A Trip to the building

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A TRIP TO THE BUILDING
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"A Trip to the Building" was originally conceived as an animated version of the murder scene in Fyodor Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment. It wasn't long before it departed from Dostoevsky and turned into a dream sequence in which somebody is murdered and somebody commits suicide. This made sense since I was at a point in my life where I was beginning to "discover" my dreams. They were becoming more vivid, more fantastic, and I found myself more and more personally invested in what happened while I was asleep. Many day light hours were spent in bed exploring wonderful and terrifying worlds.

This paper is separated into two parts. The first part is an aesthetic and technical history of "A Trip to the Building." The second part is a sampling of letters to and from various friends that pertain to "The Building." The images in my dreams hold more clues about my decision making in this project than I could ever explain on a conscious level, making the letters particularly interesting.

PART 1: Thematic Roots

The beginnings of "The Building" may have roots going back farther than even I can remember. However, the seeds of my various techniques were sown with "Orifice," my second foray into computer animation. "Orifice" has its high and low points. In one of its high points, it has managed to offend numerous people with a minimum amount of explicit material. However, the animation was extremely time consuming and not particularly desirable. At the time I was hell-bent on the idea of "moving lines." I was also a lazy animator and was attracted to the idea of puppet
automation using Alias. I built my character out of two-dimensional shapes for ease of use, animated the body parts, and painstakingly rotoscoped every frame. The characters and landscapes were gray with black outlines as if drawn over with a ball point pen. While this did achieve a jittery look, the character movement remained stiff. The result wasn't bad, but it was tedious and I decided it was not worth repeating for my thesis.

For "The Building", instead of simple, jittery lines, I went in the opposite direction. The characters and landscapes would not jitter, but I would add more detail and possibly even some color. They would look like painted drawings, but wouldn't have the line drawing animation look I so desired. Furthermore, since they were just still drawings, sitting there as if on paper, I decided to make them look like paper, and gave everything a perforated texture. The final result of all this is a world of layered paper cut outs.

Much of the way "The Building" looks is not necessarily because I had some grand vision. Many of the aesthetic decisions I made were based on the way I like to work. I liked working in 3D, but for the most part, I wasn't very fond of the 3D animation "look", and I hated modeling in 3D. In short, I wanted to work in 3D, but didn't want it to look 3D. The answer was to create a character in 2D and import the pieces into the 3D environment, the result of which is much like that of an animated paper cut out doll.

The characters were designed with certain movement limitations. Different designs would mean different kinds of movement, and therefore different characters. Still, my characters just didn't move in certain ways.
After careful research, I decided that the bodies of the characters would face forward while the head and feet would be attached in profile. It looks natural enough, but there were some technical problems. Since the arms of the character sit on opposite sides of his body, the right arm has a much shorter reach than the left. There is a scene in "The Building" in which a character drops a knife. Now, the man is right handed and the knife has landed in a position almost beyond the grasp of his right hand. Had the man leaned forward to pick up the knife, I would have had to scrunch him up to the point that he would be lying on the ground before his right hand could pick up the knife. It would have been equally awkward for the man to pick up the knife with his left hand and transfer it to his right. My solution was for the man to physically walk past the knife so that his right hand could have easy access as he leans back to retrieve it. This strange compromise never ceases to produce a laugh from the audience. This is another example of how technical limitations lead me to certain aesthetic decisions.

I had to ask myself endless questions about the style based on technical limitations. I also gave myself a set of rules to maintain the graphic integrity of the piece. Some of the other questions I had to ask myself were: How does a character pick something up? How does a character change facial expressions? How does a character turn around? All of these questions were important in determining the "look" of "The Building". I was amazed at how much of the creative process was spent solving problems as opposed to "creating."

I studied the work of Lotte Reiniger for basic character mechanics, but "A Trip to the Building" follows more along the tradition of Shinya Tsukamoto, Jan
Svankmajer and the Quay Brothers. The contribution of these artists is most vivid in the sound track of the film. When one listens closely, one can hear the plain disregard for "realistic" sound effects. The cat squeaks when she walks. The man petting the cat produces a sound more like a scrape. In general, the sound track is filled with crumpling paper, creaks, rumblings, drips, and engines. The visual quality of "A trip to the Building" is based on my own self styled drawings. It also takes inspiration from Chris Ware, Jean Dubuffet, George Groz, and the city of New York.

Among the repeated images in my own animation (including "The Formula", "September", "Peeping Tom", "Orifice", and now "A Trip to the Building") are windows, caves, stairs (or hills), leaping attacks, and children. The most interesting of these is the window motif (also inspired by Groz). We see several windows and watch a story unravel behind each one. At first glance, this reveals all the academic clichés linking movies and voyeurism. Since the very form of the cinema is based on voyeuristic principles, the image of the window is itself a sobering reminder to the audience that we are safe, we are all together in a dark room, and we are passive. The audience is almost struck with the guilty feeling that they should not be watching, but since that is why they have gathered in the first place, they continue watching. This "effect" dulls the audience and eventually creates a society where spectacle becomes a normal household event.

Including several windows with various activities taking place behind each adds an extra dimension. Since we are no longer spying on one person, but catching a glimpse of several people, a world begins to open up. The focus
becomes less about self guilt and more about reconciling a hodge-podge of different realities.

The beginning of the movie depicts a cat stalking a bird. In the background, the man watches from the window in his little hut. This is the same window in which the cat eventually enters the hut with the freshly killed bird in it's mouth. A series of circular shaped windows watch the man throughout the movie. He enters the courtyard and confronts the youth while the ominous eye ball shaped window looks down on him. Another window in the hallway watches as he meets the woman at her door. A final window spies on him as he murders the woman. Appropriately, this is the window the man finally makes his suicidal exit through and, as it is with the bird, death is again delivered through the window.

The building itself is characterized by the windows and the various horrors contained therein. Our first exposure to the windows in the building reveal a seedy, violent, and confused world. This is not only a sampling of the kind of reality the man will find inside the building, but also a glimpse into the man's own dementia. Surely, these horrors are a reflection of the problems also eating away this man's insides. In the last window we see before the man enters the building, a suicide victim hangs from a rope while the victim's cat, asleep in the window sill, seems to swing her tail back and forth in time with her dead owner. This obvious for-shadowing sets the tone for the adventures to come.

The windows are at their most terrible and incoherent at the point in the movie in which the man imagines himself falling through a seething, window filled hell. The windows look like prison cells, the line drawn characters behind
them writhe like worms. It is here that the man falls into an infinite imaginary abyss created by himself.

Although I have used the "window" symbol in the past, it is at its most realized in "A Trip to the Building". The windows follow in the tradition of the "self-aware" cinema and work as a device that eludes to the protagonist's terrifying and distorted mind state.

**PART 2: DREAMS**

I began having a series of unusual dreams around the time I made "Orifice." Although some of these nightmares were based on characters I had already created for "Orifice", the images I dreamt also began fueling my creativity. Clearly, my waking self was feeding off of my sleeping self and vice versa.

The images of these dreams were often of extreme violence occasioned by more peaceful, somber dreams. In many dreams I am chased by police or monsters or even an acquaintance. Sometimes these adventures lead to entrapment or torture. The dreams included here range in content. Some common elements include zombies, camping, murder, my parents, my childhood house, and erotic encounters.

Upon examining the movie and letters/journals included here, I think you'll find (as I have) many interesting common threads. In a few instances I have included bits of chatter and short descriptions of my more "real life" experiences. Although this may seem distracting and even indulgent at times, I think most of this banter has direct correlation to the rationale behind the movie and perhaps my creative intuition in general.
The following introductory letter was written in mid production. It serves here as an example of what was going through my mind and how I was working with collaborators. The dream it describes directly inspired the ending of "A Trip to the Building".

Dear Jason, Jeff, Elise, Aaron, and whomever would like to participate in short animation with working title "man eaten alive by building,"

How can you help? It's easy. I need music, weird sounds, and/or drawings. Some of you have already contributed one or more of the items listed above. Before I address those of you who have already contributed to "the cause," let me talk a little bit about the project, how it came to be, how it has evolved, and what it might one day become, so that you, the participants know what you may be getting into, and also to give you an idea of what to contribute.

I have a history of making rather indulgent, overlong, and non-sensical, masturbatory movies. I won't go into the sordid details of why I continue to produce work like this, but I will say that I wanted this project to be different. I decided I would choose somebody else's story to tell, for once. I would choose some classic literary work, and focus on the telling of the story as opposed to the plot, which would already be there. As it turns out, I decided to use the murder scene from Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment.

At the time I was working all of this out, I was also recovering from a series of vivid dreams in which I was chased by various monsters or people. One night I had a particularly intense dream in which I was hounded by something I couldn't see, but could feel all around me. I
knew there was no safe place I could go. In the end of the
dream, I realize I am caught. I am not physically caught. I
feel that its going to be all over, but still have no
perception of the pursing entity. I feel as if it is all
over. What was I to do? My answer was to end it all with a
bullet to the head. It turned out to be three bullets,
actually. One in the temple, one in the mouth, and one in
the back of my head. Finally, I was dead. I felt a slight
pain in my head, where I'd shot myself, but everything else
was a deep darkness. I didn't hear, see, smell, taste, etc.
Everything was black. But I could still think! I wondered
what was going to happen. I thought I was dead. To my
knowledge, sleeping or awake, I had died. And in death, I
anticipated only mysterious, wondrous things to come. I was
at peace. Eventually, something began coming into focus. It
was something.... that looked like film credits.
Immediately, I knew I was dreaming and woke up. Some of you
already know the story, but felt I should include it here,
as it is an important clue as to where this movie is going.

I began feeling that I should include some of these
extraordinary nightmares in my movie. After all, how far
are the feelings of fear and paranoia that I feel for
Raskolnikov from the experience I describe above? In short,
the story became more and more my dreams, and less and less
Dostoevsky. But maybe it was becoming more and more
Dostoevsky. At one point during the development of the
script, I was totally dependent on my dreams for the next
piece of the movie. So much for avoiding indulgences.

I have had several interesting dreams the past few
months that relate in some way to "The Building". I'll
spare you the details; but I will say that they have ranged
from the darkest nightmares you can imagine in which I am
physically murdering my loved ones to some incredibly vivid dreams of beauty and mystery.

For those of you familiar with "Orifice" (hopefully this letter is accompanied by a tape containing a copy of "Orifice"), you may remember a scene near the beginning of the movie in which an old man walks into a cave (and later, he has some adventures). In one of my early explanations for the "cave" imagery, I described the "orifice" as a symbol of the unconscious. I realized recently that there is a similar scene in "The Building" in which our hero enters a dark tunnel that leads into the belly of the building - as it turns out, an unconscious decision on my part. It seems more and more obvious that the key to the adventures our hero has in the building should be informed by my sleeping self.

I've been reading a book about lucid dreams that insists that the reality that we refer to as "the waking world" is actually a dream which we haven't woken up from. He believes the key to "waking up" is through lucid dreaming. According to this book there are various pitfalls to "waking up". Many people go crazy. The writer of the book claims to have awoken via "golden brick of divinity." Once "awake" the fellow abandoned his friends, family, and loved ones and went to India in search of a master. He returned twenty years later and wrote us this book. I only bring up this book because he talks about the importance of dreams in human spirituality. I have always thought of creativity as also being a road to possible enlightenment. But my tendency is to think about dreams as sort of psychological artifacts. I had never before, until recently, thought of these things as being linked, or maybe "linked" is not the right kind of description. I think of my dreams, my creative energy, and my various spiritual
desires and learnings, as all being made of the same stuff. I'm not sure if I'm saying that this film will eventually lead to my spiritual enlightenment (or anybody else's), but there is a certain mystery in the process that could possibly open some doors.

So now you have something to think about when you go to bed tonight. If you have any questions, I'll be in Rochester.

A note to Jeff:

Thank you so much for sending the tape. It's quite wonderful. There are parts that I think will work well with the movie, but then again, one can never tell until the whole thing has been cut together. I have a few favors to ask. First of all, I need you to send me a list of instruments used in order for me to give you proper credit. Second of all, if you have the time, energy, etc., another mix down would be nice. Ideally, it would be nice to have three mixes, one with the various stringed instruments, one with winds, and one with piano. Third, I have some suggestions if you have the energy for another recording.

First of all, in the interests of making a second recording that would be strikingly different from the first, you should try to avoid playing "music" (or, perhaps more concise, what we refer to in the west as being musical). Think of your instruments as devices of sound rather than music. Furthermore, use more than just "instruments." I know I initially asked you to try to stick with acoustic instruments, but for this second recording (if you choose to do so) you may use anything you can think of. As far as content is concerned, I want you to keep a few things in mind.
1) What does it sound like when we go through our daily rituals? What are the sounds we hear when we eat, make love, shit, sleep, walk, or pet our dear animals? What does it sound like when we sit? When we knock on somebody's door? When we scratch our heads and pat our bellies? Can these sounds be emulated with musical instruments? This is a difficult structure to follow, but try to emulate a "day in the life" or even a singular activity such as cooking or eating.

2) Always keep in mind your dreams. Think of your most horrible and wonderful dreams. Move between, or back and forth. Perhaps a certain amount of meditation is required for this. Try to conjure the images with your sounds.

3) Finally, I ask that you not be afraid to use silence. Blank spaces, as you know, can be more telling and more mysterious than filled spaces.

As I said before, you've already done a wonderful job. What you've done is above the line of duty. What I'm asking (above) is that you continue down a difficult path and I have little to offer in return. So in other words, don't do it if you don't want - I'm quite thankful and honored at what you've sent me. Call or write if you have questions.

Respectfully yours, Zak

The next few excerpts are all "chasing dreams." In them, I am chased by all sorts of people and things. What you see below is a small sampling of these dreams as I have been plagued by them for years. The feelings presented here of paranoia, fear, and the insistent need for some kind of escape are all inspiration for the film.
In particular, the feeling of being constantly watched and chased by an unknown entity were ideas embodied by the old woman, the photos and the dolls.

I would like to make a point that the parallels I have drawn here did not exist in pre-production. I was paying attention to my dreams and writing them down, but I didn't consciously decide that a group of dolls would symbolize a specific feeling I felt in my dreams. If the focus of this paper is to find out how I made certain decisions regarding the movie's development, then these letters and journal entries are one possible influence, and the influence that makes the most sense to me. Perhaps there is no end to the number of life experiences that have somehow had a hand in shaping this film.

DREAM JOURNAL

I had a dream in which I get kidnapped and dragged out to some scary house in the wilderness. I think I escape at one point and climb in a car which I begin driving at high speeds through the forests while my antagonists chase me. At one point I come to a cliff like area that consists of a narrow strip of islands separated by twenty or more feet that I have to jump across in order to reach the road on the other side. Unfortunately, I hit a bump and fly up. I jump from the car before it lands as not to get crushed inside, but still hit the ground hard. Knowing I don't have time to get back in the car and drive away, I tuck the car under my arm, hide it in case I need it later, and duck into the docking bay of a nearby building. Once inside I see a lone man in the hall, but he seems unable to help me. One of the kidnappers appears and I run up some steps into
a crowded room like a bus station. For some reason I have a hard time getting folks to help me. At least I am safe.

DREAM JOURNAL

I have had several dreams in which I am being chased either by monsters or people. Whatever the case, things are trying to get me. The worst of these was a dream I had where I am in a room filled with people, all of whom were trying to kill one another and I keep trying to get out of the room. It was horrible. Everybody is all covered with mud and each others' blood. It was like a war dream. But that was at least a year ago. In the dream I had the other night my dad and maybe my mom and I were in a theater and Godzilla was coming. My dad was telling me about this plan that my mother would execute about leading Godzilla to a cliff and jumping off. She would pretend to do a belly flop into the water, but at the last moment she would straighten out so in that way, it would be too late for Godzilla to do anything else but a belly flop and he would be dead. So Godzilla is on his way and suddenly my dad sets it up so that Godzilla sees me and I know that I better start running because as soon as Godzilla is done destroying the theater he's coming after me. I try running knowing that I have very little time, but it's difficult because in the dream I've been drinking beers and I am too drunk to go anywhere. Instead of running, my arms and legs just flop all over the place. It is even difficult to walk fast. So I head for the beach because I know I have to find a cliff and jump into the water so I can make Godzilla do a belly flop. But that never happens. In the end I think I spent the whole dream just running from Godzilla.

Dear Sean,
I had this dream the other night that continued to haunt me all the next day because it was so creepy. I wish I could remember more details because it was a dream of epic proportions. I remember being lost in this large palace where I believe I was being held captive and tortured, I don't remember exactly what was happening there, but believe me, I wanted out. Part of what made this building, or whatever it was, so scary is that it wasn't at all what it seemed. What one second was some fancy looking room was suddenly not a room at all, but a boarded up doorway. In any event I got the distinct feeling that somebody was trying to hide something. It was through one of these "hidden" doorways through the room I wasn't supposed to see that I was able to make my escape. I wander in to this dirty dusty room and it has a bunch of guys in it and one of them is the big boss who seems to be running things. Again, I seem to have blocked out some things that happened in this room but I think I am beaten and stabbed, but somehow make it out of there with evidence (a video tape which somehow kept playing over and over in my head of the big boss violently stabbing me) so that I can get the big boss guy in big trouble. The next part of the dream was particularly scary. I am wandering the countryside, going toward town, alone, having just escaped from the horrible place and I am in a very strange place - I believe somewhere in Europe. Finally, I get to town and I wander around trying to find the airport so I can go home. A few people give me mixed up directions but somehow I eventually get there, although I don't remember getting there - see there are several scenes from this dream blocked off. I do remember going back to the palace of my own accord just before the big boss (now suddenly being played by Al Pacino) was about to get his punishment because I had
turned in my evidence to the proper authorities. It was scary going back, but I went in to apologize and Al and all the other boys are standing around and laughing about a practical joke in which one of them got tricked into being skinned alive and partly eaten or something. The skinned alive guy had a good humor about him which scared me a little but he was also very friendly. He looked horrible, like his skin was made out of scabs and partly covered with thin bandages. I think Pacino eventually forgave me and told me he really had nothing against me and then the skinned alive guy (who looked normal by now) showed me to the door. And that is about all I can remember.

    They say you can see and smell and taste and hear and touch in a dream, but those things generally don't happen to me - Although I wish they did. I generally feel emotions in my dreams very strongly and I couldn't shake the feeling of going back to the palace to seek forgiveness from this fellow and his gang, all of whom I was terrified of. Anyway, I have to go now cause I'm tired. I just wanted to write to say hi cause I don't do it very much and I ended up telling you about a dream I had. Hope all is well.

love Zak

LETTER EXCERPT TO EMI

    Had a strange dream last night. Parts of it are real hazy, but I at least remember the feeling because it's a feeling I feel in a lot of my dreams. I'm in a real dangerous area and lots of people are waiting around corners to kill me or something. But also, there were some times when I felt safe. The people trying to get me were always there, but sometimes I knew they were too far away to do anything. During one of those safe moments, this cat comes right up to me and starts meowing, so I pick it up,
and this is the most affectionate cat I've ever seen in my life. Like I feel as close to this cat as I've ever felt to anyone. And I decide to lie down, and this cat gets up and changes position so that it's right up next to me, and it starts cuddling next to me and purring. Then there was somebody else there too (maybe it was you) who I think was in bad shape and they wanted to lie down, and the cat went and cuddled up next to them, but I didn't mind, because that's the kind of thing that cats do.

Anyway, all of a sudden I was some kind of gangster and a couple of guys are chasing me, and we're all on bikes, and I know that when they catch me, they are gonna kill me. I veer off the road, and jump down this slope into a wooded area. I guess I get off the bike and wait. Eventually the two other dudes catch up with me and I start punching on the leader of the two. Then I'm holding him and he's yelling for the other guy to hit me. The other dude picks up a large stick and begins smashing his partner, and then I realize that me and this guy with a stick are a team, and maybe even friends to some extent, and we kick all hell out of the leader guy. I don't remember if we kill him or not.

The next entries are a sampling of dreams that take place in the house I spent my childhood in. There are some brief descriptions of events that happened in this house in the following entry. Thinking back, the house is one of the strangest I've been in. There seemed to be several unnecessary hallways, walls and vents. The circular lay out of the rooms was such that upon entering one room, one could exit into another and so on and so on until the whole house has been explored and one is back in the room one started from. The kitchen floor is one of the strangest
patterns I have seen in any kitchen. The floor was a deep red with thin black stripes separated by about ten inches each.

The strangeness of this house may have been part of the inspiration for the design of the building. As the man travels into the courtyard of the building he comes face to face with a young boy. For me, this scene is a trip down nostalgia lane which eventually turns into a nightmare as the man enters the woman's room. Many of the following dreams also follow a similar transition from innocence to horror. While I don't remember the house as being scary at all, I can associate several feelings of guilt and apprehension there. After all, I spent the most formative years of my life in this house. I tried to capture the following elements in the design and structure of the scenes in the building: bizarre architecture, childhood nostalgia, guilt, apprehension, and release. Towards the end, the man leaves the building.

**LETTER EXCERPT TO AARON**

I had this dream when I was at Rochester living in my Uncle's basement. It was a dark place, which was fine because during the Spring I made a habit of staying at school and working till dawn. But my uncle and aunt were always getting up in the morning and doing laundry. I swear to God that Bob would purposely put items with large metal zippers in the washer. During the various spin cycles, the zipper would hit the four metal bars in the washer and would create a noise like a machine gun. Did I tell you about the cats? There's three of them and guess where they shit-- in my room, under my bed where they all hang out in the morning and get in cat fights. In any event, that's a brief description of my living conditions, which I probably
already told you a couple times because I love telling those old stories. Needless to say, things were pretty dreary. One night I had a dream that I was back in my old house in NE between Sandy and Burnside on 24th. As a matter of fact, do you remember that chick Tiffany who was in Pop Art? (I think Tiffany was her name, I'm not very good with names and I never really knew her very well.) At some point she lived only a few blocks down from the same house I grew up in. In the neighborhood I used to terrorize! My sister spent most of her birth in that house, my cousin was actually born in the room I slept in! I cried when we moved out of that house. I haven't lived there for about seven years now. Anyway, in the dream I was walking to my room, past the bathroom, and who should be in the bathtub, washing but Nikki Chapman. At least I think it was her. It was just one of those things I happened to notice as I walked by. I went in my room and guess who was on the bed? Sara Lund! I've never really thought of her in "that" way before, but in the dream, Sara and I began having "relations." At one point there was a pause in the action for me to put on some music. I think Sara wanted to listen to something else besides Al Green. So I start going through my records and Sara doesn't seem to care much for any of my records. I'm picking my brains thinking of what I should put on because I am rather over eager. After awhile, Sara tells me that she's got a bunch of records that Jason Funk has loaned her while he's out of town and we could play just about anything from his collection and it would be fine. Excited again, I grab one of his records and put it on. But my record player won't play it! I grab another one, but it doesn't work either. It doesn't take me long to realize that my record player won't play any of Jason Funk's records. At that horrible point, I woke up.
Dear Aaron,

I had another Sara Lund dream this morning. Unfortunately it was not of the erotic type, but it was one of the strangest dreams I've had in a long time. It's so weird that I'm not even sure that I can explain it very well. Again, it took place in my old house, this time in the kitchen. All I remember is drawing this outline of her hair on her head and taking some oil-jelly stuff out of the freezer and pouring it into the outline. The jelly stuff took the shape of her hair, only it was like Jell-O or something instead of real hair. At some point I think you came into the dream, but I don't remember what happened. All I remember is the jelly hair. It was bright yellow, sort of like what urine looks like after eating vitamins, and somewhat transparent. I can't make heads or tails out of it.

So I kind of wandered around and I ended up in my friend Howard's office. I asked him how his break was and found out he didn't get much of a break at all because the school kept calling and telling him to come back to work. I told him that I was trying to figure some things out with my movie. I asked "how come everything I do is so dark? Why can't I do anything wholesome?" and he told me that I would probably never really have the answer to those questions, but there was an exercise I could try that might help me figure it out. It's very simple really. Just wake up earlier than you usually do and, without even getting out of bed, start writing. Don't even think about what you're writing, but whatever comes to your mind. And don't read what you write. Just write until about the time in which you would normally get up. Then about a week later you can read it. It all has something to do with your left and
right brain. When Howard tried it, he found out that he was being too intellectual with his work and it wasn't really coming from his heart. Or something like that, anyway. He made it sound like a big revelation. So I think I might try it and see what I find out. I'll notify you if something interesting happens. So after a nice long discussion, I left and Howard went back to work. I went to the record shop and bought a couple records. I found an old Lou Rawls record for only a dollar!

Love Zak

Dear Emi,

As if taking a cue from our conversation last night about my parents and me, I had quite a frightening dream about them last night. I wish I could remember more of the details, but most of it occurred back at the old house I grew up in. I seem to have a lot of dreams about that house. Anyway, in the dream I think I escape from prison and go to my parents' house. I think David (my step dad) and my mom decide its best that I stay in prison and they lock me up again, only this time, they lock me up in some secret part of the house that I've never seen before. I escape yet again and I am sneaking out of the house but my mom sees me and I motion for her to keep quiet so David can't hear me escape, but instead she sounds the alarm. At that point in the dream I cannot remember exactly what happens, but I remember crying in the dream and also coming to the realization that the reason I'm being locked up is because I'm not all that mentally healthy. I realize that I am crazy and become very sad. That's all I remember, but really, it was terribly intense.
Hope you are keeping warm. Things are finally melting around here. The mountains of snow are going away. See you soon.
love Zak

DREAM JOURNAL

I am in my old house with Princess and it is obvious that I am trying to seduce her. This is the house I grew up and lived in before I ever met Princess. The couch is in the dining room. She is in her pajamas. I forget if we are getting a midnight snack or what, but we are about to go to bed. I keep kissing Princess, even though I know she will scold me or tell me to stop. She never does, but doesn't kiss me back either. Walt comes in. He is showing the house off to potential buyers. It is awfully late, but somehow there doesn't seem to be anything wrong with it. Suddenly it occurs to me that there is a guest room and there is also an extra bed in my room so Princess doesn't have to sleep on the couch after all. She refuses to take the bed in my room. Something happens that I don't remember. Later, we are still discussing the sleeping arrangements when I notice the man who was looking at the house is still around and Walt is gone! I get the feeling that the man is a threat. I walk him out the front door, but he comes back in before I can lock it. He won't leave the house. Somehow I manage to throw or push him out the door and lock it. Then I remember the back door may be unlocked. I run back there and lock it as the scary man appears, running up the back steps toward the door I just locked. Even though I think I am safe, I am still scared. I have a dream, within the dream, that the man has somehow climbed up the front of the house to get in the open upstairs window. Walt (except he no longer looks like Walt but some familiar television
personality) stabs him with a large spike before he can get in.

**DREAM JOURNAL**

I am trying to escape from this same house (the house of my childhood) while David, my stepfather, is trying to get in and get me. At one point I pretend to go out the front door, but make a dash for the basement. Hoping that I fooled him, I open the garage door very slowly, ready to make a dash for it if the coast is clear. As I peak my head out I see him walking very quickly towards me and I slam the door and try to lock it.

These last few dreams have to do with camping and traveling. As the movie is also about traveling, so these dreams may be significant. I have been grappling with the "travel" theme in my work for as long as I can remember. Certainly, when one thinks of a quest or an adventure, it usually requires some form of travel. To show a character travel, especially in animation, is to show how a character moves and changes, even if the intended trip is more psychological than physiological. The mood of the character is reflected in the changing scenery. The paths a character chooses are symbolic of intellectual, emotional, spiritual paths.

The following dreams are of horror, isolation, destruction, and self consumption. Many of the dreams above share these same themes. In fact, these ideas have become so much a part of my life that I have come to believe that devouring myself is a right of passage. "A Trip to the Building", the ending in particular, is a manifestation of that belief.
Dear Brent,

You were in my dreams last night. So was Casey and Emi. I think all of us were together. There are several things I don't remember in the beginning, but at some point all of us are walking down a rather filthy stairwell. It's not exactly indoors or outdoors either. Perhaps a stairwell into an abandoned building, but it keeps going on and on. Down and down and down and down. It's dirty and decrepit and also has a rather negative energy and probably a foul smell of urine and excrement and perhaps vomit and blood. We keep going down until finally we reach some kind of basement that has similar attributes as the stairs, but more intense. There is a television down there and some vagrant fellow watching it. He has blanketed himself with rags. On TV is a report that I think we've seen earlier - perhaps earlier in the dream or perhaps it was in some other dream - I'll never be sure. Anyway, the report has to do with some dead bodies and something to do with cannibalism, or maybe not cannibalism, but the reason the bodies are dead is because they were eaten by something. Actually, I'm not even sure they were dead, but they were at least pretty badly mutilated. The body I remember seeing on TV looked pretty dead. It just laid there. It's stomach looked as if the skin had been pulled off, or in this case, eaten off. I'm not sure how we found out, whether it was in the report or whether one of us deduced this, but somehow it came up that these "mutilations" were caused by little flesh eating spiders. In order to test this theory, you picked up a little spider and put it on the vagrants' face, who at this point was just lying there, already looking pretty dead. You put it on the fellow's pale cheek. After a moment or two of the spider
just sitting there, a red spot appeared underneath the spider. It was apparent to all of us that the spider was eating his flesh and I think all of us were horrified.

I am not sure I will go into detail about the second part of the dream, but I will say that in it I tried on several pairs of pants...

I'll be catching you soon, lover.

Zak

Dear Brent,

I had a dream with you in it last night. You and Jeremy were in a band - as a matter of fact, you were the new KISS. Literally, you were KISS. The original band members passed the torch on to you or something. Anyway, you were going to a gig or something and I was planning to come along and play some "kick ass" guitar solos. Unfortunately, everybody left without me so I was stuck at home - I think we were living together, too. I couldn't even watch the concert on TV cause I didn't wanna fork out the money for Pay Per View. I remember one of you guys getting into some monster costume, though - really it looked more like a GWAR costume.

Anyway, later I went with you and Jeremy to a strange isolationist camp to pick up your guys' paycheck. Jeremy wasn't very keen on me coming, but I came anyway. When I was unable to climb a dirt wall (the ladder kept coming loose out of the dirt) Jeremy seemed particularly upset. He threatened that once I had gotten over the dirt wall, I would have to perform tasks of even greater athletic difficulty. Finally, one of you showed me how to use these plastic things that were sticking out of the dirt to climb up, but I was still having trouble, especially when I
grabbed one and blades came out of it and cut up my hand. Eventually the isolationist people showed up and they weren't particularly happy that I was there either. After all, they don't like strangers coming into their camp. They said I would have to stick around for awhile and do some tests before I could leave. Jeremy didn't like this because he had to be somewhere so you offered to give him a ride home and come back for me. The isolationists said that one of the tests was to smoke some extra potent bud, but I didn't mind because suddenly I was your friend, Dave, who is always hoarding all the pot anyway.

Just thought you should know. Perhaps tonight the dream will continue.

love Zak

PS: I didn't mind it in the dream, but in real life I would appreciate if you don't leave me alone at any isolationist camps.

Dear Brent,

I was camping out (perhaps you were with me) next to the long cement walkway that leads through the parking lot to school. It is always really cold on this walkway because there is no shelter from the razor sharp wind. There are some grassy patches next to the walkway and I was lying between two comforters trying to sleep there. There was also a tent, but somebody else was in there (maybe you). I was trying to sleep, even though people were walking by me on their way to school. At some point it started raining, but I continued my attempts to go to sleep. The weather got worse and worse and eventually my comforters were soaked. I poked my head out and saw a tornado in the distance, probably heading for me. I decided I should head toward school, so I began picking my things up. I looked up again
and the tornado was now in the parking lot, only a few hundred feet away. The sky behind was a deep blood red color. I began making my way up to the school, but was being blown all over the place. I was almost there when it occurred to me that I would soon be swept off my feet, which is exactly what happened. Suddenly I was looking down at the walkway from hundreds of feet off the ground. I hovered there for awhile, thinking. I hoped that when I hit the ground, I landed on a grassy area, cause if I fell on the cement, I would surely go "splat". It occurred to me briefly that I might be dreaming. I thought to myself "Am I dreaming right now? No, this is real. This is really happening." Then I began falling toward the cement. But before I hit I realized that it was so windy that the force of the wind would probably slow my descent. And so it did. I finally made it into the building where everybody was hanging out. I saw Jason Funk there - he had long bright pink hair. I thought, "What am I doing here?" That's all I remember.

Love Zak

Dear Brent,

Last night I had this really nasty dream in which I was being hired by about four or five guys to do some kind of illegal activity. They took me out in the middle of the woods to some obscure resort area. Part of our journey to this "resort" took place in almost complete darkness. I think the guys did this so it would be difficult for me to leave. I am already forgetting lots of details and I am sure there is much that happened earlier in the dream that I cannot remember, but I will tell you what I can. They leave me in this little room and I realize that these are kind of bad guys and that I have been planning to rip them
off, or at least to run far away from them. But it is too late, because suddenly the guys are back and they know I was planning to rip them off - at least I think they know. I try to play it cool with them while they play with me. I think at one point they offer all kinds of drugs, which were really just common herbs and spices such as basil, garlic, etc, etc. Then one of the guys offers me some kind of plant and I tell him that I want no part in anything having to do with that plant. Perhaps many other things happen that I don't remember, but eventually I produce some kind of knife and manage to kill all of them. After they're dead, I stick around a little longer to pick out all the little spices they were offering me earlier when I realize that I should get out of there and I leave the room. Unfortunately, I realized that I was trapped at the resort because of the extremely dark area. Next thing I know, these five guys are coming back to life as zombies.

The next thing I can remember is that day has finally come and I'm being chased all over this resort by zombies. As it turns out, the whole resort is filled with zombies all trying to get me. It was a colony of zombies - sort of like in The Howling except for instead of werewolves, it was a zombie colony. They weren't really zombies in the classic sense of the word. They weren't mindless. They could talk and I think they were smart too. But they were decaying and they hungered for my flesh. At one point I am trudging through a lake while being chased by a group of female zombies. There is a glimmer of hope when I think that I might be able to fly away, but for some reason, I am unable to. Finally, I give in to the female zombies. There are about four of them and I tell them that they can eat me as long as they promise to have sex with me first. I think they agree, and I attempt to engage one of them with a
kiss, but I am afraid that she will take a bite of me instead of kissing me. I remember seeing them hover above me - their faces were all stitched together and their flesh was pale and dead.

I don't know what happened, but I am running from zombies again. At one point I think there might be some other humans running around and being chased by zombies too, but I cannot be sure. Toward the end of the dream I think I am once again trapped by zombies, but I find a false wall in one of the rooms of the resort and I realize that there is some secret treasure in there that even the zombies don't know about. I think after I told them about the treasure, they left me alone.

CONCLUSION

When I began working on "Orifice", I believe I opened a dialogue between my waking and sleeping states. "A Trip to the Building" was an attempt to explore and possibly develop that dialogue. In short, I had some questions about myself and my work. This movie and the process of making it was an experiment to begin answering some of those questions. Why do I make animation? What is it that draws me to the images I choose to animate? What am I trying to do with my animation? Why do I dream these dreams and what do they have to do with my work or my life? Why do we do what we do?

Whether or not these dreams were consciously built with any kind of intrinsic meaning is still unclear. But I believe we all have a series of issues, unconscious and unresolved, and the answer to some of these issues are tied closely to the life experiences and images that move us most, dreaming or awake. This movie, and perhaps my other
movies to a lesser extent, was an attempt to make some of these images more tangible and bring them to the surface.

Perhaps this is all just a heavy handed way of saying "I made this movie because I thought it would be fun."
Appendix A

Thesis Proposal
APENDIX A: Thesis Proposal

A shady figure is getting dressed in a dark grimy room. A purring cat rubs against his leg as he pulls on a worn-out boot. The man places a saucer of milk before the cat and strokes it’s head. Hesitantly, the man picks up a dagger and places it in his pocket. His dirty hands pick up a package and he leaves the room. The man steps out of a broken down old shack and begins toward what looks like a fortress in the distance. His eyes jitter from side to side. He is sweating.

The man walks through a large gateway into the building. On the other side is an open courtyard filled with little shops and a fountain in the middle. The man steps through a door and up a series of stairwells and hallways. Finally he stops at a door marked “525.” He knocks. The door opens slightly. A pair of eyes peek through the crack. The man holds the package up. The eyes examine the box and look back at the man’s face. A pair of bony hands take the package and disappear back through the door. The man slips into the room.

The clean room is filled with various trinkets and treasures. The man looks at his filthy clothes and skin. In an attempt to brush himself off, the man rips his sleeve. The woman turns toward him with a look of disgust and begins cackling. The man stands there, shaking and sweating. He reaches in his pocket for the knife, but is shaking too wildly to hold it. The knife falls to the floor. The woman stops laughing and stares at the knife. Angrily she rushes at the man. He stands in shock, his mouth open, but manages to snap out of it in time to wrap his dirty hands around the woman’s neck before she can
tackle him. The two dance around the room in a desperate struggle. Finally, they collapse. The man sits on the woman with his hands around her neck. Both are frozen. The woman is dead.

There is a knock on the door. The man looks up. An envelope appears from under the crack. A little calmer, the man gets up and opens the envelope. Inside is a series of pictures. One shows the man walking into the building. In another, he’s knocking on the woman’s door. The man begins shaking again. In another he is strangling the old woman. In another, the man is looking at a series of photos. The last picture shows a bowling pin shaped doll staring and smiling at the man. The doll resembles the woman he just murdered. The man drops the pictures to find the doll sitting on a table in front of him, shaking as if something is trying to get out.

The man watches in horror as the top pops off the doll and a second doll inside floats out and lands next to its larger relative. The larger doll replaces its top and the two dolls turn in a circle. Unable to restrain his horror, the man runs out of the room and through a maze of hallways and stairwells. Meanwhile, the second doll has opened revealing a third. Dolls continue floating out and turning in circles while the man races away more and more hysterically.

Finally, we see the last doll turn a circle. Its frozen face slowly dissolves to that of the old woman’s. The man’s hands are around her neck and the man sits, unable to move. There is no envelope, no pictures. The man is staring at a single bowling pin shaped doll sitting on a table nearby. His breathing is rapid, his eyes wide. He is shaking uncontrollably. Everything is silent. The man
screams, jumps up and throws himself out of the nearest window.

We see his body relax as it floats slowly down toward the circular fountain in the courtyard. People in the courtyard stop what they are doing to watch the spectacle. The man's face grows calm and relieved. He seems to be floating down slowly as if he was sinking in water. He closes his eyes.

**Budget**

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**Time line**

Thesis approval - mid to late April, 1998.
Rough Story board, Set and character Design - by late May.
Summer work - June - July.
Animate 1 sequence every 4 weeks for 6 sequences - July - December.
Touch up animation, fix shots, re-animate, begin sound - late December.
Finish sound, editing, other final touches - mid January.
Screen movie in late January.
Festival search January - December 1999!
Raskolnikov and the Magic Dolls by Zak Margolies
2D computer animation with 3D figures emulating cut outs,
Color, approx. 4 min 30 sec.

A shady figure is getting dressed in a dark grimy room. A purring
cat rubs against his leg as he pulls on a worn-out boot. The man places
a saucer of milk before the cat and strokes its head. Hesitantly, the
man picks up a dagger and places it in his pocket. His dirty hands pick
up a package and he leaves the room. The man steps out of a broken down
old shack and begins toward what looks like a fortress in the distance.
His eyes jitter from side to side. He is sweating.

The man walks through a large gateway into the building. On the
other side is an open courtyard filled with little shops and a fountain
in the middle. The man steps through a door and up a series of
stairwells and hallways. Finally he stops at a door marked "525." He
knocks. The door opens slightly. A pair of eyes peek through the crack.
The man holds the package up. The eyes examine the box and look back at
the man's face. A pair of bony hands take the package and disappear back
through the door. He follows the hands.

The clean room is filled with various trinkets and treasures. The
man looks at his filthy clothes and skin. In an attempt to brush himself
off, the man rips his sleeve. The woman turns toward him with a look of
disgust and begins cackling. The man stands there, shaking and sweating.
He reaches in his pocket for the knife, but is shaking too wildly to
hold it. The knife falls to the floor. The woman stops laughing and
stares at the knife. Angrily she rushes at the man. He stands in shock,
his mouth open, but manages to snap out of it in time to wrap his dirty
hands around the woman's neck before she can tackle him. The two dance
around the room in a desperate struggle. Finally, they collapse. The man
sits on the woman with his hands around her neck. She is still.

There is a knock on the door. An envelope appears from under the
CRACK. A little calmer, he gets up and opens the envelope. Inside is a
series of pictures. One shows the man walking into the building. In
another he's knocking on the woman's door. The man begins shaking again.
In another he's strangling the old woman. In another, the man is looking
at a series of photos. The last picture shows a bowling pin shaped doll
staring and smiling at the man. The doll resembles the woman on the
floor. He drops the pictures. A doll is sitting on a table in front of
him, shaking as if something is trying to get out.

The man watches in horror as the top pops off the doll and a second
doll inside floats out and lands next to its larger relative. The larger
doll replaces its top and the two dolls turn in a circle. Unable to
restrain his horror, the man runs out of the room and through a maze of
hallways and stairwells. Meanwhile, the second doll has opened revealing
a third. Dolls continue floating out and turning in circles while the
man races away more and more hysterically.

Finally, we see the last doll turn a circle. Its frozen face slowly
dissolves to that of the old woman's. The man's hands are around her
neck and the man sits, unable to move. There is no envelope, no
pictures. The man is staring at a single bowling pin shaped doll sitting
on a table nearby. His breathing is rapid, his eyes wide. He is shaking
 uncontrollably. Everything is silent. Something snaps. The man screams,
jumps up and throws himself out of the nearest window.

His body relaxes as it floats slowly down toward the circular
fountain. People in the courtyard stop what they are doing to watch the
spectacle. The man's face grows calm. He closes his eyes.
### expenses

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### Time line

Thesis approval - mid to late April, 1998.
Rough Story board, Set and character Design - by mid May.
Animate 1 sequence every 2 weeks for 6 weeks - May 16 - July 11.
Summer work - July - August.
Animate 1 sequence every 2 weeks for 8 weeks - August 11 - October 6.
Touch up animation, fix shots, re-animate, begin sound - October 7 - November 7.
Finish sound, editing, final touches, report - November 30.

### Thesis credits

Summer - 1
Fall - 6
Winter - 5

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[Image of a handwritten page with numbers and text]
Appendix B

Storyboard
FIN
Appendix C

Production Stills
Appendix D
Photographic Reference
APPENDIX D: "Some technical notes"

To respect the ever changing world of technology, I will include here only a simple recipe style list of my techniques in making "The Building."

First, draw and/or scan the necessary body pieces into a computer. Clean and color them to your satisfaction. Import them, a body piece at a time into your favorite 3D animation program. Create "geometry" in the exact shape of your "body piece" and map the image of that piece onto the new geometry. Once all the pieces have been treated in this manner, create an appropriate skeleton to link the flat geometry to. Once everything is linked properly, animate the character to your satisfaction and render the frames with an alpha channel to make the background "transparent."

The rest is just a matter of layering background and foreground objects, composing it, and rendering it all together. Maybe it could all be done in the "3-D environment," or maybe you use a program such as Adobe After Effects.

Times continue to change, and so do computers. During production of "The Building," I found the following programs indispensable: Adobe Photoshop, Fractal Design Painter, Adobe After Effects. Consequently, the character animation was done in Alias Wavefront, but by the time anybody reads this, Alias may be nothing but a lingering memory.

A major flaw in "The Building" was the use of stop motion dolls. They did not fit in with the rest of the movie. I learned that disparate elements are difficult to integrate. My story serves as a warning for others.

Despite some bad decisions I made, I found that it all ways pays to experiment as much as possible.