

*Molecular Capture* ends by asking whether molecular animation has the possibility to disrupt the expansion of governmentality through design methods and theory. The final pages ground the philosophical work of the book in close readings of the films of Jean Painlevé. Here, Nocek offers perhaps the clearest articulation of what it would mean to create perceptual experiences that can intervene in the visual logic of dominance: an experience full of “distance, hesitation, interruption, and disorientation” that resists classification (329). This viscosity creates a condition where spectators can feel their relationship to the biological world without subjecting it to neoliberal systems of rationalization, a “perceptual relation where there is no possibility for visual conquest” (329). The question remains: can molecular animation, as part of this genealogy, redesign the future of vision and epistemology in the life sciences? Nocek encourages another flight into speculation and imagination to pursue answers.

BOOK DATA Adam Nocek, *Molecular Capture: The Animation of Biology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021. \$140.00 cloth, \$35.00 paper, \$33.25 e-book. 400 pages.

MIKKI KRESSBACH is an assistant professor of Film, Television & Media Studies at Loyola Marymount University. She is currently completing her first book, *Sensing Health: Bodies, Data, and Digital Health Technologies*, which examines how popular digital health technologies shape what it means to “feel healthy” in the twenty-first century.

## BRIAN HU

### ***Whitewashing the Movies: Asian Erasure and White Subjectivity in U.S. Film Culture*, by David C. Oh**

In the late aughts, energized by the announcement of M. Night Shyamalan’s live-action adaptation of the animated series *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, popular Asian American media criticism took a noticeable turn away from the positive/negative-stereotype debates that had surrounded films like *Better Luck Tomorrow* (Justin Lin, 2003), and toward a critique of whitewashing. Shyamalan’s 2010 adaptation cast white actors in roles that fans had always read as mythologically Asian or Inuit, leading to an outcry and protests well documented in Lori Kido Lopez’s earlier *Asian American Media Activism*. This increasingly vocal strand of media criticism acknowledged that analyzing Asian stereotypes on-screen wasn’t even possible when Asian characters were themselves rendered invisible or replaced by white images altogether. Critics, including those organizing online through the “racebending” movement, expanded their object of analysis from cinematic and televisual texts to such industry practices as casting and public relations.

Given the crowded clamor of audiences, critics, and fans over whitewashing, and the rapid proliferation of think pieces online, is an entire book of case studies really needed? David C. Oh’s *Whitewashing the Movies: Asian Erasure and White Subjectivity in U.S. Film Culture* makes a strong case that these are still relevant approaches for scholars and critics seeking to make sense of Hollywood’s continued displacement of Asian characters on-screen, even when box-office analysis confirms over and over that stories about nonwhite characters reap significant financial returns. Oh shows how textual analysis is still possible by analyzing Asian images in absentia or through their white masks. In perhaps his most original rhetorical move, Oh tackles the question of casting not as industrial practice, but as an act of speculation, concluding each case study not by studying the film’s casting but by recasting the films himself to consider the political implications of simply changing a character’s race from white to Asian.

In addition to providing methods (such as character and narrative analysis) for studying whitewashing, Oh also usefully lays out working definitions and categorizations. In the introduction to the book, Oh distinguishes between three types of whitewashing: casting white actors to play Asian characters, or “yellowface”; outright replacing Asian characters with white ones to justify casting white actors; and centering whiteness in stories set in Asia or based in Asian mythology or culture. Each typology requires different approaches for media activism, but at the same time, all three can be attributed to the same ideologies of white supremacy and postracism.

To underscore the insidious, underacknowledged pervasiveness of Hollywood whitewashing, Oh focuses on case studies that, compared with the grotesque yellowfacing in earlier examples—like Mickey Rooney in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (Blake Edwards, 1961)—might appear downright liminal. For instance, is it yellowfacing if the characters are multiracial, as with Cameron Crowe’s *Aloha* (2015), discussed in chapter 1, or Carl Rinsch’s *47 Ronin* (2013), discussed in chapter 3? What if the film is an adaptation of anime that is presumably “raceless” or “culturally odorless,” as discussed in chapter 6? How does genre, specifically satire, complicate perceptions of whitewashing, as in *The Interview* (Seth Rogan and Evan Goldberg, 2014), analyzed in chapter 4?

And then there’s the question of authorship. Chapter 2 looks at films starring Asian Americans and directed by Chinese Americans, while chapter 7 considers Western coproductions with Chinese studios. In cases of mixed or “authentic” authorship, is whitewashing possible?

Oh’s answer to these questions is consistently and, perhaps predictably, “yes”: these texts, no matter the ambiguity

or complexity of their representations, are exemplary of Hollywood's erasure of Asian images on-screen. For Oh, it is precisely this ambiguity that allows contemporary Hollywood to hide behind notions of multiculturalism and racial flexibility, and thus claim that they "don't see race," sublimating Hollywood's decades-old practices of yellow-face into less obviously racist fantasies of white kids adopted into Chinese households (as in James Wong's 2009 *Dragon-ball Evolution*) or Japanese consciousness transplanted into a white body (such as Scarlett Johansson's in Rupert Sanders's 2017 *Ghost in the Shell*).

As Oh puts it, "[T]he difference from openly White supremacist discourses is in degree rather than type" (96). Oh refuses Hollywood's attempts at "subtlety," even though his stance results in a monograph that similarly lacks subtlety in its criticisms. The arrival of each relatively short chapter elicits a groan over Hollywood's formulaic approach to Asian erasure, but perhaps also a groan at Oh's checklist of grievances, including and especially the trope of white men sexually or romantically paired with Asian women.

Where Oh's approach has an air of freshness—and even subtlety—is in his aforementioned tactic that concludes each chapter. Here, he wonders, à la William Yu's #StarringJohnCho social-media campaign, how different or similar these whitewashed films would be had they simply cast Asian American actors to begin with. For instance, Oh considers how casting an actual multiracial Hawaiian actor in *Aloha* (as opposed to Emma Stone) could decenter whiteness, even if the film's complicity with US colonialism in Hawaii would remain untroubled. And if *The Interview* cast two Korean Americans as the bumbling American fools who arrive in North Korea, gone would be the self-mocking white heroism of James Franco and Seth Rogan—while introducing novel questions of ethnonationalism, combating perpetual foreigner stereotypes by distinguishing between Koreans and Korean Americans, and allowing for a Korean American man to have a romantic relationship with a Korean woman. Oh's approach is purely speculative. He doesn't interrogate actually existing challenges of casting and marketing, but relies simply on the radical imagination for a solution that is both painfully obvious and plainly impossible given Hollywood's commitment to whiteness.

Oh's speculative approach to Asian American representation is wielded primarily to criticize Hollywood racial norms. If there is a subject in *Whitewashing the Movies*, it is not Asian representation but whiteness itself, with Richard Dyer's *White: Essays on Race and Culture* a central influence.

Treating Asian American representation as conjectural is a sly rhetorical move to show how Asian American representation is not actually allowed to exist in film. That said, there's a fine line between Asian American representation not being allowed to exist and its not actually existing to begin with. After all, there is by now a substantial corpus of Asian American independent cinema, much of which embodies the very alternatives that Oh's speculative casting purports to invent. Why imagine the possibility of Southeast Asian American actors in political thrillers set in Southeast Asia when similar independent films actually exist? (See, for instance, Neill Dela Llana and Ian Gamazon's *Cavite*, 2005). Why concoct a scenario whereby Chinese Americans can "return" to China without the help of white characters when there is Peter Wang's *A Great Wall* (1986) or Lulu Wang's *The Farewell* (2019)?

In critiquing mainstream cinema's default to whiteness, Oh's radical imagination risks washing away an Asian American independent cinema that has for decades embarked on this same radical imagining. But if Oh's target is Hollywood, he strikes it with example after example, a repetitive bull's-eye that shows no mercy for the liberal hypocrisy and creative stagnation of Hollywood's "color-blind" racism.

BOOK DATA David C. Oh, *Whitewashing the Movies: Asian Erasure and White Subjectivity in U.S. Film Culture*. Rutgers University Press, 2021. \$120.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper, \$29.95 e-book. 210 pages.

BRIAN HU is an associate professor on the Television, Film, and New Media Faculty at San Diego State University. He is the author of *Worldly Desires: Cosmopolitanism and Cinema in Hong Kong and Taiwan*, and is the artistic director of the San Diego Asian Film Festival.

## MAGGIE ROBERTS

### *How Do We Look? Resisting Visual Biopolitics*, by Fatimah Tobing Rony

"What vocabularies or stories of justification occur in that moment when a person decides that he needs to kill another," asks Dr. Fatimah Tobing Rony in *How Do We Look? Resisting Visual Biopolitics* (11). Rony's latest book examines transnational images of Indonesian women, discussing how they are used for both harmful and radical ends in a process she calls "visual biopolitics" (4). Rony defines visual biopolitics as a "system, shored up by iconographies of justification found in photography, cinema, television, national monuments, and the internet, that underscores preexisting structural race and gender representations in language, politics, and the unconscious" (5). Within the Indonesian context, this refers to a series of visual codes and motifs used