

This is an important book, and Brinkema is working at the highest level of film scholarship. Yet, it will surely draw criticism for a choice that many will see as a weakness, a choice that Brinkema makes with full intentionality. Right at the beginning of the book, she rewrites a passage by Fredric Jameson thus: “This book will argue the priority of the political formal interpretation of literary texts” (xvi). Yes, she says, *I am erasing politics and replacing it with form; that is what I am doing*. She argues consistently that feminist, queer, postcolonial, and historical studies of cinema are asking the wrong questions—that they are, even, on the side of violence.

Brinkema’s provocation is to strike through politics exactly in the moment that the field of film studies has been galvanized anew by political thought. The impetus to think about political categories is everywhere, from the influence of #MeToo and Black Lives Matter on industry discourse to the vast array of scholarship and criticism drawing on black, queer, trans, feminist, Indigenous, and other pathways of political critique, not to mention the vividly political qualities of some of the most significant horror films of recent years, from *Raw* (Julia Ducournau, 2016) to *Candyman* (Nia DaCosta, 2021). And yet it is in this moment that Brinkema crosses out politics, insisting that her reading will take place elsewhere. It is a brave move to make in 2021.

When politics does emerge in her writing, it is often as a question of race. From the Arab prisoner in *Inside* (Alexandre Bustillo and Julien Maury, 2007), whose formal position as an outsider cannot be extrapolated without presupposing his marginalized political position, to the framework of racialized violence that she concedes is necessary to understanding *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017), to Derrida’s account of “racism’s fascination with form” (267), racism asserts a trace of politics that she cannot entirely excise. Brinkema could be contrasted with scholars in black film aesthetics such as Michael Boyce Gillespie or Kara Keeling, for whom race is not merely an unavoidable trace of violence but instead offers a formally rich and conceptually sophisticated imaginary. Gillespie locates blackness as on the side of cinematic form. Keeling’s black, queer heuristic is radically at odds with Brinkema’s method, yet both are closely engaged with ethics and speculative thought. Such disparate conceptions of film form, theory, and philosophy reveal something of the current shape and stakes of the field.

At the heart of Brinkema’s text is the claim that radical formalism is not merely one reading practice among many, but rather the only way to avoid what could be called the violence of partial formalisms. Only a radical formalism can grapple with what is not yet thought, and for her the

diagram stages a truth of human relationality that is anterior to any cultural meaning that might subsequently be drawn. Crucial to this argument is a claim on the priority of philosophical modes of inquiry over historical ones. “These forms,” she writes, “are not metaphors—for society, or information, or power, biopower, the necropolitical, &c.—; they are the structures themselves” (161).

Those invested in both form and politics will argue that films are, after all, about these things, and that such questions are not merely epiphenomenal. This reader remains unconvinced that films (these films, any films) are legible *only* through radical formalism. This book will surely inspire debate on what it means to think with form. But that is the point of a polemic, after all. You must follow the path of rejecting all other practices of thought in order to reach the clearing of radical formalism. For all that it can frustrate, this process also attends to that which is immeasurable: to horror and also to love. *Life-Destroying Diagrams* is very much its own totalizing system, a diagram of how to think cinematic form.

BOOK DATA Eugenie Brinkema, *Life-Destroying Diagrams*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022. \$114.95 cloth, \$31.95 paper. 496 pages.

ROSALIND GALT is a professor of Film Studies at King’s College London. Her research addresses intersections of film style, history, and theory, and her books include *Alluring Monsters: the Pontianak and Cinemas of Decolonization* (2021), *Queer Cinema in the World* (coauthored with Karl Schoonover, 2016), and *Pretty: Film and the Decorative Image* (2011).

MARKUS NORNE

The Japanese Cinema Book, edited by Hideaki Fujiki and Alastair Phillips

Routledge Handbook of Japanese Cinema, edited by Joanne Bernardi and Shota T. Ogawa

A Companion to Japanese Cinema, edited by David Desser

Thirty-five years ago I was browsing through the stacks of a used bookstore in Boulder, Colorado, when I stumbled on a cache of Japanese cinema books. Having just discovered Mizoguchi and Kurosawa, I impulsively bought the lot. In an instant, I had acquired most of the English-language literature on this national cinema that had been published over various years, which now sit at the corner of a shelf in my office.

Today I am amazed by the fact that a slew of newly released Japanese cinema anthologies take up roughly the same amount of space. These are not thematic collections, but rather national cinema “handbooks” or “companions.”

As such, they presumably aspire to say something about the field. The three are Hideaki Fujiki and Alastair Phillips's *The Japanese Cinema Book* (*JCB*, 2020), Joanne Bernardi and Shota Ogawa's *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Cinema* (*RHJC*, 2020), and David Desser's *Companion to Japanese Cinema* (*CJC*, 2022). To these, add for background their predecessor: Nikki J. Y. Lee and Julian Stringer's four-volume set *Japanese Cinema* (2014), to which I was a contributor. The three new collections are all impressive for the quality of their scholarship and for the fact that not a one of the essays in any of the three feels redundant; Japanese cinema is that rich, and today's approaches to it that diverse. Cracking the covers, it thrills me to experience the difference between that moment in Boulder and the present day.

That they all arrive more or less at once suggests they are symptomatic of an important moment—of an inflection point, a bottleneck, or even a crisis. It is hard to say which, judging from the introductions. Fujiki and Phillips purport to “update Japanese cinema studies” (*JCB*, 11) and provoke debates (17). Desser intends to shine a light on overlooked areas and approaches and to redefine Japanese cinema (*CJC*). And Bernardi and Ogawa present their volume (*RHJC*) as a “survey of *current* research organized around ... different critical challenges” (3). They all present histories of Japanese cinema studies that culminate in their own books. However, they ultimately strike the pose of intervention without necessarily making one. I will suggest that this in itself reveals something about that history and the present moment as we face a future filled with enticing possibilities.

Bernardi and Ogawa provide us with a useful starting point, as their introduction considers the nature of the “handbook” itself—its history and the motivations that undergird it as a genre of publishing over the last century. This metacritical inclination likely derives from their admirable commitment to the archive and the material and institutional underpinnings of both cinema and its study. (Their volume has three fascinating essays on the archives of Japan by Kae Ishihara, Ogawa, and Bernardi, respectively.) They provide a history of Japanese cinema handbooks, noting that “handbooks contain a built-in anxiety arising from the inevitability of obsolescence and the unattainability of a comprehensive survey” (*RHJC*, 3).

More importantly, Bernardi and Ogawa point out that “[t]he genre of handbook is always torn between the impulse to standardize disciplinary norms and the counter-impulse to facilitate future changes by inducing new members to the field” (*RHJC*, 3). In other words, the charter of handbook editors is inevitably torn between past and future.

In representing the state of the field, editors may entertain a conservative impulse to promote only approaches authorized or valued by the discipline, while at the same time surely hoping to move the field forward toward unforetold possibilities. Taking a hint from Bernardi and Ogawa, let us consider the meaning behind the coincidental publication of these three handbooks. Are these editors and authors emplacing disciplinary bumpers or intervening to provoke future change?

As the discipline of film studies formed in the 1970s and 1980s, scholars such as Stephen Heath, David Bordwell, Dudley Andrew, and Noël Burch deployed Japanese films as their objects of study. In those days, the debates were lively, and, depending on where one sat, there was a sense of being disciplined, with some approaches rewarded more than others. Everything changed around the turn of the century, when a new generation arrived with deep area knowledge and language ability. Unfortunately, when the founding generation moved on to other texts and other parts of the world, the discipline of film studies subsequently marginalized the new subfield of Japanese film studies—a process that is largely, regrettably complete. While it might have doomed the field, at this same moment the conservatism of East Asian area studies opened up to embrace popular culture—and cinema was the pop culture that even a curmudgeon could love. New students of Japanese cinema, who arrived on the scene from across the humanities, could dive deeply into the libraries and archives and did not even need subtitles. Thus, while the founders of Japanese film studies largely moved on, a new community of scholars arrived and brought new skills and tools with them.

These are the authors of the three collections at hand. Following its pivot point at the turn of the century, the field of Japanese studies, which was largely focused on masterworks, evolved to embrace approaches from every angle imaginable. One of the deeply impressive aspects of these handbooks is the way they collectively manage to represent this landscape across industry studies, genre, reception, technology, distribution, histories of theory and criticism, fandom, censorship, empire, gender and sexuality, law, adaptation, festival culture, race, movement cinema, architecture, stardom, and more. Most authors focus on analyses of feature films; however, many of the best essays center on documentary, home movies, experimental film, porn, animation, television, gaming, and intermedial experiments. Anthology contributors come from nearly every continent; impressively, half are Japanese. Collectively, they represent a panoply of disciplines: comparative literature, film studies, queer studies, anthropology, history, political

science, visual culture, international relations, sociology, art history, women's studies, cultural studies, and more.

This variety addresses the first of the impulses Bernardi and Ogawa describe: no, there is no defense of disciplinary norms from the past here. On the contrary, the field is bracingly interdisciplinary. It is a wonderful development with unfortunate side effects: incredibly, there is virtually no overlap between the ninety-one essays in these three books, and the lack of dialogue between the articles is striking. It makes me nostalgic for the vital disagreements in the early days of the field over the narrative consequences of the *benshi*, the political ramifications of Oshima, and what to make of the formal differences of filmmakers from Makino Shozo to Mizoguchi Kenji to Ozu Yasujiro. Today, everyone is doing something fascinating, but they are basically doing their own thing. Reading these handbooks gives the sense that the era of dialogue and debate among scholars in the field is largely over. This is a crucial difference in intellectual production between the formative and current moments, and it goes largely unremarked in all three books.

The second impulse behind the handbook form, as described by Bernardi and Ogawa, is one of intervention and forging new paths. What future do these authors point to, or advocate for, to rejuvenate and replenish the field? What changes do they want incite? This is ultimately a historiographic question that requires examining how editors and authors address the past to position themselves facing forward.

The introductions along with many of the articles name the divisions that characterize the history of Japanese film studies, the grand narrative at the core of the field. First there was the Orientalist national cinema paradigm, whereby Japanese cinema was valued as an expression of difference and Western theory took it as an object to constitute itself as a discipline. The field then found this object as framed less useful—especially after Edward Said. This national cinema paradigm was thus overthrown by transnational cinema studies and by the interdisciplinary approaches made possible through area studies. This is where these recent handbooks enact their intervention: to slough off national cinema study in favor of “transnational cinema studies.”

One way the authors of these volumes propose to do this is to look at actual border crossings by people, texts, or capital. For example, Daisuke Miyao looks at Japanese cinematographers circulating between Japan and Hollywood in *JCB*, Kyoko Hirano writes about exhibition in New York in *RHJC*, and Jasper Sharp analyzes the transfer of wide-screen technologies to Japan in the 1950s in *CJC*. These

kinds of border crossings often inform “transnational film studies.” However, the examples always appear diminutive in the face of the sheer scale of filmmaking inside the political borders of Japan. By Daibo Masaki's count, Japan produced 37,233 feature films between 1910 and 2015, as cited by Kae Ishihara in “A Historical Survey of Film Archiving in Japan” (*RHJC*, 285). Add documentary, experimental film, and amateur works, and the sheer scale of “Japanese cinema” becomes palpable.

The more powerful case for the transnational approach is delivered by the many authors who use their linguistic access to the riches of the archive to account for the real complexity of domestic discourses. The finest examples from these handbooks focus on film theory. In *RHJC*, Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano explores the 1930s works of Nakai Masakazu, analyzing his Vertov-inspired writings and experimental films as a rejection of the theories of Konrad von Lange and Hugo Münsterberg. In *JCB*, Naoki Yamamoto charts the constant rearticulations of montage theory from the 1920s to the 1950s. Acknowledging the role of translation—sometimes through third languages—these essays situate the local critical discourses in the global histories of film theories. These are just two notable examples. Throughout the three collections, authors deftly account for the regional and global factors connected to their subjects.

Wonderful though this is, it's hard to call this an intervention—a muscular call for change—when the groundwork has been laid for decades. Furthermore, it seems paradoxical that a transnational paradigm is the future presented by handbooks dedicated to a single national cinema. Indeed, across all three books, the treatments of the early phase of Japanese film studies tend to be simple foils for presenting this progressivist historiography. For example, while all the editors invoke Noël Burch's *To the Distant Observer* (1979) mainly to dismiss it as typically Orientalist, I would argue that it represents an impressive first attempt to overthrow the historicism of Japanese film studies. Unfortunately, the progressive historiographies undergirding these handbooks prevent serious engagement with earlier work, just as the essays in the handbooks rarely come into dialogue with one another. It's as if the collective dismissal of national cinema study in favor of the transnational is a gesture aimed at belonging to a scholarly field, a way to cohere as a community.

These handbooks fail to make an intervention because they do not enter into a truly engaged dialogue. The intervention happened back at the turn of the century, with the models for national cinema study proposed

by the likes of Andrew Higson, Stephen Crofts, and especially Susan Hayward. Their theorizations of national cinema study accounted for local, national, regional, and transnational levels that are always present, as well as the multiple and overlapping dimensions of any given country's film culture. The lessons of those critiques of national frameworks were taken to heart years ago, and so in these handbooks "Japanese cinema" is granted its seemingly endless possibilities. If there is a singular achievement shared by these ninety-one essays it is that, despite the handbooks' progressivist historiography critiquing "national cinema," they actually demonstrate that national cinema studies is very much alive and well, and done well to boot.

And in its marginalization of Japanese cinema since the turn of the century, the discipline of film studies would seem intent on corralling national cinema studies into the anachronistic image of some orthodox, reflectionist, Orientalist national character study. Jobs tend to be in departments other than film and media studies. At the major conferences, national cinema scholars attend all manner of panels, but not vice versa (with the prominent exception of those senior scholars who participated in the formative era). Film studies' marginalization of fields like Japanese cinema studies is, in fact, its own self-provincialization. This leaves venerable publications like *Film Quarterly* and others as precious spaces where critical and theoretical border crossings still happen—together with the presses that publish ambitious works like these handbooks.

In conclusion, these handbooks do not conservatively police disciplinary borders; they represent not a grand intervention but a maturation. The real intervention occurred four decades ago in 1979 when David Bordwell—one of the key figures in that foundational moment—published an essay entitled "Our Dream Cinema: Western Historiography of the Japanese Film." After an astute analysis of the state of the field, he pointed out the pressing need for new writers to enter the debates with language skills and area knowledge so that the dialogue could move forward as one based on primary sources. Two decades later, a new generation of bilingual scholars indeed appeared. And today, another two decades on, those scholars and their many students have assembled these impressive handbooks, marking the arrival of a bracing, centrifugal energy pointing in a dizzying number of directions and periods. If the simultaneity of these handbooks is symptomatic of anything, it is the realization of Japanese cinema studies in all its fulsome possibilities. Hopefully, the future will bring back the disagreements and debates.

BOOK DATA Hideaki Fujiki and Alastair Phillips, eds., *The Japanese Cinema Book*. London: Bloomsbury/BFI, 2020. \$121.50 cloth, \$44.95 paper, \$40.45 e-book. 624 pages.

JOANNE BERNARDI and Shota T. Ogawa, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2020. \$250 cloth. 382 pages.

DAVID DESSER, ed., *A Companion to Japanese Cinema*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2022. \$185 cloth. 736 pages.

MARKUS NORNES is Professor of Asian Cinema at the University of Michigan, where he specializes in Japanese film, documentary and translation theory. He is also a filmmaker and film festival programmer. His current book, the open access *Brushed in Light*, is on the intimate relationship of calligraphy and East Asian cinema.

CAETLIN BENSON-ALLOT

Post-Horror: Art, Genre and Cultural Elevation, by David Church

If the current zeitgeist could be reduced to one word, "horror" might be it. From the horrors of climate change to the trauma of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, from despair over political extremism to anxiety at soaring incoming inequality, apprehension, dread, and fear have dominated many people's experience of the world over the past decade. During that time, horror has also dominated world media cultures. While real-world horror suffuses witness videos of the ongoing international refugee crisis and racist police violence, fictional horror films have achieved more commercial success and critical praise than the genre has seen in ages.

To be sure, the major studios are still churning out gore-filled pablum about demonic clowns and malevolent escape-room designers. But esteemed auteurs never previously associated with the genre—such as Jim Jarmusch and Denis Villeneuve—have embraced horror conventions to investigate issues of human extinction or the lures of totalitarianism. Emerging directors like Jordan Peele and Ari Aster are likewise receiving praise for work in a genre that many of their predecessors were never allowed to transcend (e.g., George Romero and Wes Craven).

To understand who's contributing to the current horror renaissance and its larger cultural and artistic significance, one would be well served to turn to David Church's latest book, *Post-Horror: Art, Genre and Cultural Elevation*, which argues that since 2014, an international coterie of filmmakers have revived the long-dormant subgenre of art-horror to make cinematic "apprehension engines" that marry certain horror tropes with the aesthetics of slow cinema to explore grief, dread, and desperation (1). As Church shows, this film cycle—and the controversy it has created between populist genre fans and professional film critics—requires more sustained scholarly attention than it has thus far received, for it