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Article

From Pathology to Experience: Affective Form and the Ethics of Coexistence in Contemporary Japanese Cinema

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Abstract: This article examines Shō Miyake's All the Long Nights as an affective and cultural intervention into contemporary representations of psychological distress. Rather than framing premenstrual syndrome and panic disorder as exceptional pathologies to be overcome, the film situates them as ongoing conditions of subjectivity embedded in everyday life. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, affect theory, and Raymond Williams's concept of "structures of feeling," the article argues that the film displaces linear narratives of crisis and recovery in favor of a non-dramatic mode of coexistence grounded in vulnerability. Through a restrained visual form characterized by static shots, dispersed spatial organization, and homogenized temporal rhythms, psychological disruption is translated into a perceptual experience rather than an explanatory narrative. Emotional distress is rendered as a continuous state that coexists with routine social practices, transforming trauma from an individualized problem into a shared condition of lived experience. The use of 16mm film further foregrounds material texture and sensory immediacy, aligning spectators' bodily perception with that of the characters. Ultimately, the film articulates an ethics of being-with that reimagines affective relations and psychic repair within the socio-cultural context of post-disaster Japan.

Keywords: *All the Long Nights*; Affective experience; Structures of feeling; Ethics of coexistence

In recent years, a growing number of Japanese films have foregrounded psychological distress and emotional experience as central thematic concerns. However, such narratives often continue to rely on dramatized conflict structures and linear models of "problem–overcoming–growth." Within this context, *All the Long Nights* (2024), directed by Shō Miyake, stands out as a distinctive intervention. While the film takes premenstrual syndrome and panic disorder as its points of departure, it does not frame psychological conditions as abnormal states that must be cured or transcended. Instead, they are presented as enduring modes of subjectivity embedded within the rhythms of everyday life.

Emotional disorientation in the film no longer functions as a narrative climax or turning point. Rather, it unfolds alongside routine practices such as commuting, working, and social interaction, forming a foundational element of the film's overall rhythm and perceptual organization. Existing scholarship on Miyake's cinema has largely focused on realist aesthetics, low-intensity narration, or the stylistic characteristics of a new generation of auteur filmmaking, emphasizing his de-dramatized approach and attentiveness to everyday experience. By comparison, less attention has been paid to the mechanisms through which subjectivity is

structured in All the Long Nights, to the ways in which cinematic form mediates emotional experience, and to the film's participation in broader processes of meaning-making within contemporary cultural contexts.

At a moment when psychological issues have become increasingly visible and emotional discourse continues to proliferate, it is particularly worth examining how the film reimagines the relationship between "psychological disorder" and social life through its formal and narrative strategies. This article therefore offers an integrated analysis of *All the Long Nights* across three interrelated dimensions: subjectivity, cinematic form, and cultural meaning. First, at the level of subjectivity, drawing on psychoanalytic theory, the article examines how the film's representation of embodied experience and emotional disarray reveals a condition in which the unity of the subject is repeatedly destabilized, while simultaneously reconfiguring relational modes between self and other. Second, at the level of cinematic form, the analysis focuses on strategies of framing, movement, and spatial organization, demonstrating how a decentered visual structure guides viewers toward a mode of spectatorship oriented around sensation and affect. Finally, situating the film within the cultural context of contemporary emotional experience, the article discusses how its everyday treatment of psychological distress contributes to a redefinition of "coexistence," vulnerability, and the social meaning of emotion.

1. Subjectivity in Disintegration: Psychological Disorder and the Fissured Self

Shō Miyake's *All the Long Nights* does not present psychological disorders as exceptional conditions that must be overcome; rather, it depicts them as persistent conditions of subjectivity. In the film, Fujisawa Misa repeatedly experiences disruptions in her social relations due to cyclical emotional instability and physical discomfort arising from long-term premenstrual syndrome (PMS), while Yamazoe Toshitaka suffers from panic disorder, which triggers sudden episodes of anxiety and withdrawal, continually interrupting his daily actions. Their psychological struggles are not organized along a linear narrative path of "cause—treatment—recovery"; instead, they constitute the structural premise through which self-awareness and relational engagement with others are articulated.

From a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective, such subjective predicaments can be understood as the result of a persistent failure of the mirror mechanism. In his "mirror stage" theory, Lacan posits that the subject does not possess a unified, autonomous self a priori but gradually develops self-consciousness through misrecognition of external images. The unified image provided by the mirror is essentially an imaginary integration, functioning to temporarily conceal the subject's internal division between bodily experience and the symbolic order. As a result, the subject perpetually oscillates between integration and fragmentation in the question of "Who am I?" As Lacan asserts, "The opponent that the 'I' identifies with in becoming itself is not itself, but the Other; in order to become oneself, the subject must relinquish itself, inscribing within itself this original, mutually contradictory fissure between self and Other" (Fukuhara, 2002/1998).

In *All the Long Nights*, Fujisawa and Yamazoe inhabit precisely this state, in which the fragmentation of subjectivity is continually revealed rather than concealed. Fujisawa endeavors to maintain the image of a "rational, self-controlled social subject" within the workplace, yet the emotional eruptions caused by PMS repeatedly shatter this imaginary self, resulting in persistent setbacks within social evaluation systems. Similarly, Yamazoe attempts to preserve his personal boundaries through silence and restraint, yet the sudden onset of panic attacks continually exposes his body to uncontrollable states. Their shared condition lies in the

persistent negation of the subject's imaginary integration of self by bodily experience, rendering the unity promised by the mirror unstable.

Within this framework, the film's treatment of the "Other" becomes especially significant. Unlike conventional psychological narratives, where authoritative others (such as family members, romantic partners, or therapists) provide recognition and repair, *All the Long Nights* restricts the Other to a highly quotidian, de-idealized, and de-authoritized colleague relationship. Fujisawa and Yamazoe do not discover an idealized image in each other for identification; rather, they repeatedly witness in one another a reflection of the same disordered state present within themselves. This relational pattern does not generate an ideal ego but forms a "fissured mirror": the subject sees in the Other not completeness, but an externalization of their own fragmentation. As Lacan emphasizes, the mirror does not establish the self through fusion or assimilation; rather, it awakens the subject's position through difference and lack (Fukuhara, 2002/1998).

Consequently, the relationship between Fujisawa and Yamazoe is not curative but rather one of acknowledgment: the Other's presence does not eliminate trauma, yet it makes the subject aware that their disorder is not an isolated case. This acknowledgment does not occur through verbal psychological analysis; it manifests instead through silence, avoidance of gaze, and parallel actions, reflecting a pre-linguistic intersubjective perception. On this level, the film transforms psychological trauma from an "internal problem in need of explanation" into an existential condition of subjectivity. The subject is no longer required to return to a stable, healthy, and predictable self but learns to maintain their position within the fissure. Previous studies note that Miyake deliberately avoids dramatized depictions of psychological issues, rendering trauma a continuous backdrop within the rhythm of everyday life rather than a narrative climax (Huang, 2020). Within this authorial context, the ego is always constituted through its relation to the Other (Lacan, 2006/1966), and its establishment unfolds as a continual process of internalizing the Other through repeated identificatory practices (Evans, 1996).

In a broader socio-cultural context, *All the Long Nights* can also be interpreted as an indirect response to the collective psychological aftermath of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Fukushima nuclear disaster (Huang & Katada, 2020). Rather than representing post-disaster memory or dominant cultural narratives through grand-scale storytelling, the film adopts a micro-perspective, translating collective trauma into the fractures and disorder experienced within individual life. Fujisawa's emotional collapse and Yamazoe's psychological suffocation constitute quotidian representations of post-disaster mental impairment. This narrative strategy not only emphasizes the extensibility of trauma in private dimensions but also repositions the function of the cinematic medium—no longer as a vehicle for reproducing collective memory or reinforcing established meaning structures, but as a perceptual apparatus capable of generating emotional resonance and potential therapeutic effects.

The film further develops a visual metaphor system through recurring motifs of transportation to explore ruptures between characters and social systems. In the opening sequence, Fujisawa lies on a bench at a bus stop while a bus slowly enters a circular intersection but does not accommodate her. This scene establishes the character's spatial and psychological condition and introduces the film's central motif of "disconnection from social rhythm." As a cyclical mode of public operation, the bus symbolizes the ongoing circulation of social order and the collaborative functioning of institutional time and public space. Yet in this scene, the ongoing motion of the transportation system contrasts sharply with the character's stillness, signaling a functional suspension of Fujisawa's social subjectivity.

This imagery is further extended in Yamazoe's daily life. At home, he pedals a stationary exercise bike, creating a paradoxical situation in which the body remains in motion yet does not

achieve real spatial displacement. This futile movement is both the behavioral externalization of panic disorder and a symbol of his isolation from the mechanisms of social operation. Both protagonists are unable to utilize the transportation systems that embody social rhythm and institutional operation, indicating that their bodies and consciousness have disengaged from planned, public temporal mechanisms, becoming drifting subjects at the margins of urban space.

Notably, the depiction of Yamazoe's inability to ride trains carries profound cultural symbolism within the Japanese context. Shinkansen and JR rail systems are not only emblems of urban modernization but also exemplify highly organized, efficiency-driven social logic. Yamazoe's fear of trains thus exceeds individual psychopathology and becomes a tacit resistance to urban centrism, technological rationality, and accelerated social life. The on-screen text, "My world now only reaches as far as I can walk," further underscores this theme, revealing the core of the film's trauma aesthetics: in the post-"3.11" context, how social subjects might seek to reposition themselves amid the disintegration of everyday order.

The film's treatment of earthquake scenes extends this experience to the collective psychological dimension of post-disaster society. In an office scene, employees confronted with sudden tremors do not display panic but maintain silence and restraint, sitting quietly at their workstations while awaiting the cessation of vibrations. This surface calm reflects a mechanism of internalization within post-disaster society, whereby uncontrollable events are transformed into tolerable quotidian reality. As the director notes, whether PMS, panic disorder, or the earthquake itself, all constitute "uncontrollable internal or external natural forces," and the film depicts how individuals strive to cope, adjust, and survive under persistent uncontrollable conditions. By juxtaposing internal bodily nature with external natural disaster, the film establishes a perceptual resonance between psychological and physical realities, deeply addressing the complex ways in which post-disaster individuals navigate survival strategies in an uncertain world.

2. Embodied Temporality and the Formalization of Psychological Distress

In *All the Long Nights*, Shō Miyake does not rely on dramatized narrative conflict or psychological monologue to represent the emotional states of his characters. Instead, through a rigorously restrained visual form, the film transforms psychological disarray into a perceptible viewing experience. Rather than attempting to "explain" the characters' inner worlds, the film organizes relations among time, space, and the body in such a way that spectators are gradually drawn into the characters' affective rhythms. Psychological distress thus ceases to function merely as a narrative theme and becomes internalized as a structuring principle of the film's formal organization.

At the level of cinematography, the film predominantly employs static camera setups and medium-to-long shots, deliberately avoiding rapid editing, subjective camera movement, or emotionally charged close-ups. Characters are frequently positioned at the edges of the frame or enclosed within their surrounding environments, producing a subtle yet persistent sense of distance. This compositional strategy diminishes the spectator's immediate access to the characters' psychological interiors and redirects attention toward the perceptual relation between bodies and space. Emotional breakdowns—whether Fujisawa's loss of control or Yamazoe's panic attacks—are not accentuated through magnified facial expressions or formal intensification. Instead, they emerge abruptly within otherwise stable visual fields. It is precisely through this formal restraint that emotional disruption is naturalized as part of everyday life rather than marked as an exceptional or pathological event.

Temporally, the film adopts an almost homogenized rhythm. The narrative is not structured around clearly defined climaxes or turning points but is composed of repetitive everyday scenes: commuting to and from work, routine office labor, brief exchanges, and extended silences. The absence of dramatic differentiation between these scenes renders time as a prolonged, suspended condition. Within this temporal structure, emotional disturbance does not interrupt the flow of daily life; rather, it coexists with it. Trauma is no longer framed as a singular, explosive incident but as a continuous state that permeates ordinary existence.

Spatial organization further reinforces this aesthetic logic. Everyday locations—offices, streets, train platforms, and commuter trains—are presented with a high degree of neutrality and functionality, stripped of overt symbolic coding. A long take set in front of a train station offers a telling example: in the foreground, pedestrians pass briskly across the frame; in the middle ground, the protagonist stands still at a street corner, waiting; in the background, a bus arrives as passengers board and disembark. These movements unfold simultaneously without hierarchical subordination. One trajectory aligns directly with the protagonist and the narrative line, while the others—such as the random flow of pedestrians or the bus' s arrival—bear no direct narrative significance. As Ying (2024) observes, Miyake' s cinema prioritizes not narrative coherence or visual clarity but "the quantitative accumulation of movement within the frame." The introduction of these non-narrative movements disrupts the conventional concentration of cinematic attention and produces a multi-centered dynamic structure. Rather than guiding the spectator toward a single focal point, the image activates a dispersed attentional field oriented toward rhythm and sensation.

Notably, moments of emotional intensity are not accompanied by formal escalation. Whether depicting emotional collapse or panic, the film maintains a consistent visual distance. This de-dramatized approach prevents emotion from becoming a visual spectacle and instead situates it within a tolerable perceptual range. The spectator is not invited to fully identify with the characters' suffering but is made aware of the limits of observational access. This viewing position avoids a voyeuristic gaze and sustains an ethical restraint grounded in respect for the characters' vulnerability.

The film' s treatment of interpersonal relationships similarly resists conventional emotional amplification. Key interactions between Fujisawa and Yamazoe occur through parallel actions rather than direct verbal exchange. They walk side by side, work alongside one another, yet rarely engage in explicit emotional confession. The camera maintains a measured distance, keeping both bodies within the frame without emphasizing intimacy through composition. This formal choice corresponds to the film' s relational structure of the "fractured subject," in which connection is not founded on identification or emotional fusion but on co-presence maintained through distance.

Through these visual strategies, *All the Long Nights* transforms psychological disruption from a narrative topic into a formal experience. The image no longer functions to explain the characters' inner states; instead, it becomes the medium through which subjectivity itself is rendered perceptible. The spectator' s experience of temporal delay, emotional suspension, and perceptual instability constitutes a formal reenactment of the characters' condition. In this sense, the film enacts a shift from narrating trauma to presenting it, positioning cinematic form as the primary means of accessing lived experience.

This aesthetic stance is further reinforced by Miyake' s persistent use of 16mm film stock in an era dominated by digital high-definition imagery. In *All the Long Nights*, the grain, noise, chromatic aberration, and residual exposure marks of 16mm film are not technical imperfections but foundational elements of cinematic sensation. As Miyake has stated in interviews, his choice of film is not motivated by nostalgia but by a precise pursuit of tactile and atmospheric qualities, allowing spectators to perceive the external world—wind, light,

texture—from a sensory position aligned with that of the protagonists. Film, in this context, functions not as a stylistic device but as a perceptual conduit that facilitates bodily engagement.

The film's many landscape shots that diverge from narrative progression—such as suburban hills at dusk or city skylines scattered with starlight—do not operate as symbolic backdrops or transitional spaces. Instead, they construct what may be described as "pure optical and sound situation." This strategy aligns with theories of surface images, which emphasize direct sensory presentation over representational depth. Rather than conveying meaning, these images generate affective intensity through light, color, texture, and movement. As Massumi's affect theory suggests, affect is not a psychological emotion or subjective representation but a non-conscious, pre-personal intensity. (Shaviro, 2010) In *All the Long Nights*, spectators do not grasp the image through interpretive comprehension but receive it through bodily sensation, turning cinematic viewing into an experience of physical resonance.

In this sense, the film's visual form is not a neutral technical choice but an aesthetic position inseparable from subjective experience. By reorganizing the rhythms and material textures of everyday imagery, All the Long Nights offers a mode of existence for disordered subjects that does not depend on dramatized repair. At the same time, it lays a formal foundation for broader discussions of the visibility of emotional distress at the social and institutional levels. By situating psychological distress at the level of cinematic form rather than narrative representation, this chapter establishes the formal and perceptual framework upon which the subsequent analysis of the film's broader cultural and social implications will be built.

3. Affective Experience and Cultural Meaning in Everyday Life

Building on the preceding analyses of subject formation and film form, it becomes clear that *All the Long Nights* does not merely represent individual psychological conditions but actively participates in the cultural production of meaning surrounding contemporary affective experience. By rendering premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and panic disorder as ordinary, ongoing conditions of everyday life, the film reframes affective disruption not as an abnormal state in need of correction, but as a lived experience that can be perceived, understood, and collectively endured. It is precisely through this process of translation—from pathology to experience—that the film generates its distinctive cultural significance.

First, through a deliberately de-dramatized narrative strategy, the film transforms emotional distress from an "event" into a continuous "state." In conventional narrative models, psychological disorders often function as key plot devices that propel narrative development and are ultimately resolved through recovery or transformation. *All the Long Nights*, by contrast, intentionally weakens this logic by embedding Fujisawa's and Yamazoe's affective difficulties within repetitive, subdued routines of everyday life. Under this quotidian treatment, affective disruption is stripped of its dramatic intensity and pathological framing, becoming instead a condition that coexists alongside work, commuting, and social interaction. This approach resonates with a central insight in cultural studies concerning the concept of "structures of feeling." Raymond Williams opposed isolating film as a purely technical or artistic form, arguing instead for its analysis within broader social and historical processes, and emphasizing the dynamic relationship between cinematic form and structures of feeling. These structures refer to lived experiences at specific historical moments, particularly the meanings and values sensed and felt in everyday life by a given generation (Pan, 2023).

Second, the film's construction of interpersonal relationships further articulates a culturally significant imagination of "coexistence." The relationship between Fujisawa and Yamazoe does not develop into conventional intimacy, nor does it rely on verbal confession or complete emotional transparency. Rather, their connection emerges through parallel actions,

limited interactions, and sustained silences. This relational mode does not seek total understanding; instead, it emphasizes maintaining co-presence under conditions where mutual comprehension remains partial and incomplete. At the cultural level, this posture reflects a non-dramatic, non-redemptive ethics of understanding: individuals need not be fully explained or entirely cured in order to continue participating in social life. From this perspective, such a mode of coexistence reflects a contemporary reimagining of affective experience. As Stuart Hall reminds us, "That is what culture is: experience lived, experience interpreted, experience defined" (Hall, 2016).

It is within the context of increasingly pervasive affective discourse that *All the Long Nights* intervenes through its audiovisual narration and participates in this process of meaning production. Rather than reinforcing dominant affective values such as positivity, optimism, or self-overcoming, the film articulates a cultural attitude that allows vulnerability to persist. This stance is neither an overtly radical critique nor a sentimental gesture, but a restrained expression with a clear ethical orientation. As existing scholarship has observed, healing cinema does not aim to provide symptom-oriented solutions, but rather seeks, at the affective and communal levels, to "return those whose hearts are scarred and who have withdrawn from society back to their original communities, rekindling vitality and cleansing the spirit" (Zhang, 2023).

Confronted with individual psychological suffering and the widespread yet latent collective trauma characteristic of post-disaster society, Shō Miyake does not resort to grand narratives or conventional emotional frameworks. Instead, he constructs a gentle yet resilient healing mechanism through the portrayal of a "supportive relationship" that transcends binary classifications. The bond between Misa and Toshitaka is neither explicitly romantic nor simply platonic; it is an affective connection that gradually forms through shared vulnerability and mutual attunement. This relationship does not depend on narrative climaxes or dramatic emotional release, but is rendered concrete through everyday gestures of care and consideration. For instance, Misa gives her bicycle to Toshitaka to alleviate the mobility difficulties he faces due to his inability to use public transportation, while Toshitaka reads books on PMS in an effort to better understand Misa's emotional fluctuations and bodily discomfort. These seemingly minor yet empathetically charged practices enable both characters to carve out moments of genuine relief within conditions of psychological pressure and social alienation.

In this sense, *All the Long Nights* neither romanticizes nor instrumentalizes the discourse of healing. Instead, by depicting a low-intensity, slow-paced, and non-teleological form of companionship, the film reactivates the value of "being-with" and mutual support. The mode of relational existence articulated here constitutes a significant attempt to reimagine pathways of interpersonal connection and psychic repair within the social conditions of a post-disaster era

4. Conclusions

Through an integrated analysis of subjectivity, film form, and cultural context, this article has argued that *All the Long Nights* should not be understood simply as a therapeutic narrative about psychological recovery, but rather as a cinematic exploration of how contemporary affective experience is structured, perceived, and shared. By refusing linear models of crisis and resolution, the film situates emotional instability not as a temporary deviation from normality, but as an enduring condition of subjectivity itself. Read through Lacanian theory, the protagonists' psychological distress does not signal a failure of selfhood to be repaired, but instead reveals the structural fragility of the subject and the impossibility of a fully coherent self.

At the level of film form, Shō Miyake employs a restrained aesthetic—marked by fixed camera positions, medium-long shots, flattened spatial relations, and a subdued temporal

rhythm—to translate affective instability into a mode of perception. Rather than dramatizing inner turmoil or psychologizing its characters, the film constructs an experiential field in which emotional opacity, hesitation, and temporal suspension become sensorially legible to the viewer. In this sense, form does not merely represent psychological states but actively reorganizes the conditions of spectatorship, allowing affect to emerge as duration, distance, and rhythm rather than as expressive excess.

Culturally, *All the Long Nights* participates in a broader reconfiguration of how emotional vulnerability is framed within contemporary Japanese cinema. By embedding psychological distress within the textures of everyday labor, routine social interaction, and ordinary urban space, the film displaces affect from the realm of individual pathology to that of shared social existence. The low-intensity, non-teleological relationship between Fujisawa and Yamazoe resists both romantic closure and narrative instrumentalization, proposing instead a mode of coexistence grounded in mutual acknowledgment of fragility rather than emotional resolution. What All the Long Nights ultimately offers is not a vision of recovery, but an ethics of co-presence. Through the convergence of subject formation, formal restraint, and cultural reorientation, the film offers an aesthetic framework for thinking about psychological distress in late modern societies—one that neither spectacularizes suffering nor promises its transcendence. In doing so, Miyake's film contributes to an alternative affective aesthetics in contemporary independent cinema, where vulnerability is neither resolved nor redeemed, but quietly sustained as a condition of being with others.

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