

# SPACE INVADERS

**SIDNEY J. FURIE'S 1982 FILM THE ENTITY WAS LOOSELY BASED ON A TRUE STORY. PETER TSCHERKASSKY'S OUTER SPACE AND DREAM WORK ARE LOOSELY BASED ON THE ENTITY. ALICE LOVEJOY EXPLAINS.**

Peter Tscherkassky's ten-minute 1999 film *Outer Space*, the second part of his "Cinemascope Trilogy," begins over the sound of a running film projector. The image—in luminously grainy, scratched black-and-white—is canted, off-center, as though projected onto a wall from a worn-out print. A woman approaches a house, hesitates, and reaches for the doorknob. As she walks through rooms, the visuals gradually degrade—the frame fills with multiple exposures, and at times the images look as though they've been selectively exposed, certain areas of the frame burned with light, others obscured. With an electrical buzzing, the physical space surrounding the woman starts to break up: windows and mirrors shatter, images bleed into each other and disintegrate, until finally, all that remains legible are sprocket holes and the optical track—the celluloid itself.

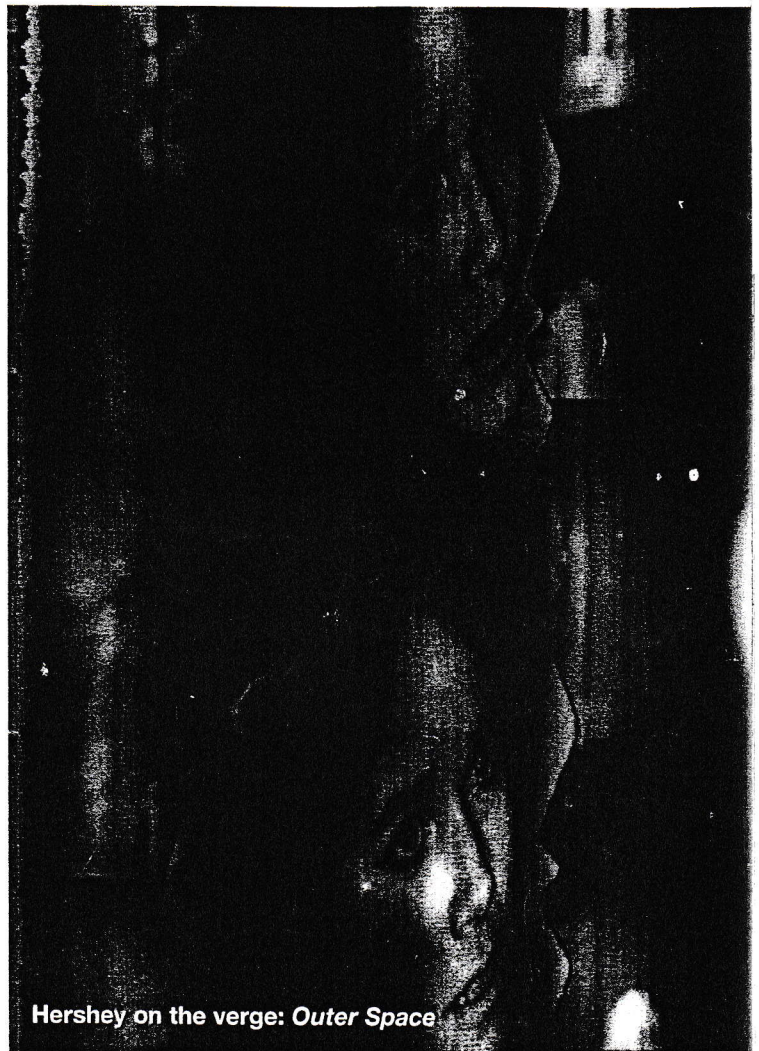
The film snaps back to coherence with a full-frame shot of the woman's face pushed against a mirror, screaming in pain. Another series of barely legible images, oscillating between negative and positive, gives way to the repeated gesture of the woman hurling a lamp at an offscreen target, and in what might be a reverse angle, mirrors smashing. It's as if the violence enacted upon her causes the woman to realize her *own* potential for violence—an uneasy sort of empowerment, particularly when the target of her aggression seems to be her own (mirror) image. The film ends with shots of her eye, doubled and then tripled; fragments of her speech; and finally her face, again doubled, then tripled—as if searching for a perpetrator, but finding only herself.

*Outer Space*, and a later Tscherkassky film, *Dream Work (For Man Ray)*, are constructed from images and sounds taken from Sidney J. Furie's 1982 horror film *The Entity*, in which Barbara Hershey plays a single California mother who is repeatedly beaten and raped by an invisible assailant. A battery of shrinks tag Hershey a textbook Freudian case ("She's masturbating!" exclaims one cigar-smoking psychoanalyst); her rapes are dreams, born from sexual abuse in early childhood and a latent desire to sleep with both her father and her teenage son. When analysis proves futile, a team of paranormal psychologists sets out to prove that the rapes are real—or as real as they can be, given there's a supernatural being involved.

*The Entity*, unlike most horror films, is not simply creepy, but arrestingly graphic and genuinely disturbing. With its many low-angle and/or off-center shots, it is imbued with an eerie sense of destabilization, and the visuals often have the disjointed quality of Surrealist film or painting (Hershey, saying good-night to her daughters, pulls down the covers to find one child upside down in bed, her feet where her head should be).

**OUTER SPACE AND DREAM WORK CAN BE RENTED FROM SIX-PACK FILM AT WWW.SIXPACKFILM.COM**

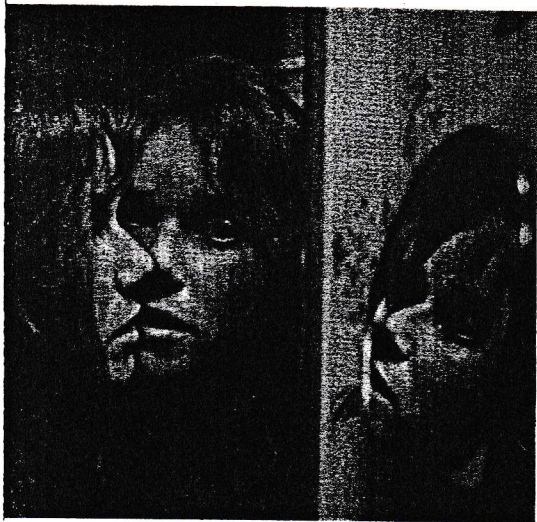
Ultimately, perhaps most eerily, this destabilization centers on Hershey herself—through the course of the attacks, she loses all self-possession, her eyes become vacant, her gaze detached. "Normal" interactions seem to serve only as noise in the



midst of this tranquil state. As noted in its end-crawl, *The Entity* is based on a true story. Perhaps the real-life victim was just off her rocker, or maybe the attacks were actually the work of a malevolent spirit. Either way, a diagnosis that places blame for violence squarely on the victim (such as the classically misogynistic diagnosis of hysteria) is undeniably damaging—dam-

age that is registered in extreme close-ups of Hershey's face and eyes, which in turn become a recurring visual motif in Tscherkassky's films.

For both *Outer Space* and *Dream Work*, Tscherkassky contact-printed images from the *Furie* film onto an undeveloped 35mm negative, which he hand-processed and printed. Shots and scenes were then re-sequenced, repeated, and elided to assemble new, compact narratives. At its core, *The Entity* is about the links between what we see and what we know. The film hinges on Barbara Hershey's attempts to convince her psychiatrist (Ron Silver) that the rapes are real—actually *happen*—even though her attacker is invisible. Her claim to non-visual (and unverifiable—though the audience witnesses it in painful detail) experience is lost between the psychologists and the paranormal researchers—on one hand, the psychologists explain her experience as purely psychological; on the other, the researchers devise an elaborate lab exper-



Two or three things: *The Entity*

iment to capture the entity and make it visible. With multiple exposures, inversion, and abstraction, *Outer Space* and *Dream Work* play off issues of visual truth—the question of whether or not images carry an indexical relationship to something that was *really there*, especially in the wake of trauma, and the ways in which aesthetic disorder mirrors psychic disorder.

The eleven-minute *Dream Work* (For Man Ray) (01) progresses from *Outer Space*'s tense conclusion. In *Outer Space*, accountability for violence shifted from the "haunted house" to Hershey, perhaps haunted herself. *Dream Work* moves deeper inside Hershey's subjective experience: her

dreams. Like *Outer Space*, *Dream Work* opens on a threshold—in the earlier film, the door of a house, here, the sphere of action moves directly to the bedroom, an open window and a blind flapping in the breeze. Over the sound of a ticking clock, Hershey undresses, brushes her hair, climbs into bed, and begins to dream. Shots of faces, opening and closing doors, and her own footsteps play over her face, in multiple exposures, both negative and positive. An alarm clock rings and the cutting accelerates, becoming frenzied. Negative forms and barely recognizable images dance around her head as her breathing becomes heavier—perhaps orgasmic.

The peak of aesthetic disorder marked by her apparent orgasm unleashes a string of violent images. In one, Silver's face is superimposed onto Hershey's, and two hands seem to hold her knees apart as she struggles and cries. Negative images of nails—produced by light projected over them onto the film—play over the entire frame. The scene, one of *The Entity*'s rapes, intercuts with shots of faces—children, a man, the woman—and returns to Hershey sleeping: the dreamer. The ticking clocks fade out and give way to a mechanical sound, sprocket holes again become visible, and two hands, in negative, appear with scissors and begin to alter the actual celluloid, placing small bead-like objects on it. Another alarm clock rings, and the image dissolves under the objects that are placed on the film.

*Dream Work* takes its name from Freud's theories of dreams and dream analysis. Tscherkassky writes that his film "realizes the central mechanism by which dreams produce meaning, the dream work, as Sigmund Freud described it: displacement... and condensation..." In Freud's dream work, our latent dreams—things we "know" subconsciously, such as a history of sexual abuse, are compressed into more compact narratives or displaced to imagery not explicitly linked to actual events. These processes create the manifest dream; the dream we *actually* dream. *Outer Space* and *Dream Work* and their imagery (nails, disembodied faces) are, in a sense, brief dreams condensed and displaced from *The Entity*. At times, Tscherkassky's films seem to mock the source material by mimicking the easy Freudian interpretation Hershey's analysts give her "dreams" (the face that is superimposed over Hershey's face dur-

ing the *Dream Work* rape is her son's). More importantly, they condense into visual form *The Entity*'s underlying psychological narrative, the spiral into subjectivity in which Hershey's character is forced to be at once victim and perpetrator of violence against herself. The cure? According to Freud, hysteria, an exclusively female complaint, is cured by pleasure and by making manifest (i.e., visual) the latent trauma that causes it—hence, in *Dream Work*, the woman's "orgasm" triggers the film's visual disintegration.

The film, however, is also named for American photographer Man Ray, whose "Rayographs," images produced when light is projected over opaque objects onto photographic paper, are the inspiration for Tscherkassky's contact-printing technique. And the films are truly homages: at one point, Tscherkassky directly quotes *Faces*, Man Ray's photograph of two parallel solarized profiles, while the ticking clock throughout the film suggests the Surrealist obsession with gears, machines, automatism, and their linkage with the subconscious. Rayographs, like dreams, do not represent the objects they capture, but rather evoke tones or moods. Techniques such as negative printing or solarization (in which the photographic paper is exposed to light during the developing process, causing tones to reverse at the image's edges) defamiliarize objects—Man Ray's colleague and fellow Surrealist László Moholy-Nagy wrote of the negative image: "The transposition of tones transposes the relationship [between a photograph and its subject]." The properties of light, photochemistry, celluloid, and paper, then, become constants in an equation whose end point is something much less concrete: the subconscious, the psyche. Tscherkassky uses the same basic photographic processes to create films concerned as much with their own materiality as with the psychological processes they evoke—a concept perhaps equally indebted to the films' source: in *The Entity*, too, psychology and material presence are uneasily linked—they require each other, even as they threaten to negate each other. Tscherkassky's cycles of progression and disintegration develop a similar logic—they are visual, yet at odds with their own visibility, narrative, yet at odds with the process of narration.

Alice Lovejoy is FILM COMMENT's Associate Editor.

tion of unanticipated encounters, like the one of a nanny and a billy goat which perform a scene of *amour courtois*. A minimalism in which a detail, like the coat or the eye of an animal that suddenly enters the shot, adds up to a marvellous apparition. Minor events and their enormous repercussions.

[NÚRIA ESQUERRA]

(1) «Serguei Dvortsevoi : Entretien», *Images Documentaires*, no. 50-51, 1st and 2nd quarter of 2004.

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### Outer Space

Peter Tscherkassky, Austria 1999, 10', 35 mm  
Cinemascope, b & w [p. 132]

The greater part of Tscherkassky's cinema is based on the intrinsic specificity of the format. This is the case with *Motion Picture (La Sortie des ouvriers de l'usine Lumière à Lyon)* of 1984; with *Parallel Space: Inter-View* (1992), made with a conventional 35 mm still camera; and with those works created from the physical manipulation of pre-existing cinematic material.

*Outer Space* is the second part of the CinemaScope Trilogy, completed by *L'Arrivée* (1997-98) and *Dream Work* (2001). In order to make *Outer Space*, as with *Dream Work*, Tscherkassky avails himself, as his only images, of bits of *The Entity* (1981), an American film directed by Sidney J. Furie. Barbara Hershey, the main character, lives through a series of odd events in her own house, where she is raped several times by a mysterious entity. Tscherkassky arrives at some surprising, and at the same time artisanal, visual effects, based on painstaking work with various fragments transformed into black and white and manipulated in the optical printer. The final piece is a stormy sea of images: with slow motion, multilayering, reframings, scratches, veiling, craquelure, images in negative; all this done with the intention of creating an hypnotic cinematic state in which the surface of the film—celluloid—and its physical properties as a whole are ever present on the screen. At times he even manages to show the mechanical cinematic device, normally invisible to the viewer, as in the section of the flickering dance of the sprocket holes of the film frames or, going still further, when he breaks the frame down into different bits, thus dismember-

ing it and creating in a single space, of four sprocket holes, a number of simultaneous images that intercommunicate, four horizontal lines of reading without digital effects. Another of his typical procedures—also of great skill at the technological level—consists in simultaneously showing different parts of the composition of the film frame, playing with the illuminated space—the image—and darkness—no light. A technique, this, already foregrounded by Kurt Kren in such works of his as *31/75 Asyl* (1975), and which Tscherkassky achieves by exposing in the darkness—with a special light bulb—parts of a frame through contact with the work print.

*Outer Space* combines musical passages from the original soundtrack with intercut dialogues that are unintelligible plus dull and metallic, strident sounds, in direct reference to the editing cuts that we see on-screen. All this is very obscure and confused, in consonance with the work as a whole.

[ANTONI PINENT]

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### As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty

Jonas Mekas, United States 2000, 288', 16 mm, colour [p. 134]

«With man's soul being squeezed out in all the four corners of the world today, when governments are encroaching upon this personal being with the huge machinery of bureaucracy, war and mass communication, [the American artist] feels that the only way to preserve man is to encourage his sense of rebellion, his sense of disobedience, even at the cost of open anarchy and nihilism. The entire landscape of human thought as it is accepted publicly in the Western world, has to be turned over. All public ideologies, values, and ways of life must be doubted, attacked. 'Smell it and get high, maybe we'll all get the answer that way! Don't give up the ship!' exclaims Allen Ginsberg. Yes, the artist is getting high on the death of his civilization, breathing in its poisonous gases. And yes, our art is 'confused' and all that jazz, jazz, jazz (Taylor Mead). But we refuse to continue the Big Lie of Culture. To the new artist the fate of man is more important than the fate of art, more important than the temporary confusions of art. You

criticize our work from a purist, formalistic and classicist point of view. But we say to you: What's the use of cinema if man's soul goes rotten?»<sup>1</sup>

What is a diary? In contrast to the narrative genre in both literature and cinema (the latter as a result of the invention of melodrama by David Wark Griffith), the diary involves a series of notes that are not organised for their dramatic value but instead reflect moments linked to the reality of the present. A diary is by definition unfinished and may be temporarily interrupted. What differentiates the filmed diary from the written one is that in the first the note is filmed and occurs simultaneously. It is not recreated, nor is it a retrospective reflection. The film diary embodies the quality of the present defended by Jack Kerouac. In his insistence on «the use of the receptivity of the present moment for composition,» the filmmaker takes the standpoint of the jazz musician.

«When one writes diaries, it's a retrospective process: you sit down, you look back at your day, and you write it all down. To keep a film (camera) diary, is to react (with your camera) immediately, now, this instant: either you get it now or you don't get it at all.»<sup>2</sup>

As well as creating the infrastructures necessary for the survival of a cinema which lacks a commercial end and origin, Mekas has also devoted his efforts to creating this complex medium: the film diary. These two bits of information are inseparable. It is impossible to speak of Jonas Mekas's diaries without speaking of his dedication to the so-called New American Cinema. His diaries are the notes that spring up around and during the creation of said structure, being transformed into the filmed record of the spirit of this movement.

*As I Was Moving Ahead I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty*, his love poem to New York, gives sustenance to the idea that Mekas has of himself: «I'm not a filmmaker, I'm a filmer.» What he is saying is that doesn't make cinema. He just films and accumulates what is filmed. He doesn't create a story based on his life; he films his life and lives through filming it. It's the intertitles that give a retrospective dimension to the work. Here's an example: «You don't have to know where you're going, you only need to be prepared.»

The images of *As I Was Moving Ahead I*

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