

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.

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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

suggests that something is changing dramatically in what it means to be horrified by life and media today.

What to call the cycle in question is no simple matter, however, and Church wrestles with the problem at some length in his first and second chapters. Fans and detractors have variably referred to the movies in question as slow, smart, indie, prestige, elevated, and post-horror—all in an effort to differentiate artistically ambitious films like *The Witch* (Robert Eggers, 2015) and *It Comes at Night* (Trey Edward Shults, 2017) from more-conventional contemporaneous horror fare, such as *The Conjuring* (James Wan, 2013) or *Happy Death Day* (Christopher Landon, 2017).

Church seems personally inclined toward “art-horror,” an appellation coined by Joan Hawkins to describe the intermingling of horror conventions and avant-garde techniques in 1960s and 1970s cinema. He argues that, like art-horror forebearers *Rosemary’s Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968) and *Don’t Look Now* (Nicholas Roeg, 1974), the current cycle of aesthetically ambitious horror films decenter “familiar genre tropes . . . via art cinema’s formal expressiveness and narrative ambiguity, making space for characters and viewers alike to soak in contemplative or emotionally fraught moods” (12). Yet Church’s interest in the reception of the current cycle—the praise it elicits from critics and the animus it inspires among horror fans—leads him to displace his own preferred term in favor of “post-horror,” the most conceptually accurate of the many monikers attached to these movies. Like post-punk, that is, post-horror denotes not “a definitive break from what came before, but rather a stylistic approach that attempts to both contain and move beyond” past precedent (37–38).

As Church explains in his second chapter, naming privileges are inextricable from cultural authority. Who really knows horror: the fans who’ve spent years achieving expertise in an oft-derided genre, or the critics and cineastes who’ve finally taken an interest? Church perhaps carries too long with this question; his diligent representation of the various factions involved in the fray suggests that some of these groups might be fighting just to fight. What is really interesting about these films, after all, is what they do, not who coins the catchiest term to categorize them.

To that end, Church’s close readings of post-horror films and their formal evocations of negative affect are among the book’s most significant contributions. This will come as no surprise to those familiar with Church’s previous work, particularly his *Disposable Passions: Vintage Pornography and the Material Legacies of Adult Cinema*. There as here, cultural studies and reception history are the frame through which the author organizes nuanced

critical claims about the objects themselves. Hence Church opens his third chapter—on themes of grief and mourning in post-horror films—by briefly citing popular writers who question why “a character coping with the death of a loved one is the new car of teenagers heading to a cabin in the woods” (Jason Zinoman) before opening up to the larger issue of how tragedies involving familial inheritance stand in for anxieties over generic inheritance in these films (68).

Through textual exegeses of the dysfunctional family dynamics in *The Babadook* (Jennifer Kent, 2014), *Goodnight Mommy* (Veronika Franz and Severin Fiala, 2014), and *Hereditary* (Ari Aster, 2018), Church shows how techniques borrowed from the modernist mourning film “allow the audience to differently *feel* the breaks in generic/familial tradition that have been so divisive among different audience segments” (70). Exemplary in this regard is Church’s analysis of how narrative focalization combines with “architectural sterility” in *Goodnight Mommy* to destabilize its spectator, leading them to (erroneously) read the conventionally grieving character as cruelly psychotic and the psychotic character as an innocent victim (82). This confusion enables a “nihilistic conclusion” far bleaker than horror films’ typical open-ended finales (86). Instead, Church argues, *Goodnight Mommy* negotiates genre formula to demonstrate the totalizing brutality of trauma’s contagion.

Church is an astute reader of film form and narration, more so than the book’s early focus on reception and cultural studies might suggest. Chapters 4, 5, and 7 (on gaslighting, landscape, and existential dread in post-horror movies, respectively) evince his skills well, yet the book’s crown jewel is chapter 6—Church’s extended interrogation of *It Follows* (David Robert Mitchell, 2015) and its queer “critique of monogamy as a monstrous force” (22). This chapter expands on a previously published study to further consider how the film’s “overall aesthetic of ruination mourns the lost collectivities of pre-AIDS queer subcultures and work-class solidarities alike” (206). One ends up wishing that the author had spent more time on such theoretically rigorous, historically grounded close readings, which showcase his scholarly gifts far better than parsing the nuances of why some horror fans rejected *The Lighthouse* (Robert Eggers, 2019) or why some post-horror directors deny their debt to the genre (46–49). Proscriptive discourses about what “counts” as horror—or post-horror—never yield much insight into what such movies do or why; far more interesting are rigorous accounts of generic inheritance and cultural negotiation—at least in this reader’s opinion.

Still, Church's investment in reception cultures renders *Post-Horror* even more valuable as a pedagogical resource. The later chapters' organization around key titles in the post-horror cycle makes them easy to assign for genre courses, while the chapter on naming the post-horror cycle will also be useful for discussions of media cultures and shifting valuations of fan knowledges. *Post-Horror* further affirms that the past decade—an epoch of horrors—has provided a fertile opportunity for filmmakers of various marginalized backgrounds to rethink what it means to be horrified. While one might wish for more focus on their work in the present volume, it does lay the groundwork for further studies by articulating the critical ethos of the cycle. The *Post-* of *Post-Horror* is thus a promise of continuity rather than a gesture of finitude.

BOOK DATA David Church, *Post-Horror: Art, Genre and Cultural Elevation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021. \$105.00 cloth, \$105.00 e-book. 280 pages.

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***Molecular Capture: The Animation of Biology*, by Adam Nocek**

Adam Nocek's *Molecular Capture: The Animation of Biology* begins with a viral video posted to Facebook: a beautifully animated microscopic protein comes to life, showcasing molecular processes in stunning 3D. The sleek digital animation, complete with score and sweeping cinematography, documents a biological process that remains inscrutable for nonexperts and prompts Nocek to ask: is this video a scientific document or mere entertainment?

Molecular Capture uses this question as a launching point from which to explore histories and theories of perception in popular culture and the biological sciences. Nocek argues that molecular animation cannot be confined to a particular category—science or entertainment—but instead that these seemingly contradictory discourses share a “logic of vision.” Inspired by the speculative philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, Nocek's ambitious project takes the reader through a series of problems that never result in a conclusion, but instead provoke new responses and adjustments. This ambitious “speculative flight” traverses the heterogenous and asymmetrical histories of cinema and the biological sciences, as well as philosophies of power and

visuality, to theorize the epistemology of vision in the twentieth century.

By moving forward and backward in twentieth-century history and drawing connections between the philosophical works of Whitehead and Michel Foucault, Nocek argues that molecular animation is the product and perpetuator of (neoliberal) governmentality. This claim emerges from his historical and philosophical account of vision in science and cinema. Rather than focusing on the technological development of molecular animation—its algorithms, modeling practices, and tools—that have made contemporary 3D animation possible, Nocek is more concerned with the practices of visualization across biology and media, and how these reflect a broader epistemology of vision. As a result, the book examines histories of science and media ranging from twentieth-century microcinematography to early images of the human genome. With a focus on how scientists and creatives alike understood the role of vision, Nocek traces how molecular animation inherits a visual logic that traverses science and entertainment.

Whitehead's philosophical methods inform the structure of the book itself. Nocek divides his project into three parts, each building on the previous one, but simultaneously invites a rereading upon discovering new questions or philosophical frameworks in the later chapters. Nocek encourages readers to move linearly through the book but to then return to earlier chapters informed by new philosophical frameworks and theoretical questions. Part 1 (chapters 1–3) is focused on histories of science and cinema, part 2 (chapters 4 and 5) uses Whitehead and Foucault to theorize contemporary modes of perception and vision, and part 3 (chapters 6 and 7) reexamines the histories of part 1 through the philosophical lens of part 2.

Each chapter incorporates a new set of disciplinary texts, moving from histories of digital cinema and animation to the development of genomics, mathematical modeling in biology, ecological media theory, genealogies of twentieth-century power, “new apparatus theory,” and speculative design. This impressive array of materials makes for a complex and creative approach to a philosophy of perception, effectively collapsing disciplinary boundaries that have perhaps restricted theoretical accounts by scholars in distinct and nonoverlapping fields. This merger makes it challenging for readers grounded in specific disciplines to follow sections of Nocek's argument. His detailed knowledge of biological modeling practices may be lost on film historians, while readers in the field of genomics may struggle to follow accounts of digital cinema and apparatus theory.