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## **Visitation Dreams**

Socrates states that the unexamined life is not worth living. "Existence has a purpose and design and it is man's unique ability to grasp it intellectually". (Wong, 2)

### **Introduction**

Visitation Dreams, is not only a story of the confounded anti-relationship between grandmother and granddaughter but a story of how the physical world consistently intersects with the spiritual and how we, as humans, grapple with making sense of its meaning.

The digital story I constructed is about an encounter I had with my grandmother, three years after her death. My grandmother and I did not share much of a relationship and as I state in my story, I didn't even think she liked me. She was a woman who had little faith in anything, especially God. Her father died, a young man in his 20's, of cancer and her mother, unable to cope with the loss of her husband, committed suicide by jumping off an unknown bridge at the start of winter and was eventually found in the east river in New York City sometime after the ice thawed. Naturally, I understand my grandmother's lack of faith. Losing her faith and ability to have a connected loving relationship with anyone left her bitter.

A visitation dream is when a loved one comes back from the beyond with an important message. This can be simply just to say hello or goodbye or to actually reveal a more detailed message of meaning. When you awake from a visitation dream, there is no doubt of this otherworldly experience. The message is clear, powerful, and uplifting.

If anyone could come back in the form of a visitation dream, it would make sense that it be my grandmother. My mother and her two sisters often told me stories of how my grandmother had psychic abilities and somehow "knew" when things were going to happen. She was connected to something beyond herself, even if she didn't want to be. Herein lies the beginning of her journey and struggle with "faith" that ultimately transcends into my journey and struggle with "faith", the unmistakable education of the irrational.

Visitation Dreams brings to light a deeper meaning such as what is our purpose and meaning in life? Does spirituality or religion play a role in furthering our educational

path? Is the irrational a valid form of learning and can this lead to a transformative learning experience?

Through David Wong's study *Beyond Control and Rationality: Dewey, Aesthetics, Motivation, and Educative Experiences* and the framework of Formalism I intend to show how *Visitation Dreams* looks beyond control and rationality to develop a fuller account of the human experience.

The audience for this piece was never supposed to go beyond myself. I've always had a fascination with finding meaning and purpose in life and this event only pushed me further into the great uncertainty of human experience. After making this digital story, I decided to post it on YouTube and since then, I have received a few responses from others who have experienced strange metaphysical happenings, all wanting to believe that there is some unexplained force out there that wants to let them know everything will be okay. This story can exist for them.

*Visitation Dreams* is anything but a conventional form of digital story and dispels anything but a traditional sense of learning. It comes from a place beyond control and rationality. Wong states, "The good student is often described as intentional, cognitive, metacognitive, critical, and reflective. Although these qualities are indeed important, I suggest that powerful educative experiences can neither be fully explained nor evoked if learners exercise only logical reasoning and self-control." (Wong, 1) *Visitation Dreams* takes its audience on an irrational journey through a metaphysical plane of learning and the outcome is a transformative learning experience. This is achieved throughout the story in a variety of ways. Through explicit and implicit imagery, narration, music, and transitions, I draw attention to how we can be motivated by things beyond our control and intention. Experience is gained through existence and existence is a teaching tool.

Lambert states that stories are boiled down into one of two types: 1. "A stranger came to town..." or 2. "We went on a vacation." *Visitation Dreams* fits into the first of the two. Change found its way into my subconscious through my grandmother's transcendental visit.

### **The Framework**

Looking through the lens of a formalistic approach, *Visitation Dreams* exists as a philosophy of aesthetics, combining poetic narration, home movie video clips, haunting music, and effective use of editing. The piece may stand on its own as merely an aesthetic piece but its overall driving theme of the human experience as supernatural is far too powerful.



Visitation Dreams begins with an establishing shot of the skyline or the heavens. The very first image we see. This image signifies the otherworldly, a spiritual realm: the sky or the heavens representing the Kingdom of God. This is as close as we can get to the heavens existing on an earthy plane but within the horizon perhaps the two can meld. Haunting music guides this image into existence and helps match the tone of the story.

Visitation Dreams can also be viewed through the lens of Philosophical Criticism. Here we can examine the piece as philosophical, even spiritual. Through the various uses of techniques, we can see the storyteller's "vision" and gain insight into the point-of-view or view of life. It is here faith is found. Wong describes faith, as "the firm belief in something for which there is no formal proof." It is through faith that I find "subjective certainty about objective uncertainty." (Wong, 214)



“You encircled us in silence. Leaving us in anticipation of your words.” (Derr) I am the focus of my grandmother’s supernatural visit and I use this shot to represent how the focus or the camera is on me. Also this is the first time we see a superimposed image of the grandmother cross dissolving over an image of the reoccurring heavenly skyline. My grandmother fades out as the skyline image fades in. This superimposition representing the earthy connection to the supernatural and how they overlap and are connected.

Another way to view Visitation Dreams would be through the lens of Psychoanalytic Criticism. Through this we discover the hidden messages and meaning in the story and uncover the truth of identity. It is through these message we interpret meaning.



In Visitation Dreams, my grandmother begins to ascend the stairs of the cottage leading to the cottage door. “It took me a moment to realize where I was. I felt humbled by what had just happened.” The visuals of Visitation Dreams take the viewer on their own narrative arc. As I awaken from my dream, I show the viewer how my grandmother is leaving or going back to her supernatural state. She climbs the stairs and begins to open the door of the cottage as the heavenly sky again representing a supernatural world superimposes over her. The visit or dream is over.

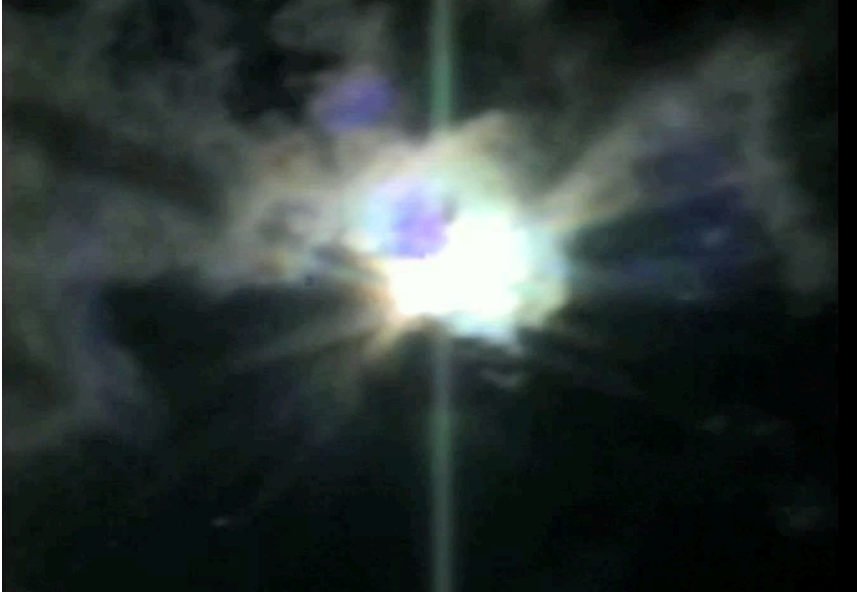
### **The Analysis**

The overall formalist tone of Visitation Dreams is haunting. We are taken on a journey of the human experience through my account of a supernatural dream. Through my use of matching dream-like narration and home movie video images, I find a larger presence at play: searching for meaning, the purpose of life, and the supernatural elements that drive that purpose. The narration itself is slow and soft.

It's poetic narration leads to a more accurate depiction of a dream-like state. The music that flows through the piece is haunting as well, a mix of beauty and uplifting uncertainty. The only other sounds we here are sounds directly taken from the home videos in the form of little blubs or scratches. We hear the grandmother's voice only once when she is scolding me for going onto the dock, a sign of disapproval the grandmother has for her grandchild. In this image I turn away from my grandmother, a sign of disconnect. The image freezes and fades away. This is the only time I am seen with my grandmother.



The uses of explicit and implicit images weave together to bring this dream-like narrative to completion. These images are equally haunting and have an experimental aesthetic to them. It is here we see the spiritual force that drives this narration. Images of sky and reflective water signify the presence of a force outside us.



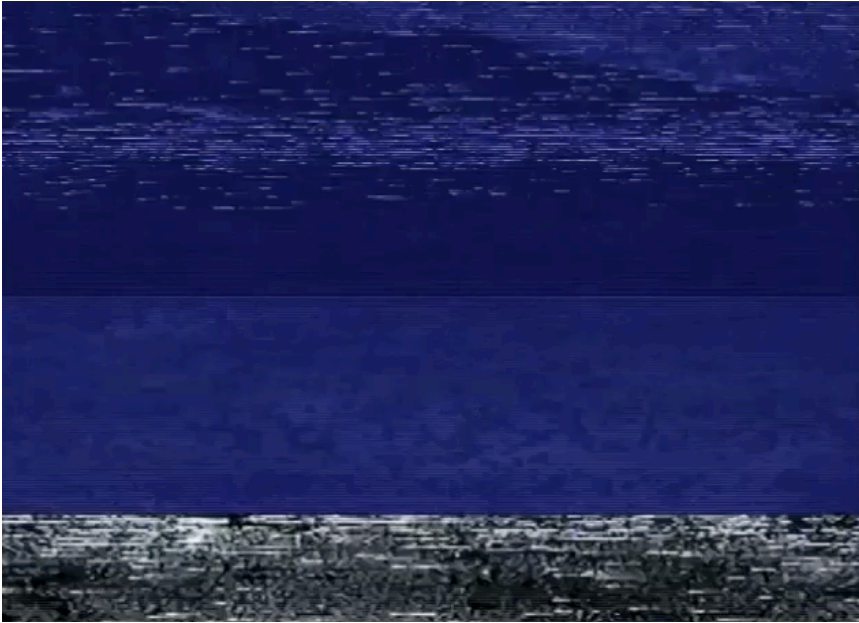
Nature video clips were used, as they are the closest visual portrayal to the spiritual realm that exists within the human realm. One of my favorite clips is when I mention how I hated my grandmother telling me to appreciate life when she in fact did not. I then mention that despite the contradiction, I heard truth in her words." The image I show is of the moon. The camera tilts down to reveal its reflection in the water, suggesting that the truth always looks us in the eye. Through the use of implicit images and juxtaposition of these images, new layers of meaning are added. My grandmother's words are reflective. My grandmother, who I felt no connection to in life, is my mirror.



"Well-chosen images act as mediators between the narrative and the audience. Audiences enjoy stories that lead them to metaphorical rivers of meaning and require them to "jump in" in order to make their own connections. (Lambert, 17)



The editing in this piece was also a main component in driving the formalistic plot of the story home. I used quick editing and incorporated static taken directly from static engrained in the home video clips. The use of juxtaposition, the placement of clips in succession, and experimental layout add to the questioning dreaminess. The video clips can also be interpreted as the constant switching of channels on an old television set suggesting that the idea of possibility exists and is numerous. Possibility is a catalyst for change.



We actually do see a television set once in the story when I am contemplating why my grandmother came back from the other side to deliver me an important

message. We see a football game on the television perhaps signifying that our lives are much like scenes on a screen.

Through Visitation Dreams “we anticipate the possibility of what might be-a new perception of the world or a new way of being in the world-and are energized to move forward”. (Wong, 208) I am hopeful and inspired by my grandmother’s reply when I ask her what happens when we die. “Her face lite up, her mouth hooked at one end, and she said with assurance, you don’t need to worry about a thing, everything is going to be okay.” This new perception, her ultimate message, has a lasting affect on how I now see the physical world.



Highly spiritual overtones of this story give clear insight into my point-of-view. I struggle to find more depth and meaning in a human existence and even though the insight has been granted, I still doubt its existence but why? This is clearly the function of the human mind. How many visions do we need before we become believers? I still doubt this fantastical newfound insight at the end.

## **Conclusion**

The problem with the conclusion is there is no conclusion. The ending lacks subjective certainty and perhaps “faith” is questioned. Does the grandmother’s ultimate message truly have an impactful affect on how I now see the physical world? We are left to grapple at billowing threads? We are left with unanswered questions but I find this humble approach honest in its ending. Isn’t this the way of the supernatural forces, not knowing where they came from and leaving us wanting more? One thing is for certain; a transformative learning experience exists, dangling



at its ends. Despite the uncertainty, the overpowering awe of the dream affects the storyteller and audience alike. The storyteller is transformed against her will, the irrational learning taking hold, the human experience stretching its limitations and opening unexamined doors. "The storytelling process is a journey." (Lambert, 24) as life is a journey. "Clarifying stories helps people to understand the context of lives." (Lambert, 10) This course of realization can happen immediately or over the span of many years. Learning can be a process especially when dealing with the metaphysical realm. Discovery does not happen overnight, at least not in my case. I want more out of life but am too afraid to believe on belief alone. I anticipate this ending. I exit now with a sense of anticipation, "the imaginative sensing of possibility." (Wong, 192) and if possibility is all there is, isn't that enough?

### **References**

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