

A Study on the Fictionality of Science and the Impact of Lucid Dream in Christopher
Nolan's Inception

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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **A Study on the Fictionality of Science and the Impact of Lucid Dream In Christopher Nolan's Inception** is a bona fide record of sincere work done by, Muhammed Zahal, Register Number: 210021000941. Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature under the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam during the year 2023-2024.

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Declaration

I, hereby declare that the presented dissertation **A Study on the Fictionality of Science and the Impact of Lucid Dream In Christopher Nolan's Inception** is based on the research that I did on under the supervision and guidance of Ms. Meriya George, Guest Faculty, Research Centre and Postgraduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. This is a report of my hands based on the research done on the selected topic and it is my original work and interpretations drawn therein are based on material collected by myself. It has not been previously formed basis for the award of any degree, diploma or fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

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This project follows MLA 8th edition

Chapter 1

Introduction

Born on 30 July 1970, Christopher Edward Nolan is an English film director, producer and screenwriter, who hold both American and British citizenship. He is one among the most acclaimed filmmakers of the 21st century. Having made his directorial debut with *Following* (1998), Nolan gained considerable attention for his second feature, *Memento* (2000), for which he was nominated for numerous accolades, including the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay. His ten films have grossed over 4.7 billion US Dollars worldwide and garnered a total of twenty six Oscar nominations and won seven times . Time named him one of the hundred most influential people in the world in 2015.

Nolan's films delve into epistemological and metaphysical themes, delving into human morality, the manipulation of time, and the fluidity of memory and personal identity. His cinematic repertoire is characterized by a materialistic viewpoint, non-linear storytelling, practical effects, innovative sound design, large-scale cinematography, and symbiotic connections between visual and narrative elements.

"Inception," released in 2010, was conceived as a horror film centered around "Dream Stealers" based on lucid dreaming in an initial 80-page treatment presented to Warner Bros. by Nolan after completing "Insomnia." However, Nolan later transformed the concept into a heist film, feeling he needed more experience before undertaking such a complex project.

Nolan spent nine to ten years honing the script for "Inception." The movie features Leonardo DiCaprio as a skilled thief who extracts information by infiltrating the subconscious, offered a chance to erase his criminal past in exchange for implanting an idea into a target's mind.

Nolan's initial inspiration for the film stemmed from questioning the reality of one's surroundings.

Upon its release, "Inception" garnered critical acclaim for its narrative, musical score, and ensemble cast. It secured four Academy Awards for Best Cinematography, Best Sound Editing, Best Sound Mixing, and Best Visual Effects, with nominations for Best Picture, Best Original Screenplay, Best Art Direction, and Best Original Score. Science fiction, a genre exploring futuristic concepts like technology, space travel, and alternate realities, often speculates on the implications of scientific advancements, contrasting with supernatural-focused fantasy. While rooted in actual science historically, contemporary science fiction is not constrained by strict adherence to scientific principles.

Chapter 2

Science Fiction

Science fiction, a literary genre, explores the impact of actual or imagined scientific advancements on society and individuals. The term gained popularity in the 1920s, largely due to Hugo Gernsback, a prominent advocate for the genre, after whom the prestigious Hugo Awards are named. These awards honor outstanding achievements in science fiction writing, editing, illustration, and filmmaking.

While some themes found in modern science fiction can be traced back to ancient times, the genre as we know it today distinguishes itself by its focus on scientific and technological plausibility. It emerged formally in the West, where the societal changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution prompted writers to speculate about the future consequences of technology. By the early 20th century, standard science fiction themes had developed, including space travel, robots, aliens, and time travel.

Science fiction narratives often employ a range of storytelling techniques, from prophetic warnings to utopian visions, presenting various attitudes towards technological and social change. Writers like H.G. Wells, a foundational figure in the genre, used scientific developments as a springboard to explore radical ideas, social satire, and dystopian scenarios.

Aldous Huxley, influenced by his grandfather T.H. Huxley's advocacy of Darwinism, offered a dark view of society in works like "Brave New World," while H.P. Lovecraft introduced cosmic horror with creations like the Necronomicon. Philip K. Dick's writings delved into metaphysical questions about identity and reality, while Olaf Stapledon portrayed humanity's insignificance in the vast cosmos.

Initially regarded as disreputable, especially in the United States where it catered mainly to a young audience, science fiction gained broader acceptance following World War II. Its popularity expanded globally, driven by remarkable scientific achievements such as nuclear energy, space exploration, and the potential for cloning.

By the 21st century, science fiction had transcended its origins as a mere literary genre, evolving into a vibrant global subculture. Enthusiastic followers and practitioners formed a thriving community, embracing a wide array of science fiction-related products and activities. This included books, movies, TV shows, video games, magazines, artwork, comics, and an expanding market of collectibles such as figurines, DVDs, and toy replicas. Additionally, fans convened regularly at well-attended, meticulously organized conventions, where they adorned themselves in elaborate costumes, traded handmade crafts, and sang folk songs.

Sir Thomas More's renowned satire "Utopia" (1516) coined its title from a pun on the Greek words for "good place" and "no place," shedding light on 16th-century England through a rational, humanistic lens. More presented an ideal society in a hypothetical setting, framing it as a thought experiment to avoid direct confrontation with established interests.

Since More's time, utopian visions have primarily attracted fringe political thinkers lacking practical influence within prevailing power structures. In such circumstances, published thought experiments airing hidden dissatisfactions can resonate widely, sparking broad popular responses.

Utopias come in various forms, from extravagant flights of fancy to nostalgic retreats and incisive political critiques veiled as novels. Society's regard for utopian thinking has waxed and waned over time, with the collapse of Soviet communism drastically altering perceptions of utopian literature, shifting it from serious social commentary to perceived irrelevance. The boundary between enlightening reform and oppressive political manipulation often remains delicate.

Utopian ideals flourished during the 19th century's fascination with scientific advancement, with thinkers like Karl Marx envisioning a future where historical forces and the accumulation of rational knowledge would lead to a perfected "end state" of history.

According to this perspective, a forward-thinking futurist simply needed to identify and foster the progressive trends of the future while dispelling outdated feudal beliefs. Then, social perfection would inevitably materialize, akin to the steady ticking of a clock.

In B.F. Skinner's "Walden Two" (1948), members of a small communal society are conditioned using rewards and punishments. In his later work, "Walden Two Revisited" (1976), Skinner remarks that while Russia's model after fifty years isn't desirable to emulate, China might be closer to the solutions he discusses, though envisioning a communist revolution in America remains challenging.

Technocratic utopias, as imagined by Wells and Skinner, face a fundamental challenge: determining when, where, and why the process of "improvement" should cease. It's difficult to advocate for "progress" by presenting a world where further advancement is deemed impossible. This dilemma doesn't apply to pastoral utopias, which reject technology in pursuit of a timeless realm of stability and tranquility. These retreats are often depicted as peaceful villages devoid of modern trappings, offering an escape from the technological upheavals of the author's real-world landscape.

Examples of pastoral utopias include Morris's "News from Nowhere," Samuel Butler's satirical "Erewhon" (1872), James Hilton's "Lost Horizon" (1933), Aldous Huxley's "Island" (1962), and Ernest Callenbach's "Ecotopia" (1975). E.M. Forster's story "The Machine Stops" (1909) serves as a rebuttal to Wells' technical optimism, depicting a soulless, networked world. The sudden collapse of Forster's dystopia drives the plot forward, a common theme in science fiction known as the "house-of-cards" plot.

In Norman Spinrad's darkly humorous "The Iron Dream" (1972), Adolf Hitler becomes an American pulp novelist, offering a strangely convincing portrayal. Whether utopian or dystopian, these visions carry a profound sense of historical finality. All solutions are presented as ultimate, lasting triumphs or calamities, expected to endure for millennia.

Chapter 3

Lucid Dreaming in *Inception*

In this movie we can actually also actually see a way in which the famous defense mechanism of Sigmund Freud being used through out the movie. Sigmund Freud believed that the unconscious mind stores all the thoughts, feelings, and memories that are disturbing . He believed that the brain protects itself by deeply burying these memories in the unconscious mind.

In the film, Dominick "Dom" Cobb and Arthur work as "extractors," utilizing experimental military technology to engage in corporate espionage by infiltrating the subconscious minds of their targets and extracting valuable information within a shared dream world. Their latest mission is orchestrated by Japanese businessman Saito, who challenges Cobb to perform "inception" – planting an idea into someone's subconscious. Saito wants Cobb to convince Robert Fischer, heir to a rival energy conglomerate, to dissolve his father's company. In exchange, Saito promises to clear Cobb of a murder charge so he can reunite with his children.

Cobb assembles a team, including conman Eames, chemist Yusuf, and architecture student Ariadne, who discovers Cobb's lingering guilt over his deceased wife, Mal, within his subconscious. During a flight carrying Fischer's deceased father, the team sedates Fischer to enter his dreams and perform inception.

In each dream level, one team member remains to set up a "kick" to awaken the others, synchronized across multiple levels where time passes differently. They face obstacles, including Fischer's trained subconscious projections and the risk of entering limbo – a subconscious realm from which escape is challenging. Despite setbacks, the team persists.

They manipulate Fischer through dream layers, facing danger and setbacks, including Yusuf's early kick causing chaos. Ultimately, Cobb confronts Mal's projection, leading to her demise, and saves Fischer and Saito from limbo. As the mission concludes, Cobb and Ariadne enter limbo to retrieve Fischer and Saito, while Eames orchestrates a final kick to bring them all back to reality.

In the movie, Cobb discloses to Ariadne their journey to Limbo, where they spent fifty years constructing a dream world from their memories. Mal's refusal to leave the dream led Cobb to perform a rudimentary form of inception by manipulating her totem, but she still believed she was dreaming upon waking. To escape this perceived dream, Mal committed suicide and framed Cobb, leading him to flee and leaving his children in the care of Professor Miles. Through his confession, Cobb finds closure regarding Mal's death.

Ariadne disrupts Mal's projection and wakes Fischer with a kick, allowing him to confront the planted idea. Cobb remains in Limbo to find Saito, while the team returns to reality through synchronized kicks. In the real world, Cobb tests reality using his totem, ultimately choosing to embrace his children instead of verifying the result.

The confusion surrounding the film's kicks and dream levels arises from the complexity of dream sequences. In any dream scenario, there's the Dreamer (whose dream it is), the Subject (from whom information is extracted), and the Architect (who designs the dream levels). The characters involved in the inception process include Cobb, Arthur, Ariadne, Eames, Yusuf, Fischer, Saito, and Mal.

Dreams can occur within dreams, with time stretching as one delves deeper. Kicks serve as sudden jolts to awaken dreamers, typically induced by falls. The key distinction in kicks lies in their ability to wake dreamers up by one level, guiding them back to reality.

In a basic dream, a single kick can awaken the dreamer by one level. For instance, Cobb is dunked into a bathtub, waking him up by one level. Alternatively, a kick can be administered to the dreaming self, such as when Arthur is shot in the head by Cobb, prompting him to wake up by one level.

However, in a multi-level dream under a powerful sedative, a synchronized kick is required. This entails two kicks: one to the sleeping body and one to the dreaming self.

Death in a basic dream functions as a kick to the dreaming self, leading to a wake-up by one level. In contrast, death in a heavily sedated, multi-level dream results in entering limbo – a subconscious state where one may remain indefinitely if the mind fails to recognize it as a dream. In limbo, dying ultimately leads to waking up directly into reality, bypassing all dream levels.

Limbo is a shared space where one can end up if they die in a heavily sedated dream. Two ways exist to enter limbo: by attempting to descend one level deeper than the dream's design, or by dying in a heavily sedated, multi-level dream without clear recollection of how one arrived there.

Saito appears much older than Cobb in limbo due to the time dilation effect. While Saito is shot and dying in the first level, Cobb is left to drown in the van level. Though only a short moment passes in reality, in limbo, years elapse due to time dilation.

Regarding the ending, if the entire movie were a dream, it would undermine the concept of dreams within dreams and kicks. The ambiguous spinning top suggests that Cobb may still be dreaming, but the change in sound and wobbling indicate reality. The wobble suggests the top is slowing down, similar to its behavior in Mal's safe, implying that it will eventually stop.

Chapter 4

Inception

The cinematic work entitled *Inception* (2010) captivated the minds of numerous viewers, being hailed as a prominent science fiction and fantasy production of that particular year. Crafted under the direction and production of Christopher Nolan, the film also saw the narrative vision brought to life through his penmanship.

Nolan's creative genesis for the script and storyline dates back to 2001, a span of nine years preceding the film's unveiling, when he meticulously crafted an eighty-page script centered around the concept of dream thievery. This artistic endeavor was influenced by the notions of dream incubation and lucid dreaming, culminating in a captivating narrative of exploring a realm where technological advancements facilitate the intrusion into the human psyche via dreams.

Inception fundamentally revolves around the premise that a singular notion residing within an individual's consciousness possesses the potential to either be a prized asset or a perilous weapon (George, 2009). Leonardo DiCaprio assumes the lead role of Dom Cobb, a character adept at extracting sensitive information from his targets within the realm of dreams. The crux of the plot unfolds as Cobb undertakes a final mission, central to the film's essence, which involves executing an inception to pave the way for the protagonist to reclaim his former life and reconnect with his offspring.

The film, upon its release, garnered widespread acclaim for its innovative and intellectually stimulating narrative, with a multitude of critics extending favorable appraisals. Notably, Rotten Tomatoes assigned *Inception* an average score of 8/10, drawing from a pool of over two hundred and fifty reviews, wherein an impressive 87% of critics expressed favorable sentiments towards the film.

Of particular commendation is Christopher Nolan, the multifaceted individual behind the film's production, direction, and script, who received an abundance of laudatory remarks and

accolades from esteemed critics. Noteworthy among these accolades is the praise bestowed by distinguished critic Peter Travers of Rolling Stone magazine, who likened the film and Nolan's prowess to that of a masterful chess match.

Justin Chang, in his analysis, commended the writer for skillfully portraying the intricate details of the subconscious mind in a surrealist thriller, presenting a significant challenge for viewers to explore. The genre of the movie "Inception" remains open to broad interpretation, with some perceiving it as a mystery or suspense, while others classify it as drama, action, or adventure. Similar to many films, the categorization of genre has sparked diverse interpretations, leading to widespread controversy. "Inception" is firmly situated within the realm of science fiction.

One key aspect supporting this classification is the film's central theme revolving around speculative technological or scientific advancements. Moreover, these concepts are not set in contemporary society but rather in a futuristic landscape where such innovations could hypothetically exist, although not currently feasible given our technological progress (George, 2009). While the notion of extracting ideas remains fictional, ongoing research in neuroscience aims to delve into the intricate workings of the human brain, potentially yielding such advancements in the future. Portrayed as the skilled extractor in the narrative, Leonardo DiCaprio's character, Cobb, is utilized by corporations to infiltrate individuals' minds and retrieve essential information. Further examples of science fiction elements are evident in scenes set in dreamworlds, such as the hotel room where gravity is distorted, exemplified by the immobile elevator necessitating an explosive force to move. Despite its fantastical elements, the film undeniably aligns with the historical context of the science fiction genre.

Altman (1984) delves deeply into the methods employed to classify films into specific genres in his work "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre". He provides a comprehensive explanation of both the semantic and syntactic approaches to film genres, offering readers a thorough understanding of

how to analyze films and assign them appropriate genres. In his observations from 1984, Altman noted the criticism and controversy surrounding genre classification, particularly in the context of the semantic approach. This approach categorizes films based on surface-level elements believed to align with a particular genre, such as plot, characters, and certain aesthetic qualities. However, a significant limitation of the semantic approach is its lack of thorough analysis and critique. It neglects to delve into the intricacies of films, placing minimal emphasis on aspects like timelines, production techniques, and scene evaluation.

Altman (1984) posits that the syntactic approach differs significantly from the semantic approach. This particular method intricately analyzes the relationships among semantic elements within a specific genre or between societal aspects and those elements present in a movie. It delves into how individual elements, when isolated, amalgamate in a film to convey its true essence (George, 2009). Furthermore, this approach aims not only to comprehend the reasons behind certain aspects of a film but also scrutinizes the impact of such aspects on the audience, considering the information they convey as valuable. Such film analysis offers a profound exploration of seemingly trivial occurrences in one film, which gain substantial importance when compared or linked to similar events in other films.

Altman introduces two additional genre criticism approaches: ideological and ritual. The ritual approach manifests when filmmakers succumb to societal pressures, resulting in films that mirror contemporary society like Hollywood productions. It reflects audience preferences on a broader scale, focusing on the consumption aspect.

Conversely, the ideological approach categorizes a movie's genre based on simplistic yet generalized interpretations of recognizable structures (Grant, 2003). Through the lens of Altman's genre criticism frameworks, it is universally acknowledged that *Inception* exemplifies the same phenomenon.

This film unequivocally upholds the assertions posited by Altman. Interpretations of the film vary among different scholars and experts, hence the diverse classification of its genre. Altman contends that genre categorization is contingent upon the applications and recipients rather than a fixed frame of reference (Grant, 2003). The film's genre is multifaceted and caters to a diverse audience. Altman concludes that employing a completely unbiased terminology in genre attribution is unattainable. The terminology in use typically originates from varying perspectives of different viewers. It is plausible that a particular method of assigning genre may be rejected by enthusiasts despite endorsement from the studio and producers. Consequently, a film's genre becomes a battleground or a cooperative ground for different user groups, signifying the importance of comprehending genre dynamics and transcending rigid genre critiques. Altman's theories find substantial support in the film *Inception*. Discrepancies in describing this movie exist among critics and viewers. As previously mentioned, this movie's genre has been classified as fantasy (as seen on Rotten Tomatoes), adventure, action, drama, science fiction, suspense, and mystery. A casual observer might categorize this film as action or drama due to its portrayal of violence and gunfights. In cases where individuals overlook the overarching plot and fail to grasp the intricate layers of reality, dreams, and nested dreams, they are likely to focus solely on the action sequences and hence label the film as an action movie. Viewers who pay attention to the visual effects and musical score, however, are inclined to characterize it as suspense and mystery (Altman, 1984). The seamless integration of visual effects and music enhances the film's thrilling ambiance typical of a suspenseful feature.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In the film *Inception*, Leonardo Di Caprio delves into the dreams of others, constructing intricate dreamscapes, extracting information, and implanting concepts. The cinematic piece was deemed remarkable by my assessment. Nevertheless, akin to any narrative belonging to the science fiction genre, the film transgressed certain established principles of contemporary science. The act of fabricating dreams for another individual, however, might conceivably be within the realm of possibility. In the hypothetical scenario of *Inception*, the scientific exploration of communal dreaming would hold significant allure.

Presently, the realm of consciousness does not permit the direct observation of another person's thoughts, a discovery made over a century ago. It was observed that upon awakening in the same location, distinct individuals such as Peter and Paul effortlessly return to their respective streams of consciousness, unperturbed by the interruption caused by slumber. The delineation between each individual's personal history and thoughts remains distinct, without any confusion arising as to the origin of specific thoughts. The mental contents of one individual do not inadvertently permeate into the mind of another. Admittedly, there are instances where we can infer the thoughts of another by observing their actions and tracking their visual focus. Nonetheless, the act of communal dreaming surpasses the current boundaries delineated by scientific knowledge.

In the movie we can also see the defense mechanism by Sigmund Freud being used as the extractors cause disturbances in the dream the subconscious slowly starts to defend itself and later on in the movie bending some rule of the science as it is a fictional movie we can see the character of Fischer's subconscious as military trained professions.

All this shows how imagined science or science fictions bends the actual reality in movies. It is feasible to inspire individuals with aspirations. A method of inducing dreams and ideas can be established even in the absence of sophisticated technological gadgets depicted in the film. The film pays tribute to a particular technique for effectively instilling ideas and dreams. In response to inquiries about instilling ideas in individuals, one character pointed out that it can be accomplished simply by instructing them not to contemplate a specific matter, such as refraining from pondering about an elephant.

In the extensive research conducted by Daniel Wegner and his associates, they have long been instructing individuals not to focus on thoughts about a white bear. Wegner's investigations have revealed that individuals tend to dwell more on a thought once they attempt to suppress it. Wegner labels this phenomenon as a rebound effect, also known as the white bear effect.

It is conceivable to inspire individuals with aspirations. A method of instilling dreams and concepts can be devised independent of the sophisticated gadgets depicted in the film. An approach to effectively implanting ideas and dreams was acknowledged in the film. Regarding the imparting of ideas to individuals, one character highlighted the simplicity of the task - instructing them to avoid contemplating a specific subject, for instance, refraining from pondering an elephant. Daniel Wegner and his collaborators have long engaged in instructing individuals not to dwell on certain thoughts. In their seminal research, the focus was on instructing individuals not to think about a white bear. Wegner's studies have demonstrated that attempting to suppress a thought leads to increased rumination on it subsequently. This phenomenon is termed a rebound effect, or the white bear effect by Wegner.

The concept of a white bear resurfaces following attempts at its suppression. The utilization of the white bear effect enables the initiation of dream inception. Endeavors to repress a certain idea will result in its manifestation within one's dreams.

Wegner, Wenzlaff, and Kozak harnessed the rebound effect to induce individuals to dream about a specific individual. Initially, participants were instructed to focus on a single person: either an individual they held romantic feelings for or someone they admired platonically. Subsequently, Wegner and his associates provided guidance for a cognitive task to be performed in the five minutes preceding sleep. Each participant engaged in a 5-minute writing exercise during which they documented their thoughts. Some were directed to inhibit thoughts about the specified person: Attempt to avoid contemplating the romantic interest.

Others were encouraged to contemplate the person, while some merely looked at the name before ruminating on any topic of their choice. Upon awakening, the participants completed a dream survey. They detailed the content of their dreams and evaluated the degree to which they dreamt about the romantic interest (or non-romantic interest) individual. Wegner and his colleagues observed a rebound effect: The endeavor to suppress thoughts about the designated individual heightened the frequency of dreaming about that individual! This rebound phenomenon manifested irrespective of the nature of the relationship with the target individual: Emotional attachment did not serve as the impetus for the dreams.

Wegner and his colleagues have delved into the realm of dreams in the movie *Inception* from a scientific perspective. Attempting to suppress thoughts often results in a rebound effect, causing the idea to persist in one's mind and potentially manifest in dreams. Dreams typically mirror our daily encounters, and the research by Wegner et al. highlights the paradoxical nature of thought suppression in enhancing their recollection.

It is feasible to influence another person's dreams by employing the rebound effect, akin to the concept depicted in *Inception*, which blurs the lines between reality and the dream world. The film underscores the challenge of distinguishing between actuality and dreams once an idea is conceived, leading individuals to question the origin of their thoughts and experiences. This ambiguity sometimes causes individuals to grapple with the authenticity of their perceptions, as exemplified by the uncertainty surrounding DiCaprio's character in the movie.

The genre of science fiction defies easy categorization due to its diverse subgenres and motifs. Hugo Gernsback, credited with coining the term "scientifiction," described it as a blend of romantic storytelling with scientific facts and visionary elements, offering both entertainment and educational value. He believed that such narratives not only captivate readers but also impart knowledge in an engaging manner, often envisioning future possibilities that may eventually come to fruition.

Posterity will regard them as pioneering a novel path, not solely within the realms of literature and fiction, but also in terms of progress. According to James Blish, the English term "science fiction" was discussed by Wells, who initially used it to describe what we now classify as 'hard' science fiction. This genre involves a diligent effort to adhere to established facts (as of the writing date) as the foundation of the narrative. If a story included a miraculous element, it was advised to not overwhelm the plot with multiple miracles. Rod Serling defined fantasy as the transformation of the impossible into the plausible, while he characterized science fiction as turning the improbable into the achievable.

Isaac Asimov proposed that science fiction pertains to literature focusing on how individuals respond to advancements in science and technology. A concise yet comprehensive definition of science fiction could be formulated as a form of literature that offers realistic conjecture on potential future occurrences.

This speculation should be firmly grounded in a deep understanding of the current and historical real world, as well as a profound comprehension of the scientific method's nature and importance.

Even ardent enthusiasts struggle to articulate a precise definition of science fiction. The absence of a universally satisfactory explanation is attributed to the genre's fluid boundaries and lack of easily identifiable constraints.

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