

UNIVERSAL HOTEL SCRIPT
A Film by Peter Thompson

Note: items in *italics* are descriptions of visuals and are not narrated.

Black screen.

Peter Thompson (V.O):

1981.

I see everything from a distance, from my window in the...

TITLE: UNIVERSAL HOTEL.

...Universal Hotel.

Woman walks slowly across piazza.

Signor Mazzuco? Il Signor Kaufman mi ha dato il suo nome e mi ha consigliato di telefonarle. *(pause)* Ha già telefonato? Thompson, sì. *(pause)* Sì, ma al meno, spero di trovare le sue fotografie....

Woman walks slowly across piazza.

Monsieur Chonitsch? Je m'appelle Peter Thompson. Frau Distel m'a donner le conseil de vous parler--*(pause)* Oui-- *(pause)* eh bien, par ce que je voudrais trouver des photographies qui s'agitent des experiments medicaux faits par Sigmund Rascher....

Woman walks across piazza, arial view.

Herr Neustadt? My name is Peter Thompson. I am in Europe to research the Testpersons in the cold water experiments made by Dr. Sigmund Rascher at Dachau. *(pause)* 1942. Well, I need information on Testpersons who were revived by the women from Ravensbruck....

Crowd stands in piazza without moving, arial view.

Frau Distel, bitte. *(pause)* Barbara! Peter Thompson. *(pause)* Yeah, every day for the past week, and there's been no answer, so that door seems closed for the time being. *(pause)* Um hmm. *(pause)* Yeah, I'm going to the archives. *(pause)* Brussels, then Amsterdam, then Paris, then Koblenz, then we'll be in Dachau--*(pause)* No, I don't, but I'll ask when I arrive.

Smash cut to montage of train moving through country and cities.

Montage ends by walking up to the front door of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation. A swastika defaces the door.

Fade to black.

Fade up. Photograph of Doctors Holzloehner and Rascher.

1980.

I open a book and see this photograph.

It was taken in Germany in 1942.

It records the freezing of a prisoner at Dachau.

The prisoner is identified as "Testperson".

The Doctors sitting to either side are identified as Erich Holzloehner and Sigmund Rascher.

The purpose of the experiment is to find the best method to rewarm German pilots after they crash into arctic seas.

The Doctors have already tested rewarming methods ranging from boiling water to short waves.

The Doctors now test Women as Rewarming Agents.

They call this method ""Rewarming with Animal Heat".

The book states that in one case during the Rewarmings, a Woman revived a Testperson and the two had intercourse at the Testsite.

Fade to black.

Fade up. Time-lapse from morning to night of clouds moving over a fortress and a cathedral.

1980.

I have a strange dream.

Between a fortress and a cathedral is the Universal Hotel.

From my hotel window I can see the cathedral's on fire.

Outside the hotel, time moves quickly.

Inside is the Testsite where time has stopped.

The Testperson stands behind a closed door.

We speak through it.

I wake and write down what I remember of our conversation.

Fade to black.

Four photographs of Testperson in sequence.

1981.

I find four photographs of the Testperson:

 This one in a book written in Russian in an archive in Brussels.

 This one in a book written in Dutch in an archive in Amsterdam.

 These two in a book written in Polish in an archive in Paris.

The four photographs form this sequence:

 The Testperson stands before the Testsite.

 He enters the Water.

 He floats.

 He floats under the Surveillance of Doctors.

Fade to black.

Fade up. Twelve photographs of Testperson in sequence.

1982.

I find eight more photographs of the Testperson in the archive at Dachau.

The twelve photographs now form this sequence:

The Testperson changes into a flight uniform.

He stands before the Testsite.

He enters the Water.

He floats.

He floats under the Surveillance of Doctors.

Close up on photograph of Doctors Holzloehner and Rascher.

Then I learn something new from an archive in Chicago:
that Doctor Holzloehner left the rewarming experiments four months
before the Rewarmings with Animal Heat *began*.

His presence in this photograph means that it was taken at an earlier time
and should not be grouped with the other eleven.

Close up on photograph of Testperson.

Then I see something I've overlooked: the Testperson is *already* wet.

So here he's not entering the water, he has left it.

And having left it, he stands.

Nowhere have I read that a Testperson ever left the Water fully
conscious.

So I begin again, and look closely.

Fade to black.

Fade up. Photographs presented full-frame, one-by-one, in new sequence.

The Testperson wears Prisoner shoes and Pilot pants.
The belt is identified by the hand of Sigmund Rascher.

The Testperson stands in a corner.
One foot is bare.

He wears a flight jacket, flight pants, and one flight boot.

Now he wears a flightsuit and a life preserver.

The Testperson floats inside a metal bin within a wooden bin.
The bins are 13 feet square and 6 feet high.
The icewater is 5 feet deep.
These and the Surveillance table behind comprise the Testsite.

The wires by the side of his mouth lead to the Surveillance table.
The wires monitor body temperature.

He climbs from the bins.
Dr. Rascher and an Orderly hold a ladder.
Dr. Rascher holds the wires at the Testperson's mouth and looks to the
Surveillance table.

At the left is a hand with wristwatch.
The hand is blurred.
The exposure is long.
There is no light from the windows.
It must be night.

The jacket is opened.
The trousers sag at the waist.
The Prisoner faces front.

The Testperson is a Prisoner chosen by chance.
He has arrived at the Testsite.
He removes his uniform and puts on what he is given.
He faces the photographer.

Fade to black.

Fade up. Photographs presented close-up, one-by-one, in sequence.

Now he is given a pilot shirt and pants.

Now he is given a flightsuit and a life preserver.

Two wires are raised from the barracks floor.
He is ordered to turn left.

He is ordered "turn left."
Now he stands, his back to the photographer.

He is ordered to walk to the bins.
He is pushed into the water.
He rises to the surface and floats there.

The photographer moves to the right to record the angle of the body
floating on the surface of the water.

The first Test ends.

Now he climbs up.

He climbs two steps higher and looks at the photographer.
The Testperson continues to climb.
The life preserver, helmet and gloves are removed.
The flightsuit is opened and pulled down.

Now he faces the photographer.

Fade to black.

Fade up. Photographs presented in close-up, one-by-one, in sequence.

The Prisoner does not know the reason for this Test.
He was chosen by chance.
At the Ravensbruck concentration camp, a Woman is chosen

for a reason: her profession has been demonstrated.
It proves her ability to participate in the Rewarming Tests.
She is placed into service, on a train south to Dachau.

At Dachau, the Tests have continued since July.
It is now January, 1942.

For seven months the Tests have consisted of this:

Testpersons are placed in Water at a temperature between 53 and 36
degrees Farenheit.

They loose consciousness between 53 and 100 minutes.

But this Prisoner stands at the end of his Test.

Fade to black.

*Fade up. Photographs presented in extreme close-up, one-by-one, in
sequence.*

He models the fastening of a belt.

The details of uniform layerings.

The proof of uniform correctness from all points of view.

The details of the retrieval: how the Testperson can still climb a ladder
after suffering from deep cold.

Once out, he stands in the presence of a Doctor.

He holds his thumbs.

He stands perfectly still.

Fade to black.

Fade up. Extreme close-ups of photographs in sequence.

The Testsite and the Prisoner's uniform are prepared for a second Test.

The Surveillance table is again monitored.

He is ordered to the bins, and is pushed into the Water.

The second Test starts.

His body temperature lowers slowly over time.

Between 53 and 100 minutes it lowers to 86 degrees and he looses
consciousness.

Two drawings.

Dr. Rascher leans over the bins.

Now he gives the Order.

A rope is lowered from the ceiling and the Testperson is raised from the
water.

Dr. Rascher now sits at the Surveillance table and lights a cigarette.

The artist who sketched the end of the second Test is identified in the
Dachau archive by the last name of Tauber.

Fade to black.

Fade up. Overhead shot of bin of dark water with floating ice.

And what of the Woman who will rewarm the Testperson with Animal Heat?

What can be said of her?

Only that she has arrived by train from Ravensbruck, that she is a former Prostitute from Hamburg, that she will wear no uniform for the Test.

I imagine her at the Testsite, waiting.

I imagine her understanding what is required.

The Testperson is retrieved and the Testpersons are placed together, on a platform, under bright lights.

Fade up to white.

She revives him.

Overhead shot of bin of dark water with remnants of melted ice.

In the midst of the revival they make the gesture of intercourse.

In the Test report addressed to the Chief of the Secret State Police, Dr. Rascher will write that: Animal Heat plus Intercourse is as effective a Rewarming Agent as boiling water.

After the Test, Dr. Rascher leaves Dachau and drives home to his family in Munich.

Fade to black.

Fade up. Bunker Five, Dachau. Day.

1982.

Bunker Five, Dachau.

The Tests took place here 40 years ago.

The Testsite has no drama--just a concrete foundation, rocks, grass, a wall, and the traffic between Dachau and Munich.

What I found in seven archives is one name, two drawings and eleven photographs.

The name is the equivalent of a number, the two drawings could document the end of any test, and the eleven photographs emphasize a uniform: how it fastens and how it sags when wet.

The making of uniforms was the duty of the Ministry of Textiles.

The photographer made the photographs for their designers.

Overhead shot of bin with strange "face" visible in the depths of the water.

I make statements about the photographs that cannot be proven.

I speak with uncertainty.

I recall my dream and the conversation with the Testperson as he stands behind the closed door:

Me: Open it.
Him: If you force it, I'll go behind another door, in another room.
Me: What's your name.
Him: It's registered.
Me: There's no register. There's just water.
Him: Choose some.
Me: Choose some water? How can I?
Him: You can't. Talking about the water isn't possible for those who registered, and isn't possible for those who didn't.
Me: I'll be your witness.
Him: Don't dare talk to me about that. I had enough of that.
Me: I want to *talk* with you.
Him: You might be talking with yourself. I might already have walked away.
Me: Go ahead, *walk*, I might hear your *footsteps*.

Fade to black.

Fade up. Amsterdam. Ravensbruck Memorial.

1982.
While walking to an archive in Amsterdam I hear pulsing sounds and follow them.
By chance they come from a memorial to the women of Ravensbruck. Above the inscription is a defacement: *Stradzinsky*.

That week, as I walked to other archives, I noticed *Stradzinsky* written on other walls.

This man asked me what I was doing.
"Filming names", I said.
He said, "I've painted this wall three times to take away the names. After each time the names come back. Look, even here!
The names come back even here.
They come at night when I'm asleep."

Eleven photographs of the Testperson's face gradually fade to black.

END OF FILM

UNIVERSAL HOTEL
Copyright © 1986 by Peter Thompson
All rights reserved. Printed in the USA.
www.chicagomediaworks.com