

# Bachelor Thesis paper In “Fjernsyns-og Multimediaproduksjon”

Do we need to follow the “laws” of filmmaking to craft a good film?

An analysis of “STAY”, “Lost Highway” and my own film “FILM”

*By Kevin Rex Nordlander*

*Studentnummer: 245680*

*Kandidatnummer:*



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University of  
Stavanger

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## **Terminology:**

**Axis:** An imaginary line between 2 characters in a dialogue scene. All filming happens on one side of the axis, and it should not be crossed by the camera.

**Breaking the fourth wall:** This originates from theatre, in which the fourth wall is the opening to the audience. The audience can look through it, but the characters cannot. Breaking the fourth wall refers to a character talking directly to the audience and acknowledging they are a character in a fictional story.

**Inciting incident:** The moment at the end of the first act that let's us know what the story will be about. In Harry Potter it is when Hagrid arrives and tell Harry he is a Wizard. That is now the journey the protagonist must take.

**Jump cut:** This is when the film cuts while still looking at the same thing. Like if we look at a character from the waist up, but then cut to the same character from the shoulders up. It can also be the same angle, but there is a cut without changing the angle.

**Empty Space:** Empty space in film is the area of the screen you're not focusing on. So, if a character is on the right side of the screen, the left side would be empty space.

**Climax:** The climax is the ending of the second act, where the tension builds to a peak, and the situation for the protagonist is the worst it has been so far.

**Panning:** This refers to camera movement. Panning is rotating the camera left or right.

## Introduction.

My whole life I've had a love for films. I remember being four years old in 2001 and seeing "Star Wars: A New Hope" for the first time. I was immediately hooked and had to watch the rest of them immediately, which included my mother explaining the concept of a prequel to me for the first time. Then "Attack of the Clones" the year after, once it came to DVD, and then "Revenge of the Sith" in cinema in 2005. In those years movies became a place I went to feel and experience worlds beyond mine. Movies made me feel. They made me happy, sad, excited, disappointed, anxious and relieved, playing with the whole spectrum of emotion. I found this to be fascinating. How did they do it? My interest quickly expanded from just watching movies, to wanting to know how movies are made. So, I sought out how movies truly are made, and how creative decisions made in writing, directing and editing can change a moving picture into an experience. There were a lot of "laws" for writing, directing and editing you had to follow, and if you followed them well, you would have a story that is gripping and entertaining. This all sounded great, but I was always a little curious about if these "laws" could be broken and a movie could still work regardless. At one point I happened upon some movies that felt weird. Something was off. Later, when learning more about film making, I realized they felt weird because they were breaking the "laws" of film making. But why?

In this paper I'll be analyzing two movies. "STAY" from 2005, and "Lost Highway" from 1997. Both movies break the "laws" of film making in different ways. I'm going to explore what effect this has on the audience, and whether breaking these "laws" is a crime, or a tool. I'll also be analyzing my own thesis film "FILM", which explores this concept as well.

## **Theory:**

Movies have a lot of ways they're "supposed" to be made, just like a lot of other art forms. There are unofficial "laws" for the various steps of the process.

When writing a story, you must think about its structure. To put it simply, stories are split into 3 acts. A beginning, a middle, and an end. Within these there is an inciting incident, a mid-point, and a climax. These should work together smoothly and carry the viewer along for the ride.

During filming you must think about various things. Things like there should be more empty space on the side of the screen the character is looking towards. In a dialogue scene between 2 characters, each character should be on opposite sides of the screen when it cuts to them. There is an axis, or a line, between the characters that shouldn't be crossed. Don't cut off the top of their head with the top of the screen.

While editing you shouldn't have any jump cuts, and you should cut to a rhythm that makes the scene flow, so you don't even think about the fact that there are cuts.

Sound should be the invisible hero. It shouldn't be noticed. What is meant by that, is that it should enhance the image without making you stop and notice it. It shouldn't interrupt the immersion.

These are some of the basic things you're supposed to do when crafting a film.

## **Method:**

To explore some different film making “laws”, how they are used, how they are broken, and what effect this has on the film, I’ll be analyzing “STAY”, “Lost Highway” and “FILM”, all of which break some of these “laws”. I’ll be analyzing what they did to break them, why they did it, if it had the desired effect, and if breaking the “laws” of filmmaking is a valid method to use when crafting a film.

I will start by introducing the movies and what they are about through a summary of the plot. Then I’ll dive into what makes them different in how they are crafted compared to other movies by looking at how they are written, directed and edited before reflecting on what I have found and present my conclusion.

## **The Films:**

## STAY

“STAY” was released in 2005. It was directed by Marc Forster and starred Ryan Gosling (Henry Foster), Ewan McGregor (Sam Foster), and Naomi Watts (Lila Culpepper) as the three main characters.

The movie opens on a car crash caused by the tire of Henry’s car blowing out. Henry survives the crash with no injuries, gets up and leaves.

Sam, a psychiatrist, meets up with his girlfriend, Lila, an artist and college student. Sam talks about his new patient, Henry, who is also an aspiring artist and college student. Sam Describes him as depressed, guilt-ridden and paranoid. During the first meeting between Sam and Henry, Henry is put off by his regular psychiatrist, Beth, not being there. Henry talks about hearing voices and predicts incoming hail, even though it’s a sunny day.

Sam introduces Henry to a friend of his named Leon. Henry is freaked out by seeing Leon, and claims Leon is his dead father, even though Leon does not recognize Henry.

Later Henry hints to Sam that he is planning on killing himself on Saturday at midnight. Sam discusses this with Lila, who has attempted suicide in the past, and she offers to help Sam prevent Henry’s death.

Sam finds Sam’s mothers house, where she lives with Sam’s childhood dog, despite Sam claiming both to be dead. His mother avoids Sam’s question before she starts bleeding from her head, and the dog bites Sam’s arm.

Sam talks to a police officer about what happened. The police officer also claims Henry’s mother is indeed dead, and that he attended her funeral. Sam is quite confused, and the scene and dialogue starts looping.

Henry had mentioned that he had fallen in love with a woman named Athena, a waitress and aspiring actress. Sam finds Athena doing a script reading of Hamlet. She agrees to take Sam to Henry, but after walking several stairs, Sam loses her. He heads back to the room where he first found her, and she is there doing the same lines from Hamlet again.

Sam keeps looking for Henry, until it is half an hour left until midnight and he finds himself in a bookstore Henry visited. When talking to the manager, Sam finds out Henry had traded one of his paintings for some books about his favorite artist who killed himself on the Brooklyn Bridge on his twenty first birthday. Henry's birthday is that Sunday, so Sam figures out Henry is planning on imitating his favorite artist by also killing himself on his twenty first birthday on the Brooklyn Bride, so Sam rushes to get there in time.

Sam catches up to Henry on the Brooklyn Bridge. The world is visually unraveling. Henry tells Sam he doesn't know what is real anymore. Sam tries to talk him down and tells him he is trying to help him. Henry claims he now realizes the world is a dream and proceeds to place a gun in his mouth and pulls the trigger.

The car crash from the beginning is played again, but in the aftermath this time, Henry is laying on the ground bleeding from his head. Sam, now revealed to be a medical doctor and Lila, a nurse, kneeled over him trying to help him. There is a large group of spectators around them. All the spectators are people we have seen throughout the movie. As Henry starts fading, he proposes to Lila, thinking she is Athena. Lila says yes, knowing he is about to die. We now see that the whole movie was a dream Henry experienced as he was dying on the ground, processing his emotions and massive guilt.

## **Lost Highway**



“Lost Highway” was released in 1997. It was directed by David Lynch. It starred Bill Pullman (Fred Madison), Patricia Arquette (Renee Madison) and Balthazar Getty (Pete Dayton) in the lead roles.

We open in the home of Fred Madison, a jazz player. Someone appears on the intercom saying, “Dick Laurent is dead”.

In the morning, his wife Renee goes outside and sees a VHS tape by their door. She watches it with Fred. The tape is a recording of their house. Fred tells Renee he had a dream of her getting attacked. He then sees her face as an old pale man.

They receive more tapes to the house, each tape showing footage of further and further into their house, including footage of them sleeping. They call the cops, but the cops are very dismissive about the whole thing. They ask Fred if he has any cameras. He responds by saying he doesn’t like things to be filmed, and he prefers to remember things how he subjectively remembers them instead.

Fred and Renee attend a party hosted by a friend of Renee, named Andy. At the party Fred is approached by the mystery man he saw Renee transform into earlier. The mystery man says he is friends with Dick Laurent and claims he has met Fred before. He also claims to be at Fred’s house right now. Fred doesn’t believe him, but the mystery man tells him to call his home phone. Fred calls home and the mystery man answers, while still also standing in front of Fred. Fred rushes from the party together with Renee.

The next day Fred finds another tape. He watches it alone. The tape shows Fred covered in blood, leaning over Renee’s dead body. Fred is then sentenced to death for the murder of Renee.

While in jail awaiting his death sentence, Fred experiences intense headaches and visions of the mystery man and a burning cabin in the desert. One day a guard goes to check on Fred, but sees that Fred is gone, and a young man named Pete Dayton is in his cell instead.

They release Pete to Pete’s parents.

Pete is followed by two detectives who aim to find out more about him. The next day Pete goes back to work at the garage. A regular customer, a gangster named Mr. Eddy comes in and asks Pete to fix his car. Mr. Eddy returns the next day, this time with his younger mistress Alice. Pete takes an immediate interest in her.

Alice later returns by herself, and starts an affair with Pete. They're terrified of Mr. Eddy finding out. They come up with a plan to rob a friend of Alice named Andy and then leave town together. Alice tells Pete that Mr. Eddy's real name is Dick Laurent, and he is an amateur porn producer.

While robbing Andy, Pete accidentally kills Andy by tossing him headfirst into the corner of a table. He looks at a photo in the house that shows Alice standing next to Renee. Later when the police are investigating the murder, they also look at the picture, but it only shows Renee.

Pete and Alice flee to a cabin in the desert. They get out of the car and start having sex on the sand. Alice then enters the cabin and Pete transforms back into Fred. Fred enters the cabin only to find the mystery man, and no Alice. The mystery man starts chasing Fred with a camera. Fred escapes and drives to the Lost Highway Hotel. There he sees Renee having sex with Mr. Eddy. Renee leaves, which leads to Fred kidnapping Mr. Eddy. He slits his throat, which doesn't kill him right away, but the mystery man shows up and shoots Mr. Eddy. The mystery man whispers something to Fred before disappearing. Fred drives back to his house. He walks up to the intercom on the outside and says, "Dick Laurent is dead". The 2 detectives from earlier roll up and start pursuing Fred in a car chase. The movie ends with Fred speeding down a highway with the cops behind him.

## **FILM**

We see our main character (MC) sitting in a room by himself working on a screenplay. His ex-girlfriend appears to check how it is going. During the conversation he finds out that the assignment included that the story must represent the writer, and in some way reflect them as a person. He must now throw away his script and come up with a new one 2 weeks before the deadline for having a screenplay ready.

He asks his best friend (BF) to help him come up with an idea. BF suggests he should talk to the three other students that have chosen to make fiction films for their thesis projects.

MC heads to the three editing rooms where they are sitting. He enters the first one and then finds himself in a stormy forest. Student 1 (S1) appears as they clash lightsabers, MC holding a blue one and S1 holding a red one. S1 explains that he appears as a villain because he is using the movie to explore the darker parts of himself that he doesn't usually share with others and tells MC he should do the same. They have a fight that MC wins. S1 tells MC to look at himself. MC finds himself now wielding both the blue and red lightsaber.

MC then enters the second editing room. He now finds himself in a desert. Student 2 (S2) appears and is immediately confrontational. MC says he just wants some advice, to which S2 responds that if he is asking for advice then he is already lost. S2 tells him only you can know what your own story is. They end up in a stand-off, which we do not see the result of.

In the third editing room it is just an editing room. MC is initially confused by seeing himself in the room, but then it changes into Student 3 (S3). MC asks S3 for advice. S3 is confused and claims they had this conversation two weeks ago, and the deadline was two days ago. Eventually S3 looks around the room and realizes what is happening. He claims this is good for MC, but won't tell him why.

MC then starts working on ideas by himself, getting more and more desperate. His mental health steadily declines. BF eventually shows up and his positive attitude angers MC. MC claims BF and his bad ideas is why MC is on the wrong track and if it wasn't for BF then he would have had a usable idea by now. BF tells him he won't have to see him anymore and slams the door on his way out.

MC is upset and ends up in a dream where he gets chased by a dark entity which when it catches up to him is revealed to be MC.

MC wakes up from the nightmare and heads to his ex's apartment to apologize. She accepts and agrees to help him apologize to BF.

MC apologizes to BF, which leads to MC, his ex and BF all working together to find an idea. After working for a while, MC pauses and realizes what his story should be. The film then goes in reverse, and we see MC where he was in the first scene. He replaces the title of the screenplay with "FILM". The camera then zooms out and reveals the film crew around him before it cuts to the title of the film, which is "FILM". We now see the film we just watched actually is the film MC ended up making, and he decided to use the story of finding a story as the story that represents him.

**Writing:**

The writing stage deals with the structure of a film. And a good way to introduce the basics of story structure is a quote from John Yorke in his book *Into the Woods: A Five Act Journey Into Story*.

“Three-act structure is the cornerstone of drama primarily because it embodies not just the simplest units of Aristotelian (and indeed all) structure; It follows the irrefutable laws of physics. Everything must have a beginning, a middle and end. Screenwriting teacher Syd Field first articulated the three-act structure down to these constituent parts: set-up, confrontation and resolution, with a turning point toward the end of the first (the inciting incident) and second (crisis) acts” (Yorke, 2014, p. 14).

All three film in question play with structure in a way that is considered poor form and each film has a different way of doing things you’re not really supposed to.

### **STAY:**

STAY challenges the norm in a way that isn’t unusual, but generally hated among viewers. It does that by using the “it was all a dream” trope. Not just for a scene or sequence, but the entire movie. The whole movie takes place in Henry’s mind.

Why is this a crime? Well, the court of public opinion has deemed it so. On Resetera, one user said “It trivializes everything we cared about and is an elementary school student’s idea of cleverness”. Another said “It can nullify interesting plot twists/progression that happened beforehand. It’s just an easy way out, especially if the plot point shown in the dream are rather shocking, like characters deaths”. On Reddit someone made a post titled “It was all a dream is the worst trope/cliché in all of storytelling”. People simply do not like it, so it should be avoided, as it is considered lazy writing. So why did STAY do it? And why has it become a cult classic and is considered a misunderstood gem despite this?

STAY breaks the rule of not using that trope, but when you finish the movie, you don’t feel the writing was lazy at all. Instead, you’re left feeling the exact opposite, that there must have been tremendous amounts of thought put into the story.

Instead of trivializing what we cared about, it amplifies it. The conflict in the movie is that we care about Henry, and we want Sam to stop him from committing suicide. We don't want him to die. This tension builds and builds until we reach the climax where he eventually kills himself and we're left sad that this struggling man didn't see another way out. But then we see reality and are now faced with his death a second time, but this time dying from an accident, and we feel bad for the character for a whole different reason, adding another layer of sympathy for him. We wanted Henry to live, but instead he had to die twice. Once in his mind because he was tormented and again physically because of an accident. It was all a dream, but because the dream ties into what is happening around him, the reveal becomes the cherry on top of our emotional journey, instead of eliminating the validity of what we felt.

A big thing people dislike with the "it was all a dream trope" is that it eliminates all the progress/choices side characters made, as it wasn't their dream, and they didn't experience it. But in STAY it solves this. We follow Sam, and his driving force is saving Henry's life. When we see reality, that is still the case, and we can still feel along with Sam, as the Henry on the bridge and the actions he makes on the bridge is what inspired dream-Sam's actions. We saw bridge-Sam all along but represented by dream-Sam.

### **Lost Highway:**

Scenes just like films have a three-act structure. "Lost Highway" plays with that a bit, as well as throwing out ongoing stories with no explanation.

"Scenes, like acts and like stories, have their own three-act structure, and mimic exactly an archetypal story shape. Just as in every story a protagonist battles an antagonist in pursuit of a goal, so scenes replicate that structure" (Yorke, 2014, p. 54)

"Lost Highway" has a structure that is confusing with turns at unexpected moments with no explanation to help the viewer make sense of what is happening. To emphasize a sense of confusion regarding the film's structure, there are also scenes that challenge the three-act structure sprinkled throughout the movie.

At one point after Pete has been released from prison, there is a scene that opens on him sitting on a lawn chair in the backyard of his parent's house. He sits for a while, then stands up, walks over to the fence bordering into the neighbor's empty yard, looks at the yard, then the scene ends. We never see that yard again, or the neighbors, or anything related to that scene. Does that scene follow the three-act structure?

"No matter how you look at it, all stories have three movements – a beginning, middle and end. You could structure a story as *setup, complication* and *resolution*; or even look at it in emotional terms as creating *attraction, tension* and *satisfaction* in the reader. (Iglesias, 2005, p. 113)

You could look at it as:

Setup: Pete sits in backyard

Complication: Pete wants to look at the other yard

Resolution: Pete looked at the other yard

But it's not satisfying. The scene falls flat after we expect something to be in the neighbor's backyard, or at least for a callback to it later, but we never get that. We are only left confused about the purpose of the scene, something we shouldn't be. Scenes should have purpose and push the story forward, but this one doesn't.

However, scenes like this one break the rules for purposes of a scene and only barely reaches the criteria for a three-act story, but without us realizing it, it helps in setting a tone for the film.

The film is purposefully abstract and wants to keep you guessing. Even when it ends, you're not sure what you just watched. Did Fred kill his wife? If so, why? Does Pete exist? If not, then why did we follow him for half the movie? Why did the movie change halfway through into a completely different film? Who is the mystery man? The film doesn't tell us any of this. You are meant to reflect on it and come up with your own theories and having scenes like the backyard one keeps you on your toes. The movie works like a collection of Lego pieces. It hands you a collection of pieces. Some have clear purposes. some you don't know what to do with. But it's

up to you to put them together into whatever you want. You don't have to use all the pieces. Some won't fit with what you want to create.

In this way the movie breaks down structure so you can build it yourself and it creates a story that's different for everyone. The joy of this movie is discussing it with someone after it is finished and seeing what everyone else took from it.

### **FILM:**

In my own film, I've taken a rather different and not very common approach towards toying with how the film structured. One that becomes very apparent early on. That is having each scene be a different genre/style. One word for it would be "inconsistent". The purpose of this is seeing if a story really needs one consistent tone/style/genre for it to work. Switching tones can be a useful tool in telling the audience how to feel, but normally you keep the same genre/style through a film. Switching it up can be immersion breaking. Like if you have a crime thriller, but suddenly for one scene it becomes a slap stick comedy. It would break immersion. But can consistent inconsistency keep immersion? Can a film where it switches genre every scene depending on who is in the scene, and no characters even have names still work?

Regarding the film as a whole, I subjectively believe it to work, but of course I am biased. Personally, I feel that despite being wildly inconsistent, the audience settles into it and can enjoy it despite not being consistent. I have tested it out in front of people that know filmmaking as well as some that don't. The response has been quite positive from both groups with a response of viewers having fun with it and enjoying watching something that is "weird" and "out there" in terms of creative approach and ideas. One viewer saying "This would be great for anyone with ADHD, there's always something new and interesting happening without really having the time to get bored of any one thing". Maybe they're right. Maybe we just now live in a time with Tik Tok and other social media reducing our attention span by feeding us constantly new things within seconds, so therefore people enjoy this film, as it imitates that a bit by accident. I'll leave concluding that hypothesis to someone more qualified within psychology than me.



I found semi-unexpected results when showing this film to people regarding their reaction to how I unconventionally play with structure and pacing. Several times when the film gets to the point where it hard cuts from a happy dancing swan straight to the main character going through a breakdown and he is crying at the camera, people laughed at the sudden change. A genuine “that was funny” laugh. The scene where he cries at the camera is rather heavy and uncomfortable to watch. But through experimental structure set up the movie achieved making someone laugh at the mere sight of a broken crying man. Within seconds people’s emotions went from confused enjoyment of a swan to surprise laughter to sad and uncomfortable, all without breaking immersion.

## **Directing:**

**STAY/Lost Highway**

I'll be grouping these two together as I'd like to talk about how they both do the same thing, but for different reasons.

Both films have actors doing purposefully poor performances. The acting is wooden, cheesy and lacking in depth. But why would a director want their actors to do a bad job? Having actors act good seems like a pretty basic rule, and the movie will be off putting if you don't follow that rule.

In *STAY* every actor other than Ryan Gosling is acting poorly. I found myself confused the first time I watched it, because I know Ewan McGregor can act really well, so why was he so bad? Just like other confusing aspects of that movie, you have to make it to the end to understand it. Once you get to the end and you realize that it was all Henry's dream, suddenly it makes sense why Henry is the only character being acted with proper depth. It's his dream. He doesn't know these other people, so they lack nuance. It works perfectly from a storyteller standpoint. Henry being the only one showing proper emotional depth also makes us emotionally connect with him the most, further driving our connection to him and our want for him to be saved. The other characters having flat acting also distances us from them. They're there in front of us, but something isn't quite right, and we can't fully connect. Which makes us share Henry's experience. The characters are there in front of him, but something is off, and he can't fully connect with them.

In *Lost Highway* the actors speak in an odd stiff emotionless manner, and the lines are written in a way where they're not quite natural or how someone would actually speak. On the surface this may seem just like poor writing and bad actors. But it has been written and performed this way on purpose, with a lot of thought put into how to balance it being bad, but not like it was an accident. The way the dialogue is performed feeds into what I mentioned earlier. Emotions and motivations behind lines are hard to read, so you must insert your own theory. If they were clear, then the story would be clearer, and we'd have less pieces to use when assembling our story Lego set. Instead, the dialogue adds to the open-ended confusion, and we can interpret them more freely to fit our own narrative regarding what the movie is about.

## **Editing:**

### **STAY/FILM**

Here I'll be grouping STAY and FILM together as here they do a very similar thing.

If you watch STAY, you will see no shortage of editing "laws" being broken. Characters in a dialogue are edited to the same side of the screen, we change scenery at what seems random, characters switch places in the room, there are jump cuts switching between different takes in front of our eyes. The movie is visually confusing and is edited chaotically. Apply this to a random movie and it will be ruined. But here it works. This is because it's a dream. Have you ever woken up from a dream and tried explaining it? A lot of it doesn't make any sense. Things just happened and changed at random. You went from one place to another but can't remember how you got there. The movie uses breaking "laws" to portray what a dream feels like. It is hinting at the true nature of the narrative while not telling you what is happening. And if you watch the movie a second time, knowing the ending, what was once annoying becomes clear creative choices you can follow and appreciate.

In FILM there is a particular scene that does something similar, and that is the third editing room scene. I edited that scene to be very off putting. Not only off putting but so distracting that it breaks immersion. But why would I want to do a poor editing job and break immersion? Every piece of editing in that scene took thought in how to maximize immersion breaking and a sense of unease. I placed the characters on the wrong side of the screen, made the voice not add up with the lips, changed a bottle into a cup and then removed the sound of the cup falling, made a microphone fall into frame, made a jump cut, flipped the screen while you could see it, kept room tone loud at times and instead of zooming during a rise in emotion I panned.

During a showing to someone not familiar with filmmaking she became visually uncomfortable and said, "This is making me so anxious, and I don't know why". But why would I want that? Seems counterintuitive.

In that scene MC becomes very uncomfortable and I wanted the audience to feel along with him. In this scene S3 also realizes that the film is currently filming. He realizes MC was able to

make a script, and he wrote about when they met two weeks earlier in that script, and he is now currently in the film MC is making. He breaks the fourth wall without announcing it. He is the only character not immersed in the film, so therefore I broke the immersion of the viewer to have the same experience. This scene is the first hint at this film being the film MC makes.

## **Conclusion:**

Do we need the “laws” of filmmaking to craft a good film?

From analyzing “STAY”, “Lost Highway”, and “FILM” as well as having watched many more films that break or play with the boundaries of these “laws”, I can see that there is absolutely a place

for breaking these “laws”. These “laws” are important, and all films/stories will follow many of them automatically. With some it’s like Yorke said, they’re like the Laws of Physics. They just are. There’s no fighting it. Do we need these “laws”? Yes, we do. In the films I have analyzed they still follow more of them than they break. They have just selectively broken the ones they wanted to for a desired effect. The films still work because they followed other ones that were needed for a coherent (to the point they want them to be) story.

There’s a saying that says, “You need to know the rules to break them”. This strikes very true. The creators of “STAY” and “Lost Highway” have an expert grasp of the rules, and that is why they can break them to create desired effects. With the editing room scene I made, I knew the “laws”, so I made conscious decisions in how to break them.

When applied properly and with a good grasp of what the “laws” are, you can achieve great results with unconventional filmmaking techniques where you break those “laws”. You can tell stories and invoke emotions in a whole new way. Even if the story stayed the same, “STAY” wouldn’t be nearly as good as it is if it wasn’t for how much it breaks the “laws” of directing and editing. You wouldn’t be as immersed into Henry’s mind if the filmmakers didn’t make the film seem “weird”.

Filmmaking is an artform, and like other artforms you can break the “laws” to create something new if you know what you’re doing. Without that we wouldn’t have Jazz or Picasso.

Abstract filmmaking proves you can break the “laws”, but you must know them and respect them to break them.

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