

Abstract

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My thesis project explored a recurring dream and was based on the physical and metaphysical presentation of windows. The word “window” comes from the ancient term “wind eye”, descriptive of the means that would allow a person to see the oncoming storm or the morning sunrise. Windows have revealed and peeled away different meanings. They separate living space from the elements of the outside world or different rooms within a building. Through my personal experience of a recurring dream, the window revealed a vision of a world within the dream. It could become a time frame or a desire for a different life. I explored these ideas through movement, personal stories, journaling, and use of props. All of these components resulted in a full evening length dance concert for seven dancers. The set design included three windows and sheer “window” curtains, which were designed by Stefan Gibson. *No Real Place* presented emotional themes in a dream world.

NO REAL PLACE

By

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Preface

I wanted to explore the meaning of a recurring dream in relation to my real life. I decided to analyze my personal experience after reading through past diary entries where I found a recurring story over nine years of a similar dream. The discovery of the story and dream led to an exploration of the meaning behind my dream by researching Freudian, Jungian and related materials.

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Chapter 1: The Dream Interpreter

Many psychologists believe that dreams are images and energies that communicate issues or events in our waking lives. These images come from the unconscious mind, which allows deeper issues to be presented to an individual. Dealing with dreams requires the understanding of the conscious and unconscious minds which work together and are interdependent.

Studies of the left and right lobes of the brain interacting with each other help to explain the two different states of consciousness. The right lobe of the brain represents the “dreaming” unconscious self. It deals with the big picture and with intuition. The left lobe of the brain can relate more to the conscious self. It deals with rational, analytical thought, language, naming and definitions. The logical left side of the brain helps the “dreaming” right side to analyze the deeper meanings of situations or of one’s self. The dreaming right side of the brain allows the decision making left side of the brain the freedom and creativity of new ideas.

In the book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, first published in 1900, Sigmund Freud first argued that the foundation of all dream content is wish fulfillment and he said that the foundation is always to be found in the events of the day preceding the dream. He claimed that there are dream operations that can be applied to repress the wishes in forming the dream. Many adult dreams have a form of distortion that occur within the content. Freud called this distortion the “dream manifest work”.

It is because of these distortions that the manifest content differs so greatly from dream analysis in waking life. So Freud believed that by reversing the distortions of the dream, the latent analysis would be clear.

The following is a list of dream operations that Freud utilized in his analysis and interpretation of dreams:

* *Condensation* — one dream object stands for several associations and ideas; thus "dreams are brief, meagre and laconic in comparison with the range and wealth of the dream-thoughts".

* *Displacement* — a dream object's emotional significance is separated from its real object or content and is attached to an entirely different one that does not raise the censor's suspicions.

* *Representation* — a thought is translated to visual images.

* *Symbolism* — a symbol replaces an action, person, or idea.

Another major psychologist who elaborated and found a different way to analyze dreams was Carl Jung. By using Jungian analytical psychology, Jung developed a central dream analysis method. Jung believed that Freud's notion of dreams as representations of unfulfilled wishes was simplistic and naive. In the book *The Essential Jung: Selected Writings*, by Anthony Storr, Storr states that Jung was convinced that dream interpretation was the richness, complexity, and entirety of the unconscious mind, both personal and collective. Jung believed the psyche to be a self-regulating organism in which conscious attitudes were likely to be compensated for unconscious (within the dream) by their opposites.

His belief regarding the psyche led to the creation of a dream analysis that catered to the patient's psychological state and avoided exercises that were too theoretical and dogmatic. He stressed exploring a patient's association in depth with an image from the dream and encouraged patients not to steer away from the image. Jung would argue that just as we do not doubt the importance of our conscious experience, we ought not to second guess the value of our unconscious lives.

In Tony Crisp's book, *Your Dream Interpreter*, he examines how to understand and control recurring dreams. The recurring dream is a phenomenon that 70% of women and 65% of men experience within their lifetime. A recurring dream is an indication that something is left unresolved or something has not been realized.

An example of a recurring dream is one that I, Marissa Guerrero, have experienced first hand. The following describes my dream:

Originally, I find myself in a room with no doors and one window. Then over time the room develops into a two story house with multiple windows. Some windows are open and some are closed. Some windows have sheer white curtains. Over another length of time, I see everything in a brown tint. I am searching for a way out, other people, or furniture. There is a sense of urgency or anxiety. When I reach the second floor I know the dream is about to end, but I do not want it to end because I haven't found whatever it is I am looking for. The dream ends by looking out of an opened window. A bright white light flashes in front of me and I wake up or I see profiles of people or maybe I see rocks or a mountain...not sure...---Marissa Guerrero

My personal recurring dream can be analyzed from many different angles. The following are questions gathered from my personal journal over nine years:

1. What do an empty house and windows symbolize in the dream?
2. What is driving the emotional state of anxiety?
3. What does the white light at the end mean?
4. Why are there are two different endings?
5. Why does the house increase in size?
6. What does the color brown mean?

These questions were mentioned several times in my journal depending on how many times the dream occurred. The last time I had the dream was in January 2007. At that time I was going through a lot of stress personally and professionally. I decided to face this dream and to figure out what message my intuition was communicating to me through Jungian concepts.

The literature on dreams is voluminous. The following information is a collective outcome of the many articles and books I studied. I decided to address four images in my dream: the house, room, window, and light. Jung and Crisp state that the house represents the self, and the different activities or dimensions of one's personality. The house depicts the body, but particularly the areas associated with the body. For example, the upper floor of one's physical house/body is one's head or mental attitude. So the upstairs may be associated with one's attitudes. The downstairs of the house may be associated with sex or reproduction.

The “room” depicts an atmosphere or particular situation. A big room suggests an opportunity to do things, while finding a new room in the house is the discovery of new talents or new possibilities in oneself. Light represents the ability to see, understand, or know where one is going and what surrounds oneself. Light can translate into one’s consciousness and awareness of individuality. Because light holds color, it can relate to one’s own unconscious talents and qualities. The “window” symbolizes an outlook on life and an awareness of other people or outer events. All four images appear to relate to the awareness of, or lack of same, to the realization of full potential in the conscious life.

The result of my research clarified my understanding of my personal recurring dream and led to new directions for fulfilling my choreographic process.

Chapter 2: The Life of Windows

A window serves as an opening in a wall of a house to let in air and light. The function of the window presents a balance of convenience between light and temperature. The window is a visual communication link between two sides of a wall. The window has a long history in architecture and remains a vital component to the way architects design buildings.

Windows become another “eye” to the world outside. They provide limited access to what an individual can see from within a building or room. Limited access of vision can stimulate a variety of emotions and can also create awareness of the design and placement of the window. A window in a high-rise building in a big city often opens up to a brick wall of the building next door and may affect the response of feeling enclosed and trapped.

In the book, *The Timeless Way of Building*, by Christopher Alexander, Alexander theorizes that architecture gains aliveness by reflecting the patterns of behavior of those who inhabit it. In other words, the day to day repetitive actions, events and activities of human beings naturally organize space in a way that is healing and nurturing.

When those patterns are ignored, Alexander suggests, we have the type of architecture that now fills our cities...dead, mechanical boxes, impersonal and cold.

I could relate to the Alexander book because I work in an office with no windows. I find that I am very stressed in my work space and that it affects how I communicate with colleagues throughout the day. It occurred to me that the link between my recurring dream of many windows in a house and my every day existence in a small office with no windows provided a very interesting relationship. The relationship was between my conscious and unconscious mind regarding a desire that was not being satisfied in real life. I decided to further my exploration by creating a choreographic project based on the role of a window both in my dreams and in my reality.

Chapter 3: The Choreographic Process

No Real Place began as an unintentional discovery. It was the week before my thesis proposal was due. I had been working on choreography based on a parody of family structures in American society. I was stressed out because the work was at a dead halt creatively. I came home from rehearsal very frustrated and decided to just go to bed. The next morning I woke up remembering a dream I had experienced many times before. I grabbed my journal and wrote down all that I could remember. I realized at that moment that the dream was a sign urging me to come face to face with it. The dream became the basis of what was to become my thesis research.

I started researching several psychology books and articles about the meaning of dreams and I decided to focus on the consistent images that I had been recorded in my personal journal over nine years based on the same dream. These images were of a house, several rooms, multiple windows, and light. The most prominent image was the window in the dream. This led my research to focus on how windows affect architecture and also how window can affect an individual's emotion. I prepared a survey based on two questions. The questions were as followed:

How would you describe your favorite window?

What specifically attracts you to this type of window?

The survey included fifty people. More than half of the fifty people described a window facing some type of outdoor scene and they pictured themselves inside the building which hosted the window. For example, one individual stated that he/she really loved bay windows that faced a patch of woods or a small window that looked out upon a courtyard. The remaining individuals described looking at a window from the outside. They were either mesmerized by the architectural design in relationship to the building or they were curious about the activities within the window.

The idea of being a voyeur intrigued me. I wanted to know how it felt to watch someone without them really knowing I was watching. I found that when I tried to watch the events within a window of a house I felt like I was violating the privacy established by the individuals within the window. It was a very unpleasant feeling.

The unpleasant sense that I experienced was elaborated even more when I watched the film titled, *Rear Window*, by Alfred Hitchcock. Here was a man confined to his apartment because of an injury and who was spying on his neighbors. The spying resulted in the discovery of a double murder and a lesson to mind your own business; but it also presented all the different visual angles a window could present. The use of camera angles intentionally created certain perceptions that were not particularly clear and truthful. There were activities blocked from the voyeur's view and the blocking of view created a freedom to imagine what could be occurring behind a wall or door.

Once I collected all of the research, I started to design what type of windows I wanted to incorporate in the choreography. I was interested in exploring how windows could be manipulated to reveal different points of view. I ultimately chose the double hung design window because it was the easiest to get built in a short period of time.

I met with my set designer, Stefan Gibson, a month before school started in the fall 2007. Originally, I visualized various sized windows slowly moving through space. These windows would not only slide but would fly through space from the catwalks of the Dance Theatre in the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. Once I realized how specific I had to be with the time and budget limitations, Stefan and I decided to create three windows. The first one would be a life size vertical window, the second would be a smaller version of the vertical window, and the third would be a horizontal window with a bench attached to it.

Stefan and I kept going back and forth about what type of material should be used for the glass effect. I did not want to use real glass because of safety issues. He suggested different types of plastics, either clear or not clear. I wanted to get a sample of each but it was too expensive to get a big enough sample to play with in rehearsal. In the end, I decided not to use plastic and to keep the window frames open which allowed movement to come in and out of the frames. Once I had established the designs of the windows, then I was able to focus on my dancers.

I had each of the dancers write and share a dream that was very prominent in their memory and also to describe their favorite windows. In addition, I had them discuss what dominant emotion developed out of the dream versus the feeling they had when they thought about their favorite window. I decided to use some of their personal stories, plus my own recurring dream as a device for creating movement phrases.

I started playing with two upstage curtains. The curtains created space which resembled a window or some kind of doorway. I wanted to have unexplained activity within the curtains. I explored how one would walk if one were forced to walk in an unknown place. I was not sure if an individual would be tentative, frantic, or confused. I explored with the dancers different ways to enter and exit from the space between, around, and through the curtains.

I collaborated with the dancers to interpret movement from the text collected from our dreams and memories. We focused on the emotional content and what was discovered from our stories. The stories helped to structure the content of the whole concert by dividing the material into sections. The sections were as follows:

1. My personal recurring dream
2. Perception of voyeurism
3. The four parameters of space
4. The feeling of trapped and containment

5. Memories

6. Individual torment of trying to find a way out of the dream or space

The six sections included solos, a quartet, a duet, and two large group segments. One solo with the life size vertical window was based on the feeling of being trapped and contained. I wanted to explore how it felt if the window had limited my movement by keeping me inside the frame of the window. Moments of freedom were incorporated by moving in front, back, and around the window frame disconnecting from it physically. The ultimate challenge was to gain control over the window. In retrospect, I do not think I ever accomplished the control of the window. Instead I became defeated and walked away in the end.

The duet between David McMichael and Laura Tucker moved in and out of the window bench. The movement was based on a personal memory of a past love affair. I was really intrigued with how one person constantly sought physical contact with the other individual and how the other person consistently ignored the attempt at connection. The roles of seeking, ignoring, and/or avoiding became movement metaphors. The window itself symbolized altered communication by moving in circles. The realization of the past love affair was that my lover and I kept talking in circles but were saying and wanting the same thing...affection.

After establishing the sections I had to find a way to connect them. I realized that in order to connect the sections I would have to integrate my own role throughout the emotional journey. I became the through line by becoming a character who traveled through a dream of unknown places. The dancers became dream people who inhabited the spaces and who were tormented because they could not find their way out. Once the transitions were created between the sections, the final product resulted in a purposefully distorted abstraction of a dream world.

I wanted the performance space to be dream like and chose soft colors for costumes and sets. The Dance Theatre was transformed by replacing the black curtains with sheer ivory curtains which had plenty of movement and gave the space an airy presence. I made sure that the cast would be dancing on the wooden floor of the theatre and that the white cyclorama would be the backdrop on the stage. All of these choices transformed the space drastically by creating a feeling of serenity. The performance space became a room in the vacant house of my dream.

Since the set had such a warm aura, the color theme of the costumes were to be deep red, green, mustard yellow, and brown, alluding to fall colors and the feeling of autumn, comfortable and warm. I bought the costumes for the cast before I even started working on the choreography. The early purchase was a major mistake because when the dancers put on the dark colored costumes a very stark, abrasive relationship with the stage was created.

The realization that the costume colors were wrong created a frantic search for new costumes. I only had a week and a half to find something for my cast to wear. I found four ivory chiffon skirts for the four female dancers and paired them with light colors of brown, yellow, and ivory tops. I then found brown pants and cream tops for the two male dancers. Although I was not fully satisfied with the costumes since they were not what I had pictured I had no time left to explore other options.

No Real Place was an example of how a dream can become reality, but there were many possibilities not explored in the process. If I had the opportunity to do further work on *No Real Place* I would explore some of the following ideas:

1. I would explore the role of the audience more. The audience could have been seated inside the windows or placed on the edge of the front row of the theater where huge windows would frame their vision. The huge windows could have been long strips of Muslin hanging from the catwalks, so that their point of view would have been manipulated. The Muslin would be part of the distorted dream, but still would create a voyeur point of view for the audience.
2. The audience would be seated on stage and the dancers would be seated in the audience. Then, through slow evolution, the audience members would end up in the seats and the dancers would become the “watched”.

My choreographic process included creating movement from text, emotionality, and scores of limitations. I prefer the movement to be developed from both the choreographer and the dancers in order to provide a sense of ownership on both sides. My expectation that the dancers were mature enough to collaborate and solve movement challenges was not met. I tried to find a different method that would work more effectively for both the dancers and the choreographer.

A major frustration throughout the whole process was the reluctance of the dancers to participate in exploring movement possibilities. The dancers wanted a choreographer to give them phrases to memorize and they desired a concrete direction in character. My own recognition of the individual characters and their roles in the dream became clear to me during the performance. I will now be more able to articulate this meaning to the dancers.

Even at the arrival of opening night, I had questions of why I was traveling through these different places with dancers and who these dancers were in relation to me. I have learned that no matter how organized one might be there will always be something to change and discover in dance making.

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