

The Thin Time

a film by j.r.hughto



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Images from *The Thin Time* are available at: www.thethintime.com

Synopsis:

"The strongest prison is the mind."

Cid Benengeli is in jail and he doesn't know why. All the Prison Director wants is a confession of everything bad Cid's ever done, preferably in a light, airy prose style. Find the last novel of a disappeared playwright -- that was the job they'd hired Cid for and it was the manuscript that had gotten him into this mess. Sure, Cid knew where the writer was, and had found the book, too, but why did everyone want it? And why is he now sitting in jail writing the same damned book?

Director's Statement:

In 2000 I completed *Words of My Voice*, my first full-length graphic novel, as my Comparative Literature thesis at Cornell University. Shortly after graduating, I moved to Boston where I began another graphic novel, *8x8*. It didn't take me long to decide that *8x8* was really a film, and with that I began shooting my first, although never completed, narrative feature.

After going back to school to study film, first at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and then at CalArts, I made several short experimental films and a longer documentary, but *The Thin Time* is in a sense a continuation of the same ideas I was exploring in this early narrative work, namely genre, the mixing of genre, an element of self-reflexivity, and a great concern with form. In addition, *The Thin Time* takes a similar tack to my early comic narratives in exploring the idea of the story as much as telling a story. The real essence of the narrative in *The Thin Time* is narrative itself, which becomes clear as Cid's story begins to disintegrate -- the audience never finds out what the novel is about or what its real significance is, besides the idea of a story. Drawing on such diverse source material as Nabokov, Cervantes, and American film noir, *The Thin Time* is an attempt to synthesize genres, but also to call attention to the idea of genre, the idea of the story, the "meta-narrative" so often reviled in film school... The film itself is really a work of theory rather than a work of fiction, a work of literary criticism, of aesthetic philosophy. Its "story" serves as a framework for executing these ideas.

That being said, in order to succeed as a narrative film, a movie must function on its own as a work of art with its own merit apart from synthesis, reference, and criticism. I hope that *The Thin Time* is able to stand on its own as an enjoyable and emotionally charged experience, indeed a story, but one whose narrative experience is one more of emotional satisfaction. The film is a journey, as all narratives are, but one that hopes to allow itself to break free of its theoretical superstructure to arrive at a place of growth and change. In the end, *The Thin Time* can be read as a call to arms, insisting that artists do not have to move or create within a preconceived structure.

- J.R. Hughto

Director J.R. Hughto's Bio:

J.R. Hughto began making graphic novels while studying Comparative Literature at Cornell University. After moving to Boston, he started turning his comics into movies. His concurrent documentary work led him to the California Institute of the Arts where he pursued an MFA in film and video. While at CalArts, Hughto completed *The Mirror Eye*, a mid-length documentary on Clement Greenberg. *The Mirror Eye*, released by ThINC, screens throughout September and October 2006 at New York City's Luben House and premiered at the MoST in May 2005. Hughto's short film *Witness* is included in the permanent collection of the International Boxing Hall of Fame. Since receiving his MFA, Hughto has co-founded The Independent Movie Supply Company, a production house dedicated to creating low budget films with intense personal vision and integrity. He currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

Cinematographer Apolonia Panagopoulos' Bio:

Originally from Massachusetts, Apolonia Panagopoulos now lives in Los Angeles, California where she is currently working towards a Master of Fine Arts degree in film at the California Institute of the Arts. Panagopoulos makes experimental narratives on 16mm film, video, and super 8; often collaborating with filmmaker J.R. Hughto. Along with Hughto and fellow filmmaker Jay Keitel, Panagopoulos has recently co-founded IMSCo, a small Los Angeles-based production company. Her films have shown at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; at the Zeitgeist Gallery in Cambridge, MA; and at REDCAT at the Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles. Her most recent film will screen at the Ojai Film Festival in Ojai, California in October, 2006.

Sound Designer Jesse Gilbert's Bio:

Jesse Gilbert works in sound and software design, creating flexible tools that are activated in live performance, via network interaction, or in installation settings. His work has recently focused on multi-channel immersive environments, composing for film and video, and real-time electronic sound using custom sampling software. His engagement with the software design process centers around the deconstruction of rational processes, usually resulting in variable interfaces that emphasize intuitive, fluid modes of human/computer interaction. Gilbert's work has been shown widely in the US and abroad; venues include Engine27 (New York), Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), the New Museum (New York), net.congestion (Amsterdam), Ars Electronica (Austria), CEAIT Festival (Los Angeles), Kunstradio's Recycling the Future (Austria), and PORT (MIT, Boston). His work has received support from the National Endowment for the Arts, Eyebeam Atelier, the National Performance Network, turbulence.org, the Studio for Creative Inquiry (Carnegie Mellon), the Jerome Foundation, Creative Capital, the Markle Foundation, the Beall Center for Art & Technology (UC Irvine), the Banff Centre for the Arts, and the Center for Experiments in Art, Information and Technology (CEAIT).

Cast:

Curtis Winter.....Cid
Dakota Goldhor.....Veronica
Jason Decker.....Delalande
Lee Lynch.....Rodderick
Michael Kelber.....Ohls
Jason Joel Harris.....Dundy
Darryl Hughto.....Clem
J.R. Hughto.....Charles
Marlowe.....the cat

Crew:

Writer/Director/Producer/Editor.....J.R. Hughto
Producer/Assistant Director.....Nir Nahum
Cinematographer/Assistant Editor.....Apolonia Panagopoulos
Sound Design.....Jesse Gilbert
Art Director/Costume Designer.....E.B. Brooks
Assistant Art Director/Prop Master/Set Construction.....Sarah Moretz
Hair and Make-up.....Ayla Dew
SFX Supervisor/Gaffer/Colorist.....Jay Keitel
2nd Assistant Director.....Josee LaJoie
Assistant Sound Editor.....Chauncy Godwin
Craft Services/Chef.....Susan Roth

Selected Reviews of *The Thin Time*:

An Essay on *The Thin Time*, by Gary Mairs, October 2006

J.R. Hughto's *The Thin Time* shouldn't work. It's an absurd conceit, pitting the hoariest art film clichés (the mind as prison, with creativity the only means of escape) against a film noir pastiche. But its parallel structure – every character doubled, the noir mystery bleeding in and out of the art film exercise – fractures and makes strange each overfamiliar detail. As the film lurches forward, all the most laughable elements start to coalesce into a devouring sense of dread, and the film becomes a bad dream you can't quite shake – or make sense of – for days.

With nods to *Vertigo* and Nabokov, Frank Miller and James Benning, *The Thin Time* parades its influences. More than anything, the film resembles the noir dreamscapes of Dennis Potter's *The Singing Detective* or the Kafka-meets-Chandler of Paul Auster's New York trilogy. There's a similarly hermetic, insular quality, the sense of a character's fantasies come all too vividly to life.

Hughto (and his cinematographer, Apolonia Panagopoulos) favor stark, flattened compositions, often shot with a blunt wide angle lens uncomfortably close to the character. The images have a claustrophobic pull that's drawn as much from comic books as from cinema: **this might be the most effective translation of the graphic novel's sensibility to film since *Ghost World***. Jesse Gilbert's sound expertly fuses the film's warring halves, the music (and the musique concrete of the elaborately detailed ambiances) constantly destabilizing and complicating the already intricate structures.

For all its formal elegance and conceptual intelligence, the film might remain a particularly clever exercise were it not for its cast. Curtis Winter, in the lead role as Cid Benengeli, private eye and captive, is astonishing. Winter (a filmmaker and publisher of the gorgeous music and photography journal *The Colonial*) never resorts to the cartoonish or the overblown. When pitted against Dakota Goldhor's femme fatale, Cid's as confused as he is aroused; when confronted by Lee Lynch (another gifted filmmaker taking a turn before the camera) or Darryl Hughto, he's as amused by their eccentric, logorrheic monologues as we are. Bewildered, angry and bemused, he guides the audience into the film's complexities in stoic reaction shots that reveal more desperation and confusion with each iteration.

Best of all are his droll scenes with Jason Decker as the smarmy prison warden. Decker, looking and sounding like the exasperated comic foil in a forties thriller, turns the film's artiest moments into sly comedy, answering Winter's agitation with a bureaucrat's amiable condescension.

The Thin Time is Hughto's second feature, after the documentary *The Mirror Eye*. Together, the films point towards enormous potential: here is a young filmmaker willing to use familiar material to push the audience into unfamiliar territory, who is equally adept with comedy, nonfiction and nightmare, who is **both unabashedly literary and purely cinematic**. As his craft catches up with his ambitions, he could go anywhere.