

Post-Horror
Art, Genre, and Cultural Elevation

David Church

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CHAPTER 1

Apprehension Engines: Defining a New Wave of Art-Horror Cinema

Unearthly drones, metallic whines, and ominous clanks emanate from a contraption consisting of several wooden boxes with a guitar-like neck, onto which are affixed magnets, metal wires and coils, and a hurdy-gurdy crank. “The Apprehension Engine” is the nickname for this unique musical instrument, commissioned by Mark Korven, composer of *The Witch* (2015), and designed/built by guitar maker Tony Duggan-Smith (Figure 1.1). As its name suggests, the foreboding ambience created by this device instills a deep sense of anxiety and dread in the listener, even as these eldritch sounds cannot be easily associated with conventional musical instruments or arrangements. That is, the machine’s tones are all the more unsettling because their source seems more obscure, less readily pinned down via common referents in the listener’s mind. Inspired by his score for *The Witch*, Korven commissioned this experimental instrument to lend his film scores a more original sound than the overused digital samples previously at his disposal.¹ And, after the machine itself came to wider attention via social media, Duggan-Smith began taking orders from other filmmakers and media producers for small runs of the instrument, each one selling for a cool \$10,000.²

Both the ethos and the effects of this device provide a useful way to approach an emerging cycle of independently produced (and potentially profitable) horror films that merge art-cinema style with decentered genre tropes, privileging lingering dread and visual restraint over audiovisual shocks and monstrous disgust. As “apprehension engines” in their own right, these films represent “a new-wave horror that diverges from the assembly line and strays from overpitched archetypes,”³ sharing with Korven and Duggan-Smith’s instrument a sense of handmade artistry, low-budget ingenuity, and striking originality – all in the service of producing affective tones that unsettle both viewers and the genre itself. Often heralded for possessing an aesthetically “higher” tone than the average multiplex horror movie, these films have received disproportionate critical acclaim for catering to more rarefied tastes, even as viewers with more



Figure 1.1 Film composer Mark Korven’s “Apprehension Engine” instrument, designed and built by Tony Duggan-Smith. Photo by Kai Korven; courtesy of Mark Korven.

populist tastes have proved ambivalent or even hostile toward the films’ aesthetic strategies, and dedicated horror fans have decried the critical conversation emerging around these works.

Variouly dubbed “slow horror,” “smart horror,” “indie horror,” “prestige horror,” and “elevated horror,” films such as *It Follows* (2014), *The Witch, It Comes at Night* (2017), and *Hereditary* (2018) all emerged from the crucible of major film festivals like Sundance and Toronto with significant critical buzz for supposedly transcending the horror genre’s oft-presumed lowbrow status, and succeeded in crossing over to multiplexes. Meanwhile, arthouse releases like *Under the Skin* (2013) and *The Babadook* (2014) found a larger second audience on streaming video services around the same time that films like *I Am the Pretty Thing That Lives in the House* (2016) premiered on Netflix and studio-backed releases like *Get Out* (2017) and *A Quiet Place* (2018) earned critical acclaim for their intelligent takes on the genre. Collectively, these films represent one of the horror genre’s most important trends since the turn of the twenty-first century, as a major site of both artistic innovation and cultural distinction. As just one example of how traditional gatekeepers of cultural taste have embraced these films, three-quarters of the entries on a recent *New York Times* list of the best

“21st Century Horror” films belong to the emerging corpus of films that, for the sake of expedience, I will refer to across this book as *post-horror*.⁴

Coined in July 2017 by *Guardian* columnist Steve Rose,⁵ the term “post-horror” is one of many flawed attempts to name a corpus of recent films whose core stylistic tendencies were developed during the 1950s to 1970s “golden age” of modernist art cinema, but whose generic overlaps with horror cinema also open onto a wider range of precursors and contemporary intertexts. Because I will address the shortcomings in each of these critical labels in Chapter 2, my tentative use of *post-horror* should be taken with a large grain of salt, as less a wholesale endorsement of the term itself than as a convenient shorthand for the corpus of films concurrently labeled “smart horror,” “elevated horror,” and so on. (Although this book focuses primarily on Anglo-American understandings of these films, the label “elevated horror” continues to be more prevalent in the United States, while “post-horror” has become more common in British critical contexts.) In my opinion, “elevated” is a more accurate descriptor for the *aesthetic strategies* used in these films, but, as we will see, it comes freighted with elitist biases against the horror genre itself. Meanwhile, “post-horror” is also problematic, since it could erroneously imply that these are not “actual” horror films – yet its very vagueness as a term also makes it more reclaimable, for my purposes, as a ready-made placeholder label for the many tropes, themes, affects, and political concerns that together constitute the corpus.

In this opening chapter, I will argue that form and style are far more functional elements uniting these films as a shared corpus than the morass of critical labels more promiscuously applied to horror films that may or may not evince the distinctly austere aesthetic seen at the heart of the corpus. Some film critics have posited post-horror as a “new genre” or “new subgenre” – but it is far more accurately described as an aesthetically linked *cycle* within the longer and broader tradition of art-horror cinema, as longtime genre fans are more likely to point out (and as I will explain in these first two chapters). My goal for this first chapter is thus twofold: first, by enumerating some of the most common formal traits in films that critics have nominated as part of this emergent cycle, we will arrive at a provisional corpus of post-horror films; and second, we will see how such stylistic traits can generate forms of affect that may appeal very differently to different tastes. This chapter will thereby lay the groundwork for Chapter 2’s more expansive reception study of how differences in aesthetic tastes – and the commingling of such divergent opinions as the lines between traditional film criticism and genre fandom have increasingly blurred – have generated voluminous discourse about post-horror’s

cultural value vis-à-vis its perceived closeness to, or distance from, the larger genre.

Other than pornography, horror is perhaps the most divisive of all popular genres: it garners tremendous devotion from fans who consider it their favorite type of film, while other folks avoid the genre altogether if they can at all help it. Between these two poles, however, we can posit a broad continuum, ranging from *horror-friendly* viewers on one side to *horror-skeptic* viewers on the other; the former are more likely to consider themselves fans and frequent consumers of the genre, while the latter are less frequent genre consumers but may still make exceptions for what they see as qualitatively superior texts. Canonization, for example, is a process that adheres less in choosing sets of texts than aggregating sets of valuations that associate some texts (and, by extension, the readers best suited to “properly” understand them) as more “literate” than others – hence the ability for a handful of high-minded horror texts to be canonized by horror-skeptic viewers.⁶ For the purposes of this study, I will use the terms horror-friendly and horror-skeptic to describe tastes inclined toward or away from the genre, in addition to three related (albeit inevitably porous) categories of viewers/discourse who can be roughly situated along that continuum.

First, there are *professional film critics*, whose livelihood as arbiters of cultural taste depends on making aesthetic judgments and viewing recommendations for the perceived benefit of a wide readership. Although their overall numbers declined during print media’s painful transition into the digital era (including the corresponding rise of freelance and unpaid critics writing in nontraditional venues), I am primarily referring to full-time film critics whose job as cultural gatekeepers has traditionally required a significant amount of cultural capital (that is, higher education in aesthetic appreciation, accumulated knowledge about culturally/historically valued texts, and so on) as justification for the value of their opinions.⁷ Working for a widely read publication means that their opinions often circulate more broadly and create more discursive impact – thereby actualizing their cultural capital – in more substantial ways than highly educated writers (such as scholars) with more limited platforms at their disposal.⁸ However, it is also important to note that Anglo-American film criticism has longstanding biases against the horror genre – so, even though it would be an overgeneralization to say that all film critics share a distaste for horror, it is still reasonable to position the broad category of professional film critics along the horror-skeptic axis.

Along the horror-friendly axis resides the second category of viewers/discourse discussed in these opening chapters: *genre fans*, or highly devoted

aficionados whose long-term investment in a particular filmic genre typically involves acquiring a broad and deep knowledge of texts from different historical periods, national contexts, and industrial sectors. While it is possible for devoted horror fans to move into the dwindling ranks of professional film critics (and professional academics), it is far more likely for fans to circulate discourse in genre-specific venues, such as horror-related websites and magazines, where their subcultural capital (that is, an intra-subcultural sense of coolness that includes accrued knowledge, experience, and prestige) will be recognized by fellow fans.⁹ Although a very small handful of writers may be able to eke out a living writing about the horror genre, genre fan discourse is typically circulated in either unpaid venues, such as blog and discussion-board postings, and/or in a freelance capacity. Without the expectation of reaching a more general readership or earning a regular paycheck from such efforts, genre fans often have more freedom – but may also be under more competitive pressure – to engage in discourse relevant to the cultivation of subcultural tastes in texts that are not widely recognized by larger society as “legitimate” or “respectable” objects. Many genre fans, however, still possess some degree of cultural capital, including an above-average amount of formal education and/or the cultivation of high-cultural tastes and reading strategies (their tastes not merely being limited to a culturally “low” genre).

Hence, both professional film critics and genre fans may know how to appreciate the “difficult” formal and stylistic qualities of art-horror films that alienate viewers with less cultural capital. Yet, when fans’ high-cultural tastes and practices are nested within niche appreciation of a genre too often considered beneath “serious” aesthetic contemplation, we might use the conjunction “(sub)cultural capital” to connote the provisional status of cultural capitals that are not yet seen as fully “legitimate” because originally honed within the realm of subcultural tastes. Academics who are writing as an outgrowth of their genre fandom exemplify a particularly high mixture of both cultural and subcultural capital, so their voices best fall under this category as well – not least because their writing typically reaches a coterie of fellow scholar-fans.¹⁰ Nevertheless, genre fans (both academic and non-academic) may attempt to enter the cultural conversation about post-horror, directly responding to the perceived limitations of broader film-critical discourse about such films, via online venues with a wider readership than fellow fans. As addressed in Chapter 2, this vying for expertise is partly driven by film criticism’s increased reliance on freelance writers who may have dubious amounts of genre knowledge, or may be rushing their opinions into circulation for the sake of profitable clicks in the social-media era.

By contrast, the third category of viewers/discourse consists of what I am calling, for better or worse, *populist viewers* – or the wider and more mainstream range of horror-friendly viewers who may watch and enjoy horror films in a more “casual” way than the genre fan’s acquisition of subcultural capital through broader and deeper knowledge of the genre’s historical, cultural, and stylistic diversity.¹¹ Although they may consider themselves horror fans, their relative shortage of subcultural capital is more akin to the “fair-weather fans” of a sports team during a highly publicized season, or music fans whose tastes are primarily shaped by pop-radio programming. Due to this shortage of subcultural capital, they are less likely to engage with horror-specific websites or contribute to the same discursive nodes frequented by devoted genre fans, instead sharing their opinions via more generalist movie websites (such as the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) and Rotten Tomatoes) and major social-media platforms. These viewers are more likely to view and enjoy horror films that adhere closer to mainstream conventions as regards both filmic style and generic content – especially (but not exclusively) those produced by the major Hollywood studios, since those texts receive the largest market visibility. Their sharing of opinions about post-horror films on generalist websites is also populist in the sense of trying to warn other prospective viewers against seeing such films, in order to avoid similar feelings of disappointment or frustration. This criticism is sometimes framed as a reaction against the buzz that professional film reviewers and genre fans have helped generate around such texts, or may be rooted in reactions against the exhibition of arthouse-style films in multiplexes (a predominantly populist exhibition site) under misleadingly generic marketing. In this regard, my use of the admittedly charged term “populist” should connote an *aesthetic* conservatism on the part of both texts and audiences, a conventionalism in style and taste rooted in attempted appeals to a very wide viewership.

“Populist” should not be taken as synonymous with “popular,” however, since the post-horror films *Get Out* and *A Quiet Place* ranked among the top twenty box-office hits of their respective years, whereas not all horror films that adhere to industry-standard norms for film form/style or generic treatment of their subject matter necessarily become major hits when released to multiplexes.¹² Nor should it be presumed that more populist horror films – for instance, the massively profitable *It* (2017/2019) and *Halloween* (2018), whose generically conventional style complements their well-known source material – are devoid of artistic, cultural, or intellectual value. Indeed, the huge body of scholarship on genre cinema has aptly demonstrated that even mainstream genre films that gain broad

audiences can still speak to cultural anxieties in surprisingly fascinating ways. As we will see in Chapter 2, genre fans make precisely this claim as a means of trying to level the cultural distinctions that professional film critics often draw between post-horror and more populist horror movies. Yet, even if many horror fans may criticize this high-minded stratification of the genre, I would point out that populist audiences uphold such distinctions as well, when lacking the “double access” to appreciation of both “high” and “low” culture that fans’ higher degree of (sub)cultural capital can grant.¹³ If genre fans primarily have *discursive* qualms about the critical conversation around contemporary horror cinema, many populist viewers still have *textual* qualms about films that seem not to deliver the genre’s conventionally expected pleasures, for reasons that this chapter will address and the next chapter will elaborate.

Post-Horror as Minimalist Art-Horror

Horror cinema has long been a popular but critically denigrated genre, capable of reaching sizable audiences but often derided for its corporeal appeals, fantastical conceits, and thematic focus on evil, monstrosity, and death. Accordingly, it is a critical commonplace for horror-skeptic film reviewers without deeper appreciation for the genre to celebrate texts that privilege haunting atmospheres and indirect chills over shocking spectacles and visceral disgust. As such, the monster conjured in the high-minded viewer’s imagination has often held critical precedence over blatant images of the abject, with “psychological horror” seen as a more refined and restrained aesthetic that is more at home in the art house than the grind house.¹⁴

At root here are taste valuations diverging around different generic strategies for producing *affect*, or sensations which precede cognitive organization into emotions attached to particular objects or figures. Theorizations of affect tend to offer slippery definitions of the term (often by attempting to distinguish it from more common terms like emotion, feeling, mood, and so on), in part due to this sensed quality’s evasion from being easily put into words.¹⁵ Whereas *emotions*, for example, are commonly recognizable varieties of feelings that we might associate with a specific person or action, *affect* registers as a more generalized, ineffable block of sensation, such as free-floating anxieties without an apparent cause or solution. Across this book, I am far less interested in meticulously deploying affect theory (or even adhering to a specific definition of the term itself) than in exploring how the aesthetic form and narrative strategies of post-horror films produce various affects that have been subject to critical

nomination (and contestation) as a supposedly “new” trend in the horror genre. Rather, my methodological approach here unites formal analysis with reception studies and cultural studies, in order to tease out how and why this corpus of recent films has emerged as one of the genre’s most prominently discussed developments since approximately 2014.

As a starting point, I must clarify that my description of post-horror films as a cycle within a longer tradition of *art-horror* reflects its status as a noticeable spike in (at least) Anglo-American film markets, driven by several trailblazing hits – including *It Follows* and *The Witch* – which proved the crossover potential of films that might have otherwise remained within the realm of limited arthouse distribution that two other early examples, *The Babadook* and *Goodnight Mommy* (2014), called home.¹⁶ That is, critical acclaim and box-office grosses after 2014 meant that more of these films were visibly circulating, creating the impression of a surge above baseline production levels for art-horror films in the marketplace.

For my purposes, the compound noun “art-horror” is far less an evaluative modification of the genre label than a much more literal means of evoking the combination of *art cinema* as a formally distinctive mode of film practice and the *horror genre* as an established set of storytelling conventions, iconography, and themes.¹⁷ In other words, I am not using the term to effectively say “These films are ‘art,’ unlike most horror movies” (as the epithet “elevated horror” implies), but rather to directly allude to the stylistic methods used by these filmmakers in approaching the genre. David Bordwell influentially outlines art cinema as less a genre in its own right than a *mode* of filmmaking inspired by modernist art, and internationally popularized during the 1950s–70s with the spread of independently owned arthouse theaters. More formally challenging than classical Hollywood cinema (a far more populist filmmaking mode), modernist art films frequently include drifting, circular, and open-ended narratives; ambiguous and psychologically complex characters; and various forms of spatial and temporal manipulation (including deliberate continuity violations, durational realism, and so on).¹⁸

Importantly, viewing art cinema through the more nebulous classification of a “mode” allows us to see how its common formal traits can serve as a sort of conceptual umbrella beneath which many existing genres can also function. That is, virtually any popular film genre (such as gangster, science fiction, suspense, comedy, war, and so on) can be approached via art cinema’s formal strategies – and horror films have proven a staple source of subject matter in this regard. Indeed, the long tradition of art-horror includes such diverse films as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), *Vampyr* (1932), *Ugetsu* (1953), *Night Tide* (1961), *Repulsion* (1965), *Hour*

of the Wolf (1968), *Don't Look Now* (1973), *The Tenant* (1976), *Eraserhead* (1977), *Possession* (1981), *Funny Games* (1997), *Trouble Every Day* (2001), *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006), *Antichrist* (2009), *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), and countless others.

In her ground-breaking book *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde*, Joan Hawkins argues that, despite the cultural stratification of tastes that privilege higher cognition (such as vision and intellect) over lower bodily sensations, art films trade in many of the same capacities to shock, disgust, and offend as horror films – albeit framed for supposedly different, “higher” purposes (for instance, symbolism over literalism). For Hawkins, then, art-horror films represent a key site for levelling the taste hierarchies between so-called “high” and “low” culture. Most of Hawkins’s examples explore how modernist art and avant-garde cinema (such as *Un Chien Andalou* (1928), *Eyes without a Face* (1959), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *The Act of Seeing with One's Own Eyes* (1972), *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975)) and “trashy” exploitation cinema similarly trade in both taboo spectacle (including gore and explicit sex) and Brechtian distanciation strategies – creating a dialectic of “high is low” and “low is high,” wherein visceral affect is the uniting factor between films from seemingly opposed taste strata. As Hawkins shows, most critics have read such shock effects as signifiers of authorial intent and symbolic resonance when occurring in art and avant-garde films, but more likely dismiss them as literal-minded prurience and inadvertently sloppy filmmaking when present in genre and exploitation cinema.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Matt Hills argues that Hawkins’s own attempt to level these taste strata does not wholly deconstruct taste hierarchies so much as maintain art cinema’s existing cultural repute as a tool for culturally salvaging exploitation films: “the lines of cultural demarcation around film as art are stretched as avant-garde legitimacy is discursively borrowed” when the umbrella of avant-gardism is extended to analyze seemingly “low” texts.²⁰

Although Hills’s criticism is more fittingly targeted at Jeffrey Sconce’s concept of “paracinema” (the practice of ironically reading unintentionally “bad” exploitation movies as inadvertent avant-garde masterpieces),²¹ the idea that modernist art cinema has retained its cultural repute as a qualitative yardstick among professional film critics is important for understanding how post-horror films fit into the larger realm of art cinema. Post-horror films exhibit many of the art-cinema traits noted by Bordwell, but without so many of the genre’s critically countervailing traits like graphic violence/gore, unrealistic monsters, and so on. Even if some post-horror films contain gory or abject imagery consonant with Hawkins’s argument (see the graphic decapitations in Ari Aster’s films),

I argue that they more often share similarities with varieties of art cinema marked by visual restraint and stylistic minimalism; in other words, they tend to work in a rather different affective register than Hawkins's predominant emphasis on art-horror films which foreground shock and disgust.

Post-horror films, for instance, have fewer formal affinities with the so-called "new extremism"²² (such as the films of Catherine Breillat, Gaspar Noé, Lars von Trier, Sion Sono), which controversially infused a new level of explicit sex and violence into international art cinema during the post-9/11 period, than affinities with one of that period's critical darlings: "slow cinema" (see Chapter 2). Hence the fact that not all art-horror films produced during the post-2014 period were critically lumped in with post-horror, since some diverged too far from post-horror's more specific subset of aesthetic strategies. Hawkins notes how any art-horror film's "affective properties tend to be divorced from its 'artistic' and 'poetic' ones, so that it's difficult to find a critical language that allows us to speak about the film as a whole."²³ Consequently, even when post-horror films bear more subtle and subdued qualities of art cinema than shock value, horror-skeptic critics still tend to compartmentalize and downplay such traits by using qualifiers like "elevated" in order to preserve the hierarchies that keep the horror genre near the bottom of the ladder of cultural taste. Hence, professional film critics less often valorize post-horror films according to what they *are* (part of the larger history of art-horror cinema) than what they are *not* (the mainstream horror film as "bad object"), much to the chagrin of genre fans who assert horror's longer history of artworthiness. Rather than being distinguished from other varieties of concurrently circulating art-horror films, then, post-horror is typically posited as highbrow counterprogramming to the supposedly trite and clichéd Hollywood horror film.

Whereas these films earned very strong reviews from most film critics on the basis of distinctions from more conventional Hollywood fare, review-aggregator websites with broad user bases (such as IMDb and Rotten Tomatoes), along with opening-night audience polling services like CinemaScore, demonstrate far less acclaim from more general viewers. *It Comes at Night* (2017) and *Hereditary* respectively earned "D" and "D+" CinemaScore grades, for example, despite earning critical plaudits; similar splits emerged on Rotten Tomatoes between high "Tomatometer" scores (compiled from professional film critics) relative to very low user-generated "Audience Scores." According to high-minded reviewers, these are "no jump-scare, teen-bait multiplex horror movie[s]," but instead "make . . . the viewer work for gratification"²⁴ and "cherish . . . the intelligence of [their] audience."²⁵

Meanwhile, populist viewers regularly criticize the films' slow pacing, ambiguous endings, and lack of conventional monsters/thrills, deeming the films to be boring, confusing, not scary, and utterly unsatisfying; indeed, the vast majority of negative criticism from general audiences hinges precisely on the art-cinema traits that these films display. Misleadingly genre-centric trailers have been suggested as one reason for this disappointment: "One hallmark of the new wave of prestige horror is that the movies are often nothing like the trailers. [. . .] Cutting together duplicitous trailers to bait a broader audience into seeing these very good movies seems like the best of a lot of bad options."²⁶

Even among the minority of professional critics with negative reviews of these films, the same traits that they might praise in an international art film – stylistic self-consciousness, mood over narrative, cryptic character motivations, depressive affect – are here deemed faults by virtue of their presence in a feature-length horror film. Hence, *The Witch* is a "witches' brew of half-formed subplots, under-baked themes, a grating score, and unlikable characters"²⁷ that "needs to be less proud of itself and yeah, it needs to be scarier."²⁸ And "[t]hose expecting a horror movie that's filled with a *lot* of those gross and scary moments will likely be disappointed" by *It Comes at Night*, "while those who might appreciate the film's less horrific storytelling will probably be scared away by the marketing. One thing's for sure: no one who sees this is going to come out of it thinking it was any kind of fun; it's one of the bleakest movies to be released this year."²⁹ In short, for nonplussed viewers, both casual and professional, these films may be stylish, moody, and technically accomplished – but they are not conventionally "fun," their affective tone may feel more oppressive or alienating than sensational, and their narratives may read as "yet another would-be art piece that mistakes ambiguity for complexity."³⁰

In my estimation, post-horror's difference from more conventional horror films is primarily one of *tone*. As Douglas Pye argues, a film's tone resides in how a film's dramatic content is stylistically conveyed via the construction of an overall mood that shapes our affective horizon as viewers. Tone can register through a film's apparent generic or formal/stylistic distance from established norms – and is especially apparent when alternative uses of film form unsettle our conventional ways of approaching genre conventions.³¹ Stylistically, post-horror films evince minimalism over maximalism, largely eschewing jump scares, frenetic editing, and energetic and/or handheld cinematography in favor of cold and distanced shot framing, longer-than-average shot durations, slow camera movements, and stately narrative pacing. In *It Follows*, for instance, David Robert Mitchell uses slow 360-degree pans, static long

shots, and slow zooms that allow the viewer to share the protagonist's paranoid searching of her visual field for a perpetually approaching monster that can take anyone's form (see Chapter 6), while *The Witch* presents interiors as chiaroscuro tableaux and exteriors as distanced vistas where even a waving tree branch conjures supernatural fears among its family of early American colonists (see Chapter 5).

This tendency toward a "vulnerable stillness" increases the viewer's dread that something might occur at any moment, affectively stretching out the film as a felt temporal experience.³² Confirming Hawkins's argument, critics often highlight the "poetic" and "dreamlike" qualities of post-horror films, while typically downplaying the more visceral moments. For instance, *I Am the Pretty Thing* is described as "a tone poem," "almost pornographic in its portent, every second of it seductive and ripe with tension, promising money shots that never come."³³ Critics also observe that these films avoid "the annoying modern tendency towards wobblicam and over-editing"³⁴ and "don't fit neatly into the 'rising action, jump scare, rinse, repeat' model" of mainstream Hollywood horror.³⁵ Whereas jump scares' sudden audiovisual shocks (as produced through quick cuts, loud aural stingers, and startling intrusions hidden by frame edges) cause visceral bodily reactions that precede and short-circuit higher forms of cognition, post-horror's distanced visual style generally eschews such "cheap" and "dumb" thrills in favor of slow-building tension and sources of fear emerging from small details in the *mise-en-scène* (such as glimpsed hints of a monster). With the de-emphasis on jump scares, there may also be more investment in developing psychologically complex protagonists; as Cary Fukunaga remarked, for example, about his abrupt departure from writing and directing the remake of *It*, "In the first movie, what I was trying to do was an elevated horror film with actual characters. [The studio] didn't want any characters. They wanted archetypes and scares."³⁶

Although post-horror films can be said to occupy established horror subgenres in their underlying subject matter (ghostly hauntings in *The Babadook* and *I Am the Pretty Thing*; supernatural curses in *It Follows*; post-apocalyptic survivalism in *It Comes at Night*; demonic possession in *Hereditary*), familiar genre tropes become decentered via art cinema's formal expressiveness and narrative ambiguity, making space for characters and viewers alike to soak in contemplative or emotionally fraught moods, not be shuffled along to the next abrupt scare. In these films, for instance, the appearance of the monster itself is frequently downplayed or presented only indirectly – whether turned into an invisible or abstract force (*It Follows*, *It Comes at Night*), or presented as a potential figment of a character's overwrought imagination (*The Witch*, *I Am the Pretty Thing*)

or mental illness (*The Babadook*, *Hereditary*). Even when the monster does appear, it often takes a recognizably human form, not that of a grotesquely inhuman creature. *A Ghost Story* (2017) takes this decentering of the conventional monster to an extreme, presenting its titular ghost as an actor under a white sheet with black eyeholes – thus replacing the horror genre’s fear-inducing ghosts with a more comic image that marks the film’s closer generic resemblance to an existential drama.

Indeed, one of the major characteristics of post-horror films is a thematic exploration of what Silvan Tomkins terms “negative affects”³⁷ (including grief, sadness, shame, anger), with fear serving as an affective platform for shifting to affects that might be more closely associated with the themes in “serious” arthouse dramas. *I Am the Pretty Thing* and *A Ghost Story*, for instance, use the figure of the ghost for poetically meditating on mortality, memory, and time (Chapter 7), while other films have more worldly concerns. *Hereditary*, *The Babadook*, and many other post-horror texts operate, in addition to horror films, as family dramas about grief, mourning, and monstrous reproduction (Chapter 3). In a more sociopolitical context, *Get Out* explores the hypocrisies of white liberalism as a racially charged iteration of the epistemic violence in “gaslighting” (Chapter 4), while *The Witch* uses its teenage protagonist’s budding sexuality and growing defiance of her family patriarch as an exploration of puritanical paranoia about unruly female bodies (Chapter 5), as though contextualizing the historical roots of the sexual shame and control depicted in *It Follows* (Chapter 6). Of course, this is not to say that more mainstream horror films have not used similar themes in less “rarified” forms, but rather that post-horror films tend to ascribe more narrative weight to such concerns – and, more importantly, the films’ stylistic minimalism distinctly enhances such themes’ cumulative negative affect. To put it another way, the underlying themes in many post-horror films are not necessarily new to the genre – which may account for why so many of them, by offering recognizable generic hooks, found crossover distribution to multiplexes, in spite of their arthouse stylization. Rather, the key distinction resides in *how* these films’ relatively minimalistic form activates themes and anxieties that have long existed within the genre.

Although the preceding paragraphs constitute more of a précis for the chapters to come, we can begin to sketch the contours of the post-horror corpus via three main criteria: (1) which films that critics have labeled as such; (2) which films share the aforementioned formal/stylistic characteristics; and (3) whether these texts substantially engage with themes generating negative affects. In Table 1.1, I have subdivided the post-horror corpus into those films which best represent the above criteria (the “primary” or “core” texts), and

Table 1.1 Provisional corpus of post-horror cinema

Primary/core texts	Secondary/peripheral texts
<i>Under the Skin</i> (Jonathan Glazer, 2013)	<i>Let the Right One In</i> (Tomas Alfredson, 2008)
<i>It Follows</i> (David Robert Mitchell, 2014)	<i>House of the Devil</i> (Ti West, 2009)
<i>The Witch</i> (Robert Eggers, 2015)	<i>Absentia</i> (Mike Flanagan, 2011)
<i>The Blackcoat's Daughter</i> (Oz Perkins, 2015)	<i>The Imkeepers</i> (Ti West, 2011)
<i>The Invitation</i> (Karyn Kusama, 2015)	<i>Berberian Sound Studio</i> (Peter Strickland, 2012)
<i>A Dark Song</i> (Liam Gavin, 2016)	<i>Only Lovers Left Alive</i> (Jim Jarmusch, 2013)
<i>The Eyes of My Mother</i> (Nicholas Pesce, 2016)	<i>Enemy</i> (Denis Villeneuve, 2013)
<i>I Am the Pretty Thing That Lives in the House</i> (Oz Perkins, 2016)	<i>The Babadook</i> (Jennifer Kent, 2014)
<i>A Ghost Story</i> (David Lowery, 2017)	<i>Goodnight Mommy</i> (Veronika Franz and Severin Fiala, 2014)
<i>It Comes at Night</i> (Trey Edward Shults, 2017)	<i>Evolution</i> (Lucile Hadžihalilović, 2015)
<i>Get Out</i> (Jordan Peele, 2017)	<i>Don't Breathe</i> (Fede Álvarez, 2016)
<i>Hagazussa: A Heathen's Curse</i> (Lukas Feigelfeld, 2017)	<i>Personal Shopper</i> (Olivier Assayas, 2016)
<i>Hereditary</i> (Ari Aster, 2018)	<i>Under the Shadow</i> (Babak Anvari, 2016)
<i>Midsommar</i> (Ari Aster, 2019)	<i>The Untamed</i> (Amat Escalante, 2016)
<i>The Lighthouse</i> (Robert Eggers, 2019)	<i>Raw</i> (Julia Ducournau, 2016)
<i>The Lodge</i> (Veronika Franz and Severin Fiala, 2019)	<i>The Neon Demon</i> (Nicolas Winding Refn, 2016)
<i>Relic</i> (Natalie Erika James, 2020)	<i>mother!</i> (Darren Aronofsky, 2017)
<i>She Dies Tomorrow</i> (Amy Seimet, 2020)	<i>The Killing of a Sacred Deer</i> (Yorgos Lanthimos, 2017)
	<i>A Quiet Place</i> (John Krasinski, 2018)
	<i>Suspiria</i> (Luca Guadagnino, 2018)
	<i>Us</i> (Jordan Peele, 2019)
	<i>Swallow</i> (Carlo Mirabella-Davis, 2019)
	<i>Gretel & Hansel</i> (Oz Perkins, 2020)
	<i>Amulet</i> (Romola Garai, 2020)

those films which display only some of the aesthetic qualities or which critics have less frequently associated with the trend (the “secondary” or “peripheral” texts). This subdivision is intended to help indicate how not all films critically ascribed to “post-horror” status share all of the aforementioned stylistic traits, nor are those traits wholly new or exclusive to only the films clustered beneath that banner. In this regard, I have attempted to strike a balance between my own subjective reading of each film’s formal/affective qualities and a more objective survey of which films have been critically nominated as post-horror.

The films most often identified as post-horror’s core examples (such as *It Follows*, *The Witch*, and *Hereditary*) bear a distinctly slow, austere, and minimalist style for most of their duration, for instance – but I have also included less overtly restrained films like *The Invitation* (2015) and *Get Out* on the primary list due to both their ubiquity in critical discourse about post-horror and their thematic similarities to core post-horror texts. Films on the secondary list, by contrast, may initially share the claustrophobic ambience and shortage of jump scares associated with the primary texts, but eventually devote extended narrative duration to faster, action-oriented pacing (as in *Don’t Breathe* (2016) and *mother!* (2017)) or uncharacteristically violent scenes (as in *Goodnight Mommy* and *Suspiria* (2018)). Likewise, critics frequently described *A Quiet Place* as “elevated horror” due to its clever narrative conceit (the characters must remain silent to avoid attracting monsters that hunt by sound), but I have relegated it to the secondary list because its overall form adheres so closely to classical Hollywood style and narration (as compared to, say, the art-film ambiguities of the similarly post-apocalyptic *It Comes at Night*).³⁸ Moreover, some of the secondary films – such as *The Neon Demon* (2016) and *Personal Shopper* (2016) – may appear too peripheral to the horror genre itself for some viewers to readily associate them with post-horror. Despite the table’s rather schematic look, then, these subdivisions should be seen as potentially fluid, and readers are welcome to add or subtract entries on either provisional list, depending on whether one privileges (1) critical nomination; (2) formal/stylistic minimalism; or (3) thematic/affective resonance.

Narrative vs. Affect

Thus far, I have argued that post-horror is a variant of art-horror distinguished from its generic kin via a minimalist aesthetic that functionally enhances the affective impact of a set of recurring themes. Although I will elaborate in subsequent chapters on these themes and how post-horror’s

formal style informs their narrative meaning, a few additional words about the relationship between narrative, genre, and the generation of affect are important for understanding how these films operate as “apprehension engines” – and thereby why they have engendered such a gaping evaluative divide between, on one side, horror-skeptic film critics and horror-friendly genre fans and, on the other side, more casual and populist horror viewers. After all, it is one thing to analyze texts for their thematic content as an interpretive through-line connecting multiple films, but another to consider how affect may, in fact, be better generated by films whose narratives are more impressionistic than explicitly discerned.

Rather than the monster serving as the horror genre’s conventional locus for generating emotions of fear and disgust (as Noël Carroll has argued),³⁹ many of these films veer closer to Tzvetan Todorov’s concept of “the fantastic,” as narratives rooted in hesitation over whether apparently supernatural occurrences can be explained away as mere “uncanny” events with rational elucidation or whether something truly “marvelous” is afoot.⁴⁰ As noted earlier, in classic art-cinema style, these films predominantly filter their diegetic visions through the vagaries of characters’ distressed psychological states, often refusing to confirm or deny the truth of their seemingly supernatural happenings. Hence, if these films evoke a deep sense of unease, it is partly because they often retain one foot in the realm of real-world plausibility.

The Witch, for example, leaves ambiguity about whether a witch has actually beset a colonial family, whether the various travails of frontier life (child disappearances, crop and livestock failures, and so on) are mere projections of puritanical fears about Satan’s invisible assaults, or even whether blame can be attributed to a hallucinogenic rot on the family’s corn. This mix of epistemic registers is further suggested by the film’s titular subtitle “A New England Folktale” (cuing us to expect a more mythical narrative), whereas a closing onscreen card informs us that this “folktale” was also inspired by “written accounts of historical witchcraft, including journals, diaries, and court records. Much of the dialogue comes directly from these period sources.” As Aviva Briefel argues, the film’s revival of a historically accurate past thus conflicts with its potential to be read as a historical counter-narrative confirming the “actual” existence of Puritan-era witchcraft.⁴¹ In this sense, *The Witch*’s historical verisimilitude blends supernatural ambiguity with the “documentary realism” that David Bordwell associates with some examples of art cinema,⁴² with the film’s portrayed events occupying an epistemic shadow not unlike the so-called “spectral evidence” presented against suspected witches during colonial-era trials.

Matt Hills argues that horror cinema may be organized less around the object-directed emotions that Carroll privileges, but instead “immerse its audiences in an ‘anticipatory’ mood or ambience that endures across the text” – an overwhelming affect of “objectless anxiety” that may especially linger beyond the text when a film ends without a clear narrative resolution.⁴³ For Hills, horror should be defined more as an “event-based” than “entity-based” aesthetic experience, with narrative circumstances and the details of *mise-en-scène* and cinematography being capable of generating horror even in films like *The Haunting* (1963) and *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) where a monster is implied but never explicitly manifest.⁴⁴ In other words, because affect precedes emotion, creating diffuse sensations that may not be easily ascribed to particular characters (whether humans or monsters), the horror genre’s affective impact cannot be simply reduced to abject imagery of the monster and its effects. This idea certainly fits post-horror’s lessened focus on the terror-inducing monster as a clearly defined narrative locus, and its alternate focus on generating ambient states of dreadful unease.

Hence, in a film like *It Comes at Night*, there is no “it” revealed over the course of the film (a recurring complaint among populist viewers), beyond the literal nightmares among a family of plague survivors fighting off potential interlopers and an invisible disease (see Chapter 5), while *The Neon Demon* contains no “demon” beyond the insatiable consumers of youthful beauty in Los Angeles’s cut-throat fashion world. In its story of a high-minded British sound designer (Toby Jones) slowly losing his mind while working on a 1970s Italian *giallo* film, *Berberian Sound Studio* (2012) even goes so far as to conceal any horrific sights whatsoever from the film’s own viewers; apart from a brief glimpse of the film-within-the-film’s opening title sequence, we only ever see (and feel) Gilderoy’s reaction shots to the violent footage as he creates morbid Foley effects for the gory scenes that are merely described to us. Compared to the rather straightforward narrative conceit of *A Quiet Place*, then, *Berberian Sound Studio* presents a far more *formally* self-conscious play upon how sound is typically used in the horror genre. Because post-horror thus prioritizes affect over monstrous entities, it is perhaps little surprise that these texts seem more difficult for film critics to label in a satisfactory way, unlike so many entity-based subgeneric labels (such as “slasher,” “zombie,” and so on).

As Robert Spadoni argues, atmosphere in horror cinema is often considered secondary and subservient to narrative concerns, but affective moods like dread prove that atmosphere is functionally inseparable from narrative – operating less as accompaniment than *culmination* of certain scenes. Thus atmosphere “may have as special a relationship to the *absence*

of narrative as it does to narrative.”⁴⁵ He further suggests that atmosphere and narrative exist in tension with each other, with one side filling in where the other is used more sparsely.⁴⁶ In this regard, then, the relative paucity of classical Hollywood narrative structure in post-horror films allows their thick affective ambience to take precedence during the viewing experience. Also of note here are their ambient scores and claustrophobic sound design, from Rich Vreeland’s eerie retro-synth vibes in *It Follows* to Mark Korven’s quasi-medieval noisescapes for *The Witch*. If orchestral scores traditionally cater to object/character-based emotions, then these more affectively immersive, dread-inducing uses of music underscore the films’ function as “apprehension engines” that seldom deliver the same narrative beats as populist horror films.

Much as horror films may shift from narrative to atmosphere, it is precisely this ability for horror to shift fluidly from objectless affect to object-directed emotion (and vice versa) that, I argue, allows the genre’s traditional emotion (fear) to be shifted toward other negative affects in post-horror films.⁴⁷ As noted earlier, these films do not regularly deliver the steady string of jump scares that typically relieve tension, instead allowing dread to stretch across and beyond the loose progression of narrative events. Hence, even if eschewing many of the genre’s most familiar means of sensationally addressing the viewer, “formal or thematic ‘sophistication’ seems to authorize sensation” (that is, affect) in a different mode by instead “incorporat[ing] sensation into their [arthouse] style.”⁴⁸ When viscerally shocking moments do occasionally occur in post-horror films, they are more likely used to signal major traumatic events, and therefore used to greater thematic effect than as disposably “cheap” scares. In *Hereditary*, for instance, Charlie’s (Milly Shapiro) sudden decapitation comes as a major shock to viewers (see Chapter 3) – but those who saw the film in theaters will likely recall audience members who emulated Charlie’s dental clicks during other parts of the film, effectively trying to relieve the near-constant tension that the film refuses to temper with jump scares or comic relief.

Here, then, we also have a tension between the “quiet-attentive” mode of pleurably concentrated viewership that Julian Hanich associates with the collective theatrical experience of slow art cinema and the “expressive-diverted” mode in which film viewers’ responses become a partial focus of co-present viewers’ attention.⁴⁹ The latter mode is conventionally expected of the horror genre (especially in the populist forms typically found at multiplexes), whereas the former mode can be more apt for consuming post-horror texts. As Hanich notes, dread-inducing scenes seem to stretch out time by delaying narrative momentum, but

even though horror films typically use such scenes to pleurably build up tension before a scare, such scenes can instead run the risk of generating boredom and feeling unfinished when conventionally expected scares do not come.⁵⁰ Adam Charles Hart, for example, argues that jump scares have become such a defining characteristic of the twenty-first-century horror experience that the overall genre functions as a system for prioritizing bodily responses above narrative absorption. Yet, when this “sensational address” is far less overt, when the viewer’s body is not directly implicated in completing a given scene’s intended effect, then a horror film may not offer the “affirming experience” that the film is being made for the viewer’s entertainment.⁵¹ Rather than being encouraged to play a game with the filmmaker over when and how the expected scares will arrive, post-horror films sometimes seem indifferent to audience response, willing to risk alienating viewers in the service of a “higher” artistic vision. As we will see in the next chapter, this stylistic flouting of generic convention vis-à-vis dread helps explain the sharp divide between populist viewers who accuse post-horror films of being “boring” and high-minded film critics who celebrate such “slowness” as their own show of elitist tastes.⁵²

Unlike the jump scares that have abruptly punctuated the final frames of many Hollywood horror films since *Carrie* (1976), post-horror films more likely extend their sense of fantastic hesitation and ambient affect by way of art cinema’s open endings (especially an abrupt cut-to-black), as an extension of narrative ambiguity – instead of delivering one last scare before the lights come up and thus teasing the monster’s survival for a potential sequel. *The Witch*, for example, ends with its protagonist, her family’s sole survivor, joining a coven of witches in the woods and levitating into the trees – but whether this is all a fantasy sequence borne of desperation or an actual event is left unclear. Likewise, the seemingly “happy” formation of the heterosexual couple at the end of *It Follows* is undercut by their ignorance that they are still quite possibly being followed by that film’s titular entity, as seen in the distant background (see Figure 6.2). More often than not, such ambiguously open endings extend the post-horror film’s affective power across and beyond the narrative events, leaving viewers in a more pensive position than the average horror film. Rather than a mere question of misleading marketing, then, occupying a stylistic position closer to “difficult” art cinema than populist genre cinema means that post-horror films offer audiences beyond the art house an expanded view of what the horror film can feel like, but at the cost of potentially alienating many horror-friendly viewers with less (sub)cultural capital.

The Chapters to Come

The remaining chapters in this book discuss other important aspects of the post-horror phenomenon, moving outward from the formal/aesthetic and affective traits sketched here, through the mesh of critical debates that encircle the corpus's boundaries, and into recurring threads in the thematic and social meanings engendered by such a diverse group of texts. Each chapter addresses films from both the primary and secondary lists presented in Table 1.1, in order to indicate the places where these lists aesthetically or thematically overlap. Much as the body of films in Table 1.1 should be seen as an open and fluidly shifting category, this book does not pretend to offer an exhaustive overview of all post-horror films – not least because the post-horror cycle is still in progress at the time of this writing – but also because these complex interminglings of art cinema and horror cinema readily lend themselves to many methods of scholarly analysis. Indeed, several of these films (including *The Witch*, *The Babadook*, *It Follows*, and *Get Out*) have already inspired separate academic volumes and plentiful articles of their own – with surely more to come – while multiple films that I had originally planned to analyze herein fell by the wayside as the project evolved. My own modest goal for *Post-Horror* is to provide a useful entry point into this corpus by reading across a variety of the cycle's major texts in order to account for genre history, critical/popular reception, sociocultural implications, and artistic style. Since this book is primarily a work of film criticism, I also invite readers to follow along with the mini-analyses in the following chapters, by watching the films with me and developing their own conclusions.

Building atop this chapter's focus on art-horror, Chapter 2 examines the successive critical attempts to name this emergent cycle of films as something other than the literal conjunction of art cinema and horror, including modifiers like "slow," "smart," "indie," "prestige," "elevated," and finally "post." As I will argue, the shortcomings in each of these naming attempts were driven as much by critics' difficulties to put the films' affective impact into words as by the increased speed and fragmentation of film-critical discourse during the social-media era. The immediate flak that these terms earned from genre-literate fans reflects online film criticism's collapsing of longstanding cultural lines between professional film critics as (horror-skeptic) cultural gatekeepers and genre fans as (horror-friendly) organic intellectuals, with each broad category of viewers actualizing a different degree of either (legitimate) cultural capital or (less recognized) subcultural capital. Nevertheless, by looking at the individual meanings of these critical labels, we can trace an intersecting series of historical lineages that

have led into the stylistic and discursive construction of the post-horror corpus.

Chapter 3 begins to unpack some of the recurring narrative tropes in these films by exploring how familial traumas – particularly the narrativized process of mourning a lost family member – form one of the most prominent ways that post-horror encroaches on the generic territory of serious arthouse dramas. In making such a comparison, however, I am not trying to make the case, as some horror-skeptic viewers have done, that these films are “actually” something (anything!) other than “horror” movies; rather, I am interested in how these films expose fault lines between genres and modes that are too frequently considered separate categories. With the affective shape of grief at their disposal, many of these films (*Goodnight Mommy*, *The Babadook*, *Hereditary*) depict mothers and their offspring as made monstrous by their emotional response to the haunting loss of immediate family members. Moreover, drawing on Richard Armstrong’s generic conception of the “mourning film,” this chapter argues that themes of generationally inherited dysfunction serve as a larger metaphor for post-horror’s own relationship to both the horror genre and art cinema.

Shifting the focus from familial to romantic relationships, and from the personal to the political, Chapter 4 posits that “gaslighting” serves as a common theme in post-horror films where emotional abuse cannot be immediately ascribed to intergenerational family dynamics. Whereas the couple is presented as part of an endangered out-group in both *The Invitation* and *Midsummer* (2019), the racialized possession of black bodies in *Get Out* demonstrates how gaslighting within romantic bonds can function as a form of epistemic violence that reinforces larger social inequalities beyond sexism. The affective discomfort created by films about the horrors of gaslighting is further heightened by post-horror’s tendency toward epistemic hesitation, encouraging viewers to reflect on their own positionality as viewers who may or may not know more than the deceived protagonists.

Chapter 5 looks at how post-horror films use their physical settings to differently generate affect, with particular emphasis on rural areas and wilderness as spaces whose sparseness and depopulation operates in conjunction with the films’ own stylistic minimalism. To call these films “spaced out” describes not only their literal locations, but also the films’ generic distance from the larger horror genre and the contemplative mood that each one encourages. Witchcraft-themed films like *The Witch*, *Hagazussa: A Heathen’s Curse* (2017), and *Gretel & Hansel* (2020) use wilderness settings to evoke woman’s place in relation to fertile landscapes, while post-apocalyptic survival films like *It Comes at Night* and *A Quiet Place* use the

countryside to invoke a paranoid “bunker mentality” against perceived or actual threats to the existing family. Meanwhile, seaside-set films like *The Lighthouse* (2019) allow us to explore post-horror’s larger relationship to inhospitable realms of non-human nature as well.

Unlike the previous chapter’s discussion of wild natural spaces, Chapter 6 offers an extended case study of one of the earliest and most important post-horror films, *It Follows*, whose overall aesthetic is rooted in its specifically urban, postindustrial setting. Through its ironic critique of monogamy as a monstrous force, I argue that the film advances, by way of negative example, a queer ethics of open, responsible sexuality – albeit an ethics constrained by the film’s setting in a neoliberal Detroit increasingly stripped of public services. By examining the film’s ambivalent nostalgia for both a generic and an urban past, this chapter argues that *It Follows*’s queer aesthetic achieves its affective tenor through imaging Detroit’s decrepit (sub)urban spaces as haunted by polyvalent sexualities and socioeconomic inequalities.

Finally, Chapter 7 answers the prior reframing of sexuality as a horror of the body by examining the other side of a classic philosophical dualism: horrors of the soul. Although hardly unique to post-horror films, one of the cycle’s contributions to the genre is refiguring the ghost from a vengeful, fear-inducing trope into a much more existential figure, as in *A Ghost Story* and *I Am the Pretty Thing That Lives in the House*. Meanwhile, *A Dark Song* (2016) echoes *A Ghost Story*’s concern with individual grief’s relationship to cosmic realms of (non)existence, much as *mother!* and *I Am the Pretty Thing* ask whether artistic creation itself can play any role in personal or spiritual redemption. In closing the book, these stories about attempts to gain some sort of transcendence thus serve as a way of imagining post-horror’s own mixed success at (for better or worse) transcending the genre itself.

Notes

1. Indie Film Maker, “Horror Musical Instrument – The Apprehension Engine,” YouTube, September 30, 2016, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lzk-l8Gm0MY>>; Great Big Story, “Sounds of the Nightmare Machine,” YouTube, June 20, 2017 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ITYPvArbGo>>.
2. The Apprehension Engine, accessed June 27, 2019 <<http://apprehensionengine.com/PreOrder/>>.
3. Laura Birnbaum, “*The Blackcoat’s Daughter*: The Film You Aren’t Ready to See (But Should),” *Film Inquiry*, July 1, 2016 <<https://www.filminquiry.com/blackcoats-daughter-2015-review/>>.

4. Watching Staff, "21st Century Horror," *New York Times*, accessed June 24, 2019 <<https://www.nytimes.com/watching/lists/best-horror-movies-21st-century>>.
5. Steve Rose, "How Post-Horror Movies are Taking Over Cinema," *The Guardian*, July 6, 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/jul/06/post-horror-films-scary-movies-ghost-story-it-comes-at-night>>.
6. See Sheila J. Nayar, "Epistemic Capital: The Etiology of an 'Elitist' Film Canon's Aesthetic Criteria," *Post Script*, 29, no. 1 (2009), pp. 27–44.
7. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 16, 27.
8. On the distinction between potential and actual subcultural capital, see Matt Hills, "Attending Horror Film Festivals and Conventions: Liveness, Subcultural Capital, and 'Flesh-and-Blood Genre Communities,'" in *Horror Zone: The Cultural Experience of Contemporary Horror Cinema*, ed. Ian Conrich (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010), pp. 92–3.
9. Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), pp. 11–12.
10. Jostein Gripsrud, "'High Culture' Revisited," *Cultural Studies*, 3, no. 2 (1989), pp. 196–8.
11. There are plenty of populist viewers at the horror-skeptic end of the continuum as well, but because they lack the horror-skeptic film critic's professional obligation to occasionally watch horror films, horror-skeptic populist viewers are more likely to altogether avoid viewing or sharing opinions about (post-) horror films. Therefore they will be generally left unaddressed in this book.
12. Nevertheless, these two films do veer considerably closer to the dominant Hollywood style than most post-horror films (see Chapters 4 and 5), and had the support of major Hollywood studios as distributors. Both films also feature established actors, and directors who were widely known from previous television careers as comic actors. These factors all helped contribute to their box-office success, relative to post-horror films with more modest origins and more pronounced art-cinema inspiration.
13. Gripsrud, "'High Culture' Revisited," 199. This double access surely animates my own taste-based biases toward the films under consideration in this book, even as my larger academic career has also focused on revaluing culturally "low" texts, such as exploitation and adult films, on their own terms.
14. Among others, see Gregory A. Waller, "Made-for-Television Horror Films," in *American Horrors: Essays on the Modern American Horror Film*, ed. Gregory A. Waller (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 148; Mark Jancovich, "Genre and the Audience: Genre Classifications and Cultural Distinctions in the Mediation of *The Silence of the Lambs*," in *Horror: The Film Reader*, ed. Mark Jancovich (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 151–61; Joan Hawkins, *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), ch. 3; Kate Egan, *Trash or Treasure? Censorship and the Changing Meanings of the Video Nasties* (Manchester: Manchester University

- Press, 2007), ch. 1; Daniel Martin, "Japan's *Blair Witch*: Restraint, Maturity, and Generic Canons in the British Critical Reception of *Ring*," *Cinema Journal*, 48, no. 3 (2009), pp. 35–51; I. Q. Hunter, *British Trash Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2013).
15. For example, Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), ch. 1; Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), ch. 1; Eric Shouse, "Feeling, Emotion, Affect," *M/C Journal*, 8, no. 6 (2005) <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php>>; Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1–25; Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 204–18.
 16. On this model of film-cycle development, see Richard Nowell, *Blood Money: A History of the First Teen Slasher Film Cycle* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 42–7.
 17. This literal conjunction of the art-cinema mode and the horror genre should not be confused with Noël Carroll's cognitivist use of the term "art-horror" to broadly describe emotional responses to horrific works of art (as opposed to real-world horrors) – not least because Carroll's entity-based approach to the horror genre does not usefully explain post-horror, as I elaborate below. See Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 27–42.
 18. David Bordwell, "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice," in *Critical Visions in Film Theory: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, eds Timothy Corrigan, Patricia White, and Meta Mazaj (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011), pp. 560–4.
 19. Hawkins, *Cutting Edge*, 4–8, 21–8.
 20. Matt Hills, "Para-Paracinema: The *Friday the 13th* Film Series as Other to Trash and Legitimate Film Cultures," in *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, and Politics*, ed. Jeffrey Sconce (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 221–2 (quoted at p. 222).
 21. *Ibid.*, pp. 220–1; Jeffrey Sconce, "'Trashing' the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style," *Screen*, 36, no. 4 (1995), pp. 371–93.
 22. See James Quandt, "Flesh and Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema," *Artforum*, 42, no. 6 (2004), pp. 126–32; Joan Hawkins, "Culture Wars: Some New Trends in Art Horror," *Jump Cut*, no. 51 (2009) <<https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc51.2009/artHorror/>>; Tanya Horek and Tina Kendall (eds), *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011); Mattias Frey, *Extreme Cinema: The Transgressive Rhetoric of Today's Art Film Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2016), ch. 2; Aaron Michael Kerner and Jonathan L. Knapp, *Extreme Cinema: Affective Strategies in Transnational Media* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), ch. 1.

23. Hawkins, *Cutting Edge*, 66.
24. Chris Alexander, "TIFF 2016 Review: *I Am the Pretty Thing That Lives in the House*," *ComingSoon.net*, September 12, 2016 <<http://www.comingsoon.net/horror/reviews/766113-tiff-2016-review-i-am-the-pretty-thing-that-lives-in-the-house>>.
25. Kiernan McLoone, "*It Comes at Night* and the Power of the Unseen Horror," *Cultured Vultures*, July 12, 2017 <<https://culturedvultures.com/it-comes-at-night-horror/>>.
26. Jordan Crucchiola, "Why Do Prestige-Horror Trailers Keep Lying to Us?" *Vulture*, June 13, 2017 <<http://www.vulture.com/2017/06/it-comes-at-night-why-are-horror-trailers-lying-to-us.html>>.
27. Ethan Sacks, "'The Witch' Casts a Spell on Critics Even Though It's Not Very Good," *New York Daily News*, February 17, 2016 <<http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/movies/witch-casts-spell-critics-not-good-article-1.2529738>>.
28. Will Leitch, "*The Witch*: Suffer the Little Children," *New Republic*, February 19, 2016 <<https://newrepublic.com/article/130182/witch-suffer-little-children>>.
29. Rain Jokinen, "Bleak 'It Comes at Night' is a Thoroughly Unpleasant Experience," *SFist*, June 9, 2017 <http://sfist.com/2017/06/09/bleak_it_comes_at_night_a_thoroughl.php> (original emphasis).
30. Richard Lawson, "*It Comes at Night* is a Pretty But Pointless Downer," *Vanity Fair*, June 6, 2017 <<http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/06/it-comes-at-night-review>>.
31. Douglas Pye, "Movies and Tone," in *Close-Up 02*, eds John Gibbs and Douglas Pye (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), pp. 7, 21, 23, 28, 76.
32. Julian Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers: The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 179–80, 187.
33. Alexander, "TIFF 2016 Review."
34. Anne Billson, "Cheap Thrills: The Frightful Rise of Low-Budget Horror," *The Telegraph*, May 6, 2015 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/film/it-follows/rise-of-low-budget-horror-movies-babadook/>>.
35. Crucchiola, "Why Do Prestige-Horror."
36. Quoted in Ramin Setoodeh, "Cary Fukunaga Offers New Details on Why 'It' Remake Fell Apart," *Variety*, September 2, 2015 <<https://variety.com/2015/film/news/cary-fukunaga-it-exit-1201584416/>>.
37. Silvan S. Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness: The Complete Edition* (New York: Springer, 2008), vols II–III.
38. The quick, direct-to-streaming release of imitators like Netflix's *Bird Box* (2018) and *The Silence* (2019), both of which similarly use sensory-deprivation themes within post-apocalyptic milieus, also suggests how *A Quiet Place*'s success can be attributed to a gimmick that proved easily adaptable to conventional Hollywood filmmaking practices and audience expectations.
39. Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 28–30.

40. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), ch. 2.
41. Aviva Briefel, "Devil in the Details: The Uncanny History of *The Witch* (2015)," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 49, no. 1 (2019), p. 6.
42. Bordwell, "The Art Cinema," 562.
43. Matt Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror* (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 25–7 (quoted at pp. 25, 27).
44. Matt Hills, "An Event-Based Definition of Art-Horror," in *Dark Thoughts: Philosophic Reflections on Cinematic Horror*, eds Steven Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003), pp. 142–4, 148–50.
45. Robert Spadoni, "Carl Dreyer's Corpse: Horror Film Atmosphere and Narrative," in *A Companion to the Horror Film*, ed. Harry M. Benshoff (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 157–9, 165 (quoted at p. 165), original emphasis.
46. Robert Spadoni, "Horror Film Atmosphere as Anti-Narrative (and Vice Versa)," in *Merchants of Menace: The Business of Horror Cinema*, ed. Richard Nowell (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), pp. 109–12.
47. Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror*, 28.
48. Adam Charles Hart, *Monstrous Forms: Moving Image Horror Across Media* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 83.
49. Julian Hanich, *The Audience Effect: On the Collective Cinema Experience* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), pp. 95, 112.
50. Hanich, *Cinematic Emotion*, 169, 187, 192.
51. Hart, *Monstrous Forms*, 28, 34, 41, 51, 68, 80 (quoted at p. 51).
52. See, for example, the discussion of *Midsommar* (2019) in Charles Bramasco, "Extended Scares: In Defense of the Two-Hour-Plus Horror Movie," *The Guardian*, July 1, 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/jul/01/midsommar-ari-aster-horror-movie-extended>>.