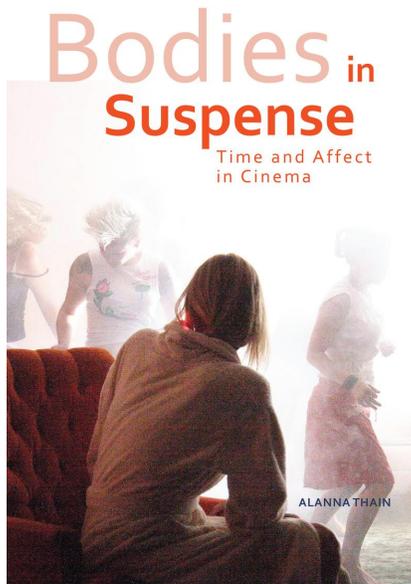


BOOK REVIEW



Bodies in Suspense: Time and Affect in Cinema

By Alanna Thain
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Alanna Thain opens the conclusion of her book, *Bodies in Suspense: Time and Affect in Cinema*, with a provocative quote from James Elkin's *The Object Stares Back* (1996): "Seeing is metamorphosis, not mechanism." This idea, through her conclusion's focus on Andrei Tarkovsky's reflections on cinema, *Sculpting in Time* (1986), is a way to elucidate the often overlooked dimension of how time and atmosphere collide to create an understanding of suspense films that emerge out the corporeal, the senses, and affect. For Thain, seeing-as-metamorphosis is, within the context of both corporeal and affective turns in cultural studies, a call for the relational immersiveness between the spectator and the film, and a way to dismantle notions of mechanistic perception towards new forms of subjectification as a "process of living" (277). I was both surprised and delighted that Thain concludes her examination of the suspended body of suspense films with Tarkovsky, because the Russian filmmaker could easily be read as out of place in a discussion of suspenseful time. The point of Tarkovsky's inclusion here is to challenge ideas that have become petrified. Tarkovsky's reflections are upheld in dominant mechanistic readings on time in cinema that situate rhythm (of the long take) as the foundation of the art house cinema. Thain's fresh rereading of Tarkovsky's correspondence with audience members regarding their corporeal experiences (such as headaches and nausea) upon seeing his masterful 1975 film, *Mirror*, reminds one that Tarkovsky's cinema is indeed immersively, atmospherically, and affectively fashioned to "live time" (277). Time in Tarkovsky's films acquires a thickness (as the titular notion of "sculpting" suggests) toward corporeal metamorphosis and potential, rather than the mechanistic view often associated with the act of seeing. According to Thain, time immerses the spectator in Tarkovsky's films in ways that reconfigure notions of the subject, agency, sensations, and knowledge.

The main thrust of *Bodies in Suspense* is to address affective time in suspense films where bodies themselves signal a different experience of time. Thain focuses her first chapter on Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), for example, where Scottie Ferguson's (James Stewart) body, hanging from a rooftop—in *suspense*, as we never see him come down—affectively projects the spectator into an experience of “anotherness” with time, a place where bodies make sense. Thain's affective, event-based discussion of *Vertigo* situates the replay of the spiral (cued by the Saul Bass credit sequence) within the experience of suspense in the thriller genre. The equation she makes between spiral and suspense comes in the fact that the spiral does not signal intelligible revelation, or character identification, but what she calls “immediation [...] to highlight affective immediacy that undoes reference and position” (76). Accordingly, Thain is critical of Laura Mulvey's rethinking of time in *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (2006). She challenges Mulvey's thinking within modes of pensive or knowing spectatorial control with the “unthought” that is privileged in the suspense genre. Hitchcock famously told Francois Truffaut that suspense is created by immersing the audience in temporal suspension and thrilling anticipation: cueing the audience to expect a bomb to go off, for example, and then making them wait for it as long as possible. It is the suspended waiting that Thain is interested in here, that sense of living—not knowing—time that Tarkovsky's films so effectively produce. For Thain, suspense is not the resolution of uncertainty, but, like Scottie still hanging, is an affective *suspension* that is not resolved. Against Roland Barthes, then, for Thain suspense grips the guts, not the mind.

In Chapters 2 and 3, Thain continues her exploration of the anotherness of time with a move into the “unthought” of David Lynch's Hollywood Trilogy (*Lost Highway*, *Mulholland Drive*, and *Inland Empire*) and Lou Ye's *Suzhou River* (2000), arguing that these films are all remakes of *Vertigo*, offering a series of doubles and repetitions that create a vertigo-effect, or a vertigo-time—an invitation to look again into ‘lost highways’ of corporeality and affect rather than narrative logic. Fans of David Lynch's cinema know in their guts that the pleasure of his films resides in what Thain might call vertiginous and unresolvable confusions—those that loosen control around knowing or “solving” the narrative puzzle, producing new forms of subjectivation. Lynch's films allow the spectator to linger in sensation of the “unthought.” In Thain's reading, this lingering is vertiginous, an uncannily spiralling of suspense that doubles back in Lynch's films in the figure of the femme fatale. Here the doubling and repetitions are less uncanny in the psychoanalytical sense than they are about “affective uncertainty about identification” (162).

Like the performative experience at Club Silencio in *Mulholland Drive*, and all the other pleasurable dead-ends of Lynch's cinema, art is indeed beyond knowledge for Thain. Influenced by Henri Bergson's notion that "the real is continual change of form," art is in this sense produces affect before it produces content (152).

For scholars focused on body genres, particularly the horror genre, it is very common to think through atmosphere in more spatialized terms, as setting is so upfront in horror. Thain's thoughtful, rigorous, and creative re-positioning of affective time in relation to the suspenseful body signals a serious lack of scholarship in the horror genre on themes related to corporeal time, especially in relation to the suffering body suspended in the grips of terror. Though Thain does not discuss Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), her focus on "immediation" helps us to shift the locus of that film from its American Gothic setting (a space off the main highway of the American Dream), to the folding-over of Marion Crane's driving time as a form of suspended terror (helped along by Bernard Herrmann's jarring music). In Thain's notion of "immediation" the audience is suspended like Crane's dead body, slumped over the bathtub after the murder, or her car pausing momentarily before the marsh finally swallows it—an effect that is not as much about suspenseful identification with characters as it is about sustained notions of heightened affect. In such moments, time is a crucial aspect that Thain's book helps genre scholars to rethink along new lines of unthought and sensation. *Bodies in Suspense* is an important contribution to the study of affect, the corporeal, and the senses in the suspense film. It is also indispensable to horror scholars seeking to rethink of the genre in other terms, a much-needed signpost along the lost highways of otherness and in-betweenness.

— Mario DeGiglio-Bellemare

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