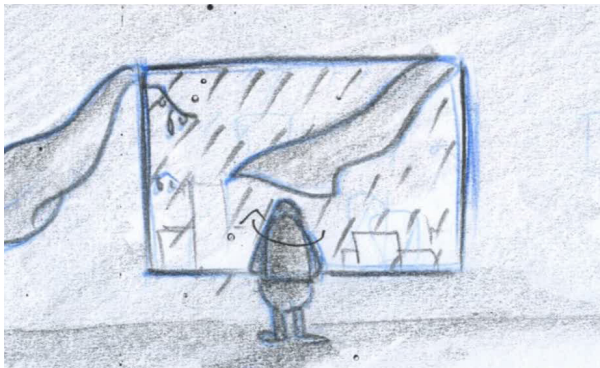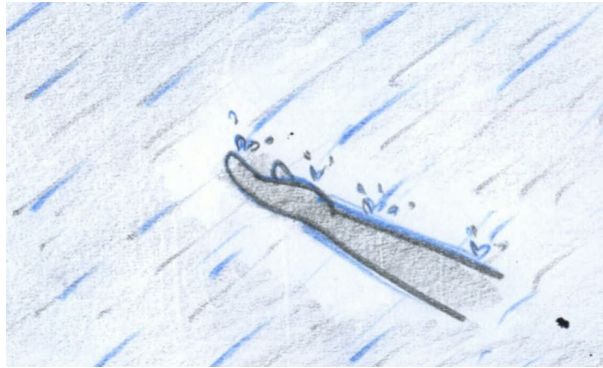

[Scene 4 shot 3]

A shoy of Abir seeing outside the window
(Cut to scene 5)

[Scene 5 shot 1]

A front shot where his face is visible. Sad and lonely he is looking outside the window.

[Scene 5 shot 2]

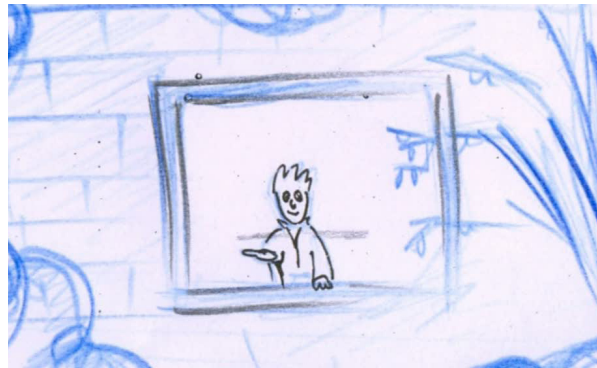He takes out his hand outside the window to feel the rains.

[Scene 5 shot 3]
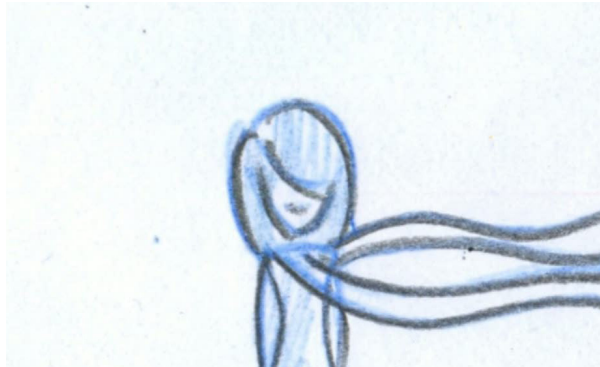
He closes his eyes and smiles.
(Cut to scene 6)

[Scene 6 shot 1]

Rain and clouds have disappeared and the sky is full of flowing colors. He sees a pretty lady.

[Scene 6 shot 2]

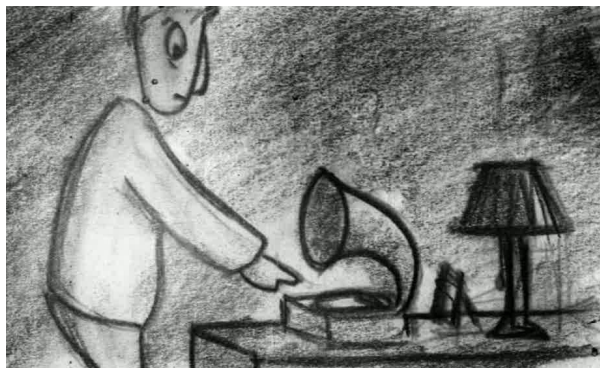A view from outside. Camera moves forword.

[Scene 6 shot 3]

Close up of the girl .
(Cut to scene 7)

[Scene 7 shot 1]

Gramophone has stopped playing the music.

[Scene 7 shot 2]
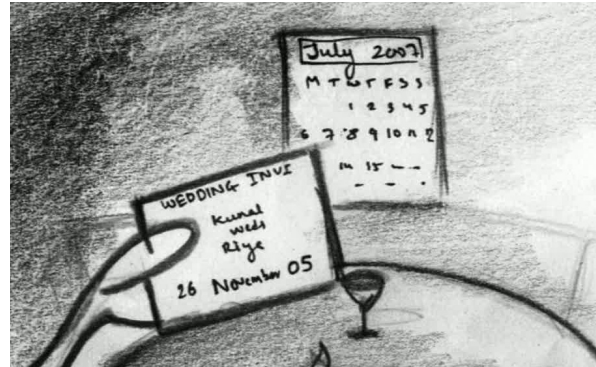
Abir comes and plays the music again.
(Cut to scene 8)

[Scene 8]

Scene starts with a black frame. Abir opens the cupboard
door and takes out wine glasses.
(Cut to scene 9)

[Scene 9 shot 1]

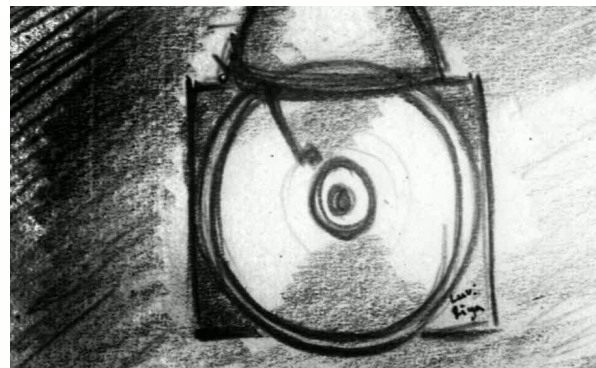Abir sitting at a dining table with card in his hands. A candle is lit on the table.

[Scene 9 shot 2]

Camera focuses on calendar on the wall and then on the wedding card which is dated two years back.

[Scene 9 shot 3]

A silhouette shot of Abir sitting. Its raining in the background.
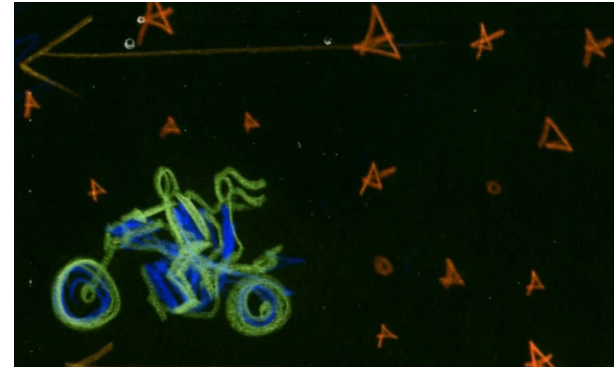

[Scene 9 shot 4]

Top view of the gramophone playing the disc.
(Transition to Scene 10)

[Scene 10 shot 1]

Abir and Riya riding the bike. Background is full of colors flowing upwards. They look like trees of color changing its form.

[Scene10 shot 2]

They enter the space full of sparkling stars.

[Scene 10 shot 3]

Then we see a close-up shot of Abir climbing up the ladders.

[Scene 10 shot 4]

A wide angle shot. Abir is climbing up the ladders to a star and right next to it there's an another star on which Riya is sitting.
(Transition to scene 11)

[Scene 11 shot 1]

Abir and Riya sitting at a table. Background is full of floating candles. Both are looking at each other.

[Scene 11 shot 2]

Close up of Abir..

[Scene 11 shot 3]

Close up of Riya

[Scene 11 shot 4]

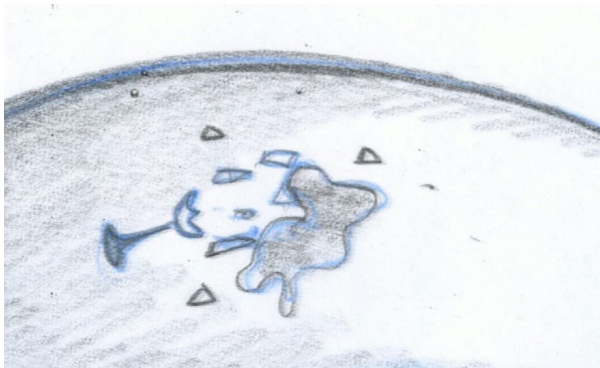Wide angel shot of Abir and Riya sitting.

[Scene 11 shot 5]

Close up of Abir.

[Scene 11 shot 6]

Abir picks up the wine glass for a toast.
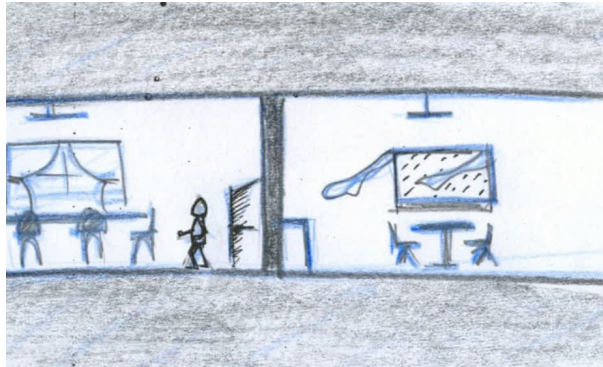(Cut to scene 12)

[Scene 12 shot 1]

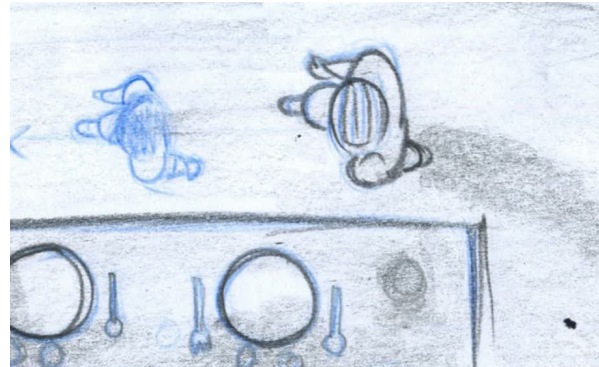Dreams breaks and we see a broken wine glass in the frame.

[Scene 12 shot 2]

Abir is still lost in his dream. Sound of doorbell is audible in the background. Someone is waiting at the door.
(Cut to scene 13)

[Scene 13 shot 1]

He leaves his bedroom and comes to the living room.

[Scene 13 shot 2]

We see a view of dining table which is already set for the guests.
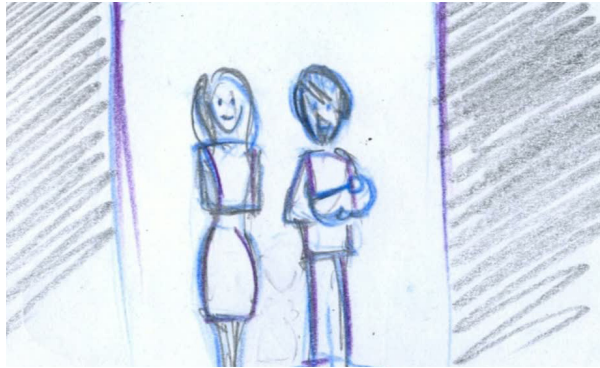(Cut to scene 14)

[Scene 14 shot 1]

Door opens and Riya is standing at the door. She smiles

[Scene 14 shot 2]

Abir is happy as his dream has come true.

[Scene 14 shot 3]

He sees Riya and Rishab standing at the door.

[Scene 14 shot 4]

Reality is just in front of his eyes. His smile fades.

[Scene 14 shot 5]

He sees them happy together.

[Scene 14 shot 6]

Close-up of Riya; happy and smiling.

[Scene 14 shot 7]

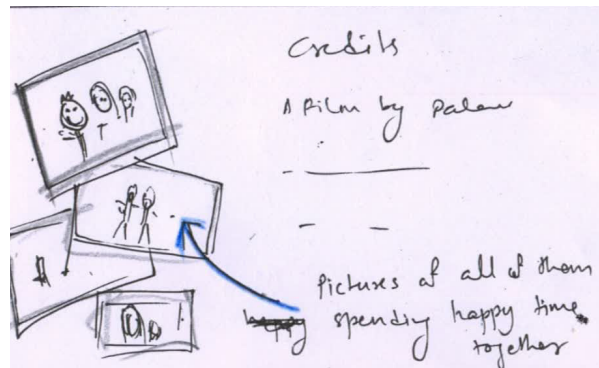Finally Abir smiles; seeing both of them happy together.

[Scene 14 shot 8]
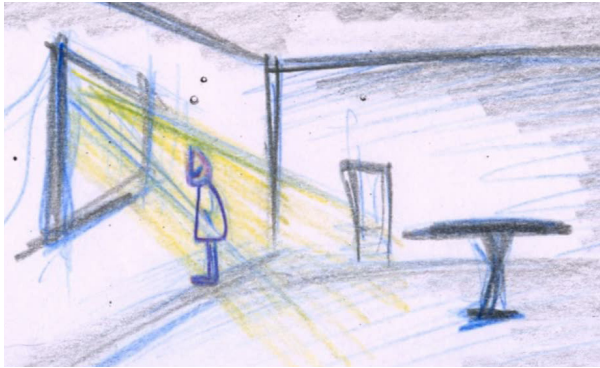
Both of them walk inside the door

[Scene 14 shot 9]

Door closes.
(Cut to scene 15)

[Scene 15]

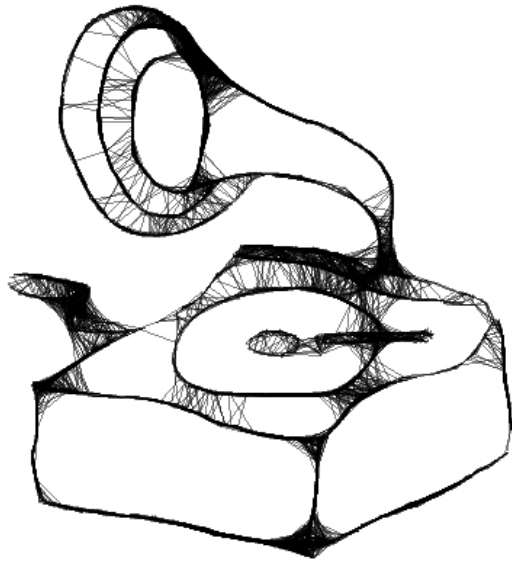Final credits roll in with the pictures of them spending time together is shown.

[Scene 16 shot 1]

Abir is standing near the window; he is looking outside.
Light is falling in from the window.

[Scene 16 shot 2]

Same shot from the back. We see a clear sky outside.

Sounds and editing

I wanted to create the "lost and lonely" effect for my film. So I have used various free sounds to create the required environment. Background music is chosen accordingly to suit the style of the storytelling. Sound editing and mixing is done using Cool Edit Pro.

As the environment created is dark and grey to produce the feeling of loneliness, editing is done accordingly. There are long shots used in the film for the similar reasons. So for editing I have used parallel cuts, fast cuts and fades according to the mood of the scene. Editing is done using two softwares, *Adobe After Effects and Adobe Premiere.*

Epilogue

This film is an attempt to bring out something that is close to my heart. The journey was full of highs and lows but I have learnt a lot in the process. Sometimes simple stories are most difficult to tell and I have tried hard to bring out the best from me. I have always wondered about existence of dreams and how it affected the reality. The answers are complex as the question itself is obscure; and I have tried to explore the subject in my own way.

While working on my film I learned a lot. I learned about the craft of visualising and narrating a theme and also some new softwares like *Animo.* I chose this topic because I felt for it and a successful conclusion will give me enough confidence to become a good animator in the future.

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