# THROUGH ALIEN “EYES”: SPECTACLE MEDIATING NONHUMAN AGENCY IN *NOPE* (2022)

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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As horse trainers, a former child star and a mysterious UFO clash in the Agua Dulce desert, Jordan Peele’s *Nope* (2022), replete with nonhuman actors, presents a generative model for considering the possibilities and constraints of non-human representations within media. Weaving frameworks established by Derrida, De Bord and Benjamin, I analyze the ways in which nonhuman beings are shaped and molded into images for consumption, as well as their resistance to this control. As the forces of Hollywood production clash with the gazes of nonhuman beings, *Nope* points toward avenues to disrupt the aesthetically captivating distractions of capitalism and the destructive impulses they inspire, highlighting the possibilities of nonhuman agents as forces of disruption and interruption of systems of exploitation.

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Jordan Peele's 2022 film *Nope* opens onto a moment of animal sitcom acting gone wrong in a scene which is, at first, seemingly unrelated to the rest of the narrative. Despite the jarring dissonance in these opening moments, the opening conflict establishes the overarching concern of the film: interrogating how the aesthetic of spectacle guides and disrupts relationships between humans and other beings.[1] The audio for the opening scene begins far before the scene, laid over the introductory sequences of Universal Studios's globe and Monkeypaw Productions's disembodied monkey hand stirring a cup of tea. Over these standard corporate sequences, the familiar cadence of sitcom audio, complete with audience laugh-track, plays, sounding the beginning of a birthday party. However, before the visual image of the sitcom reaches the screen, a sharp pop sounds. No longer the jovial tones of a sitcom, the audio is now distorted by voices crying and speaking panicked but undecipherable words. With this cacophony as its score, a biblical epigraph holds the screen: "I will cast abominable filth at you, make you vile, and make you a spectacle. -Nahum 3:6" (*Nope* 0.00.51). Finally, we receive the image of this spectacle. Under harsh filming lights, in a mostly empty and partially destroyed television set, a child's body lays still, only her legs visible. A chimpanzee with his face, shoulders and hands covered in blood, dressed in human clothing and a party hat approaches the child. He pushes aside a broken lamp and nudges the child's foot, seemingly unaware of the violence he has enacted. Receiving no reaction from the child, he sits back against the side of a sofa, pulls the party hat off his head, and rubs his face and head, further smearing blood across himself. The applause sign continues

[1] In my first viewing of the film, I originally thought that the opening scene was a brutal continuation of the Monkeypaw Production company's introduction. I did not realize that it was part of the movie until it was referenced, and later reprised, in connection to Ricky "Jupe" Park, a minor character who experienced the "Gordy's Show" incident in his childhood.

to blink on and off in the studio, signaling to an absent audience. Glancing about, his eyes meet the camera[2] and he stares with a sense of recognition, meeting the viewers' gaze.

This scene and its reprisal, later described as the "*Gordy's Home* incident", is the first spectacle displayed in the film and introduces the multi-species stakes of spectacle creation. Introduced by Nahum 3:6, it brings the subjects and objects of a spectacle into question. Who is made into a spectacle and who is "casting abominable filth"? I see two possible responses, both of which are shaped and created by the interplay between multi-species interactions and the apparatus of film[3] as a site of image creation. The first response emerges within the media production of *Gordy's Home* itself, defined by the commodity it creates. Dislocated from the lived realities of the chimpanzee and the actors, the sitcom derives its value from the chimpanzee as a sign to be manipulated. Within the Hollywood economy of images, which commodifies "the exchange of signs, symbols and images at least as much as … the actual exchange of objects", *Nope* presents a vision of mass-market media production aligning with both the vernacular understanding of spectacle as something visually striking and Debord's critique of alienation under capitalism (West). Drawing upon Debord's formulation, this spectacle "is a world vision which has become objectified," crafting value and meaning through the use of living beings as symbols (para.5). The sitcom as a Debordian spectacle derives its economic value and comedic affect from the juxtaposition and disjunction of an animal occupying a space and position they normally would not. Chimpanzees participate in birthday parties, horses sell commercial

[2] The camera in this scene is later revealed to be a vehicle for Ricky "Jupe" Park's perspective, as he, as a child actor, hides beneath the set's dining room table while Gordy beats his co-star.

[3] As described by Benjamin in "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility", the "recording apparatus" of film subjects the actor "to a series of optical tests", fundamentally changing the performance through the editing and camerawork and failing to "respect the performance as an integral whole" (259). The apparatus is understood as the "piece of equipment" that the actor performs for, exiling and alienating the actor from both the audience and their performance (Benjamin 260).

products, and aliens perform at a western tourist park. Nonhuman beings within each of these spaces are controlled to produce a commodifiable image.[4] The Debordian spectacle appears as a totality, precluding escape and individual agency (Trier 70). However, in the chimpanzee's violent resistance, there is the possibility "to see spectacle itself as a contested terrain", shattering and disrupting the consumerist spectacle to "constitute a field of domination and resistance" (Kellner 29). While Debord's spectacle recursively constitutes itself through "lived reality", both shaping the spectators experience of reality while enlisting them in its further production, the presence of nonhuman animals presents opportunities to see the recursion broken, to watch it stutter. The chimpanzee erupts, the horse spooks, the alien feasts and a pre-Debordian spectacle, "something extraordinary that attracts attention," takes the place of the commodity (West). Within this rebellion and violence, something new is created, perhaps a brutal re-emergence of the sublime image, incomprehensible and arresting. The directional movement of the spectacle reverses, positioning the previous directors of the circus spectacle as now those covered in "abominable filth". Throughout this film, nonhuman beings stare out at us as they are shaped and molded into images for consumption and, subsequently, shock us with resistance to control. Caught within the technological apparatus of image production, nonhuman beings actively create a new spectacle, resonating between the contrived and uncontrollable image. Following from the cinematic traditions of the creature feature, *Nope* is driven by the conflict between humans and a monstrous non-human other; however, the creation of images drives the need for conflict in the humans, as battles over representation emerge in tandem with battles for survival. Within this

[4] Notably, the control exerted upon animals in effort to create value permeates most animal's lives within systems of capital through biopolitical control (Wolfe). However, the media commodification demonstrated within *Nope* differs in the lack of physical sale of animal life to consumers, demonstrating the value that is derived solely through the being's symbolic resonance. This symbolic register exists through both instances of commodification, yet often goes unnoticed beyond its effects, such as the popularity of meat-eating and the cultural narratives that sustain this practice.

context of image-obsession, nonhuman agency is forced toward a new dimension, creating an alternative mode of expression within a system that does not acknowledge them as living beings. Through the emphasis on nonhuman resistance, *Nope* points toward avenues to disrupt the aesthetically captivating distractions of capitalism and the destructive impulses they inspire, highlighting the necessity of nonhuman agency as a force of disruption.

**Animality and Race in Black Horror**

Released in July of 2022, scholarly attention to *Nope* has only now begun to catch up with the fast-paced film review environment. The most extensive scholarly work on *Nope* is a blog post on Keith Booker's *Comments on Culture*, which also notes connections with Debord's theories, additionally analyzing Peele's approach to genres through a postmodern lens and arguing the "play with genre is part of a larger game that involves contemporary culture in general … conducting a subtle critique of the society of the spectacle as a whole" (Booker and Daraiseh). In addition to their extensive analysis of the postmodern spectacle, Booker and Daraiseh briefly mention the use of animals within the film, arguing that they should be viewed only "as representatives of nature as a whole." Beyond this blog, *Nope* has been briefly mentioned (but not directly analyzed) within analyses of race in Black Horror films, the impact of film scores on understandings of race in horror films and speculation of Afrofutures in Black Horror movies (Tartaglia 245; White 55; Guerrero 15). Outside the academy, the film has garnered primarily positive attention from reviewers and received "solid performance" at the box office (Sterritt). Reviewers have noted both the emphasis on race (present across many of Peele's films) and the criticism of "celebrity and spectacle" while other critics have noted its complexity and ambiguity, describing it as "Jordan Peele's least accessible movie" (Gilbey; Willmore 78;

Tesfaye). Ultimately, the main themes of the film have been widely noted but only briefly analyzed or discussed. More broadly, Peele's work, particularly *Get Out,* is well established in discussions of race. Most extensively, Kevin Wynter's *Critical Race Theory and Jordan Peele's Get Out* explores the field of critical race theory and Peele's film through each other, creating both a primer on the major themes of critical race theory and a detailed reading of the film (Wynter). In this reading, Wynter notes the genre confusion that surrounds *Get Out*, repeated now in *Nope*. In contrast to Booker and Daraiseh's reading of the genre multiplicities as an expression of postmodern aesthetics, Wynter attributes the genre blending to the struggle "to come to terms with how to integrate Black protagonism into an genre that has historically excluded Black narrative agency," a struggle that is similarly replicated in *Nope* (Wynter 82). Beyond a critique of the many forms of the spectacle in media societies, the illegible genre boundaries of Peele's films emerge in the effort to portray racialized bodies as agents with full humanity in a space that typically precludes their entry.

Through its explicit focus on the concept of the spectacle and animality, *Nope* calls upon a long history of exploitative image creation. In my reading, I deliberately situate *Nope* in conversation within the broad history of racialized and animalized bodies as a mechanism for establishing "humanity" through exhibition. Operating within this history, Peele's film deliberately rejects the replication of violence for the "White Gaze", instead subversively and tangentially gesturing toward the use of Black bodies for entertainment, following contemporary trends for Black Horror projects (Bethea and Negra 94). The incorporation of bodies, particularly non-white bodies, into spectacles for observation has a long tradition in both colonial history and mass culture, often through "human zoos" in which human beings were displayed simultaneously as curiosities and tools for developing colonialist knowledge (Blanchard et al. 1).

Developing into the tradition of the "freak show," these displays operated as mechanisms of white domination through "scientific inquiry," creating a visual catalogue of aberrant forms against which norms of white humanity could be formed (Reiss 77). This process was made even more expedient through the use of photography as "a tool for reproduction" in which "images become ideal vehicles for a process of popularization" (Deroo 125). In this process, human bodies, particularly racialized bodies, are iteratively (re)presented as objects for the creation of whiteness and the benefits of Western scientific inquiry. As Zakiyyahh Iman Jackson argues, *"black peoples' fungibility with objects* is a primary function of blackness in "the world (in the making of "the" world)" (112 emphasis in original). The history of traveling circuses and human zoos as sites of spectacle echoes throughout *Nope*, particularly in the prominence of "Jupiter's Claim", a family wild-west theme park, and Haywood's Hollywood Horses, a training facility for equine actors. Both locations share a cultural lineage of performativity, presenting the actors within them as participants in the intentional creations of spectacles. However, Peele's engagement with this history of spectacle intentionally avoids placing human characters back into the cage for observation. Instead, the role of exploited source for spectacle is occupied by the nonhuman characters. The presence of spectacular nonhuman bodies in *Nope* (in the form of chimpanzees, horses, insects, and aliens) and their relationships with nonwhite bodies, seek to question the treatment of all beings within the exploitative process of Hollywood filming, while firmly situating Black bodies as human bodies. In this way, Peele follows in the tradition of other black authors and artists who have "cultivated a poetics of persistence and interspecies empathy" (Bennett 5). Peele seeks to avoid the use of blackness in defining humanity, while still drawing lines of comparison between humans and nonhumans (Jackson). All beings are threatened by the pursuit of a spectacle as a basic form of (self)exploitation.

The specter of exploitation similarly hovers over the history of Black people's treatment in horror films, in which they are often portrayed as antagonistic bogeymen or expendable characters (Coleman 6–7). In contrast to the history of main-stream horror films, Robin R. Means Coleman establishes an additionally history of "Black Horror Films", which "have an added narrative focus that calls attention to racial identity" and include black people as active and guiding members of the film's creation (7). Overall, Coleman argues Black Horror displays a long history of "resiliency" through participation. Beyond merely contributing cultural capital that is utilized, appropriated or commodified by the film process, black people actively reshape, reject, and influence representation of black bodies in horror films (Coleman 199). Peele's work clearly continues this tradition of Black Horror Films. Interpreting *Get Out*'s relationship to power and exploitation, Kimberly Nichele Brown asserts "Peele takes auteurist license to challenge the power Hollywood asserts over the representation and spectatorship of blacks, particularly black men, by offering a filmic treatise on the precarity of black male existence as demonstrative of slavery's afterlife" (108). Although not present in the "*Gordy's Home* incident," *Nope*, in typical Peele fashion, confronts the ways in which black men's position is dependent upon their participation in systems of exploitation. Through these systems, their labor is dependent upon their ability to perform as expected. Peele showcases this requirement as OJ Haywood, the primary protagonist and horse trainer, loses a vital job partially due to his inability to embody friendly and authoritative on-set persona (*Nope* 0.08.00). In addition, these exploitative systems render their labor invisible, noticeable from *Nope*'s fictionalization of the first moments of film history. Used as repeated visual motif in the film, the first moving picture "The Horse in Motion" depicts a horse and an unremembered black jockey, narratively described to be Haywood's ancestor. With ancestors forgotten to history, Haywood now seeks to protect

his family legacy and keep the family ranch, a task only achievable for him through participation in the exploitative Hollywood industry.

**Animalistic and Artistic Gazes**

While the system of image production treats living beings, both human and nonhuman as objects to be consumed and reproduced, the multiplicity of gazes in *Nope* provides a force for resistance against the totality of the camera's gaze. Ultimately, the process of image production is generated by the concept of the gaze – and the deliberate fixation of a specific perspective as the narrative gaze. Through the incorporation of nonhuman beings into the struggle over representation, *Nope* enters into a larger discussion about the limits of human understanding of other beings, which I engage in the context of Derrida's formulations of nonhuman gazes in "The Animal That Therefore I Am". As the chimpanzee's eyes meet the viewers through the camera, the image apparatus creates a facsimile of recognition for the audience (and, potentially a real instance of recognition in the film studio). In the context of this horrific scene, the chimpanzee's gaze ultimately provides a glimpse of Derrida's "abyssal limit of the human" (12). In addition to the graphic brutality of blood and injuries, the "*Gordy's Home* incident" draws emotional resonance through the recognition of a completely incomprehensible perspective, echoing Derrida's meditations on the experience of recognizing the gaze of another being. More so than the thought that the chimpanzee may progress toward the viewer and bring with him continuing violence, the recognition of a vastly unknown consciousness, that cannot be understood or fully predicted, is unsettling. Beyond physical threats, this occasion unsettles the position of humans as the creators of an image, disrupting the supposed supremacy of humanity. In addition to the "*Gordy's Home* incident", nonhuman beings display unique points of view through their

interactions with the systems of image production throughout *Nope*. In tandem with my analysis of the way multispecies gazes reproduce and disrupt spectacle, I look toward Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" to inform my understanding of the different formulations of the spectacle. In this article theorizing about the current and future work of art as it is shaped by and utilizes new technological forms, Benjamin attempts to recontextualize the value of art in a technological reality in which photography and film can copy almost all elements of an artwork exactly. Benjamin locates the difference between original and reproduction in "the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place" (Benjamin 253). Referring to both its physical relationships to the circumstances of its creation and the cultural and social connection it holds to individuals and society, this quality confers authenticity to a piece of art.[5] Through the disruption and corruption of these connections, the distancing of an art from the origins of its authenticity, the artwork can be transformed into a consumable spectacle; however, to retain its value, the image must retain the patina of authenticity, even as it is repurposes as a spectacle of exploitation. Benjamin's concerns about the authenticity of art also reflect Peele's preoccupation with the "parasitic nature of cultural appropriation" (Brown 108). Cultural appropriation deliberately removes an artwork from its here and now, distancing it from its relationships and using it as a disconnected element to produce capital and spectacle. Within the current processes of technological reproduction, film exists as a vessel to produce an image deliberately disconnected from its sense of here and now, participating in artifice even as it seeks a sense of authenticity.

[5] Although, as we shall see, locating the "unique existence in a particular place" is also disrupted through particularly technologically reproduceable forms of art. Through the invention of digital tools such as PhotoShop, the authentic relationship to a place becomes even more tenuous, demanding more authentication of authenticity.

Within Benjamin's view, the very "shooting of a film … offers a hitherto unimaginable spectacle" (Benjamin 263). Film, as a medium, is detailed as the ultimate extension of modes of reproduction, capturing and reproducing images with both incredible accuracy and increased distance and mediation through the film apparatus. It is not just the film itself (and the images therewithin) that are a spectacle, but its production and creation. Through the film lens, "*Gordy's Home"* was a spectacle far before the incident, as it created a commodifiable image out of signs and symbols, alienating both the viewer and the actor from reality. Through the process of filming, "*the apparatus has penetrated so deeply into reality that a pure view of that reality, free from the foreign body of equipment, is the result of a special procedure, namely the shooting by the specially adjusted photographic device and the assembly of that shot with others of the same kind"* (Benjamin 263, emphasis in original). In an extension of the disjunction between the chimpanzee and his surroundings, the film set and its apparatus creates its images through the disruption and reconceptualization of reality. The sitcom set, with its false walls, bright lights and camera's bolsters the juxtaposition between reality and fiction. That in itself is a spectacle, with an audience cued for applause and laughter to view it.

In addition to the disjunction between the sitcom set and the sitcom as aired, the chimpanzee's image and body is used as a tool to create the spectacle. Gordy[6], the chimpanzee, is dressed as a human and placed in the disjointed spectacle of a human birthday party, fully subsumed by the cultural imagination of the human. The act of dressing Gordy as a human positions him as a border figure between the imagined dichotomies of nature and culture, a position that is often at work in creature features, working both to separate the image of "man"

[6] While, for brevity, I will refer to the chimpanzee as Gordy from this point on, it is not entirely accurate. While within the fictional sitcom, the character is known as Gordy, from the perspective of the characters in *Nope,* he is only one of the chimpanzees who played Gordy, and is otherwise unnamed.

from “nature” and “entertaining the fear that humans are a part of the nature they destroy” (Alaimo, “Discomforting Creatures” 280). Positioned as a semi-human figure within the sitcom, Gordy crosses between the positions of human and animal yet ultimately reinforces the separation through his differences. Despite his clothing, there is no question that he is a chimpanzee. The act of dressing a chimpanzee in human clothing points toward a more expansive expectation of participation in human social cues and roles. As Derrida describes, “the property unique to animals, what in the last instance distinguishes them from man, is their being naked without knowing it” (4). What, therefore, is to be made of a clothed animal? Clothing fails to hold the same signifying power for a chimpanzee as for a human, for whom it is biblically connected to the “consciousness of good and evil” (Derrida 5). Yet Gordy is not imbued with sudden human moral understanding, which is made apparent through his eventual eruption. Instead, the clothing further emphasizes the division between the chimpanzee and the human costume he wears. However, despite the reification of the human-animal divide, Gordy is also expected to engage according to human standards of behavior, disregarding chimpanzee social conventions[7]. Gordy’s treatment by the other actors and his handlers, while not shown as abusive, is entirely centered within human needs and understandings, motivated by the drive for profit through the use of Gordy’s image as a commodity. In addition, the human expectations reveal a “longing for a peaceful naturalistic nature” that ultimately does not exist (Uddin 205). Through this vision of the natural world, the television producers expect a peaceful interaction though which they can shape Gordy’s image. The circus spectacle is created through deliberate control of Gordy, (re)shaping human definitions of animality. However, this spectacle cannot

[7] See Barbara Smut’s “Encounters with Animal Minds” for a discussion of the importance and value of cognizant recognition of primate social conventions (Smuts).

survive its own creation. The film apparatus facilitating the creation of the circus-spectacle intrudes upon the image. The balloons Gordy is given in his birthday float up too high, popping as they encounter the bright filming lights. The chimpanzee erupts, no longer constrained and guided by the carefully designed image. Instead, he bursts forth violently, devolving into the spectacle of a massacre (*Nope* 0.59.00). As the chimpanzee rebels, spurred by the accidental and errant popping of balloons, he violently disrupts the carefully crafted image he is within. The audience, staff and actors flee, leaving those who cannot escape: the child actors. This spectacle of violence reverses the circus-spectacle, exchanging the human for the animals as the one "casting abominable filth" and transforming the other into a spectacle.

In contrast to the actual events of the "*Gordy's Home* incident", Ricky "Jupe" Park reinterprets the occasion back into the spectacle of Hollywood consumerism. Instead of a traumatic event from his childhood, which the incident certainly was, Jupe creates a hidden museum of memorabilia to impress guests within his office at the Western theme park. In his brief description of the event, Jupe states "Boom. One of the chimps that plays Gordy just, just hit his limit. And it was 6 minutes and 13 seconds of havoc. Network tried to bury it, but it was a spectacle" (*Nope* 0.19.47). Jupe's recollection rejects the agency of "Gordy" as an individual animal. "Gordy" is now unnamed – one of many chimpanzees without recognition. In addition, Jupe rejects both the spectacle of the sitcom and the agency of the chimpanzee in creating the new spectacle. Instead of the film apparatus and the sitcom itself, Jupe interprets the violent event as a spectacle, even as he approaches it with a carefully crafted cavalier attitude. However, when asked to recount his memory and experiences of the event, Jupe is unable to do so directly, only pointing toward the SNL comedy recreation of the incident, an intentional representation that only emerges through the human gaze. As he describes it, "they pretty much nailed it better

than I could … Bit goes like this. Everyone's trying to celebrate Gordy's birthday, but every time Gordy hears something about the jungle, Gordy – [Chris] Kattan – goes off. … He is killing it on that stage" (*Nope* 0.21.00). In a replication of the process of creating the circus-spectacle of the sitcom, Jupe channels the actions of the chimpanzee into a form that maintains control over the intrusion of nonhuman rebellious elements. In comparison to the traumatic and violence of the actual events, the SNL skit description exists as a more palatable and easily interpreted version of events, reducing the uncontrollable and unknowable animal mind to a "bit", hiding from the reality of the "infinite space" separating all species (Derrida 34). Despite the denial present in his description, hints of reality slip into Jupe's description through phrases with multiple meanings.[8] While he describes Chris Kattan to be "killing it" on the stage, presumably referring to gaining a wildly positive audience reaction, this could also be a hint toward Gordy's actual violence against his co-star, Mary Jo Elliot.[9] In a clear reinterpretation of the sources of the spectacle, the SNL depiction reverses the intruding factor that precipitates the violent event. Instead of the film apparatus intruding in the form of hot lights popping the balloons triggering the chimpanzee's rage, Gordy is angered by the reintroduction of the natural world – mentions of the jungle. Responsibility for the violence is offloaded to the natural world, away from the pressures of the controlling apparatus of spectacle-creation. This vision of the incident reframes

[8] An additional instance of possible double-speak occurs in this scene with the line "That's the first exploding fist bump", which Jupe says while gesturing to a large print of young Jupe fist-bumping a chimpanzee (Peele, 0.19.16). While this could refer to an unseen innocent "exploding fist-bump", it could also refer to the final moments of Gordy's life. At the close of the *Gordy's Home* incident, after Gordy has beat Mary Jo Elliot and destroyed most of the set, he approaches the young Jupe hiding underneath the dining room table, in a continuation of the eye-contact from the first scene. Approaching his co-star, Gordy reaches his closed fist out for a fist bump. Just as Jupe connect the fist bump, Gordy is shot through the head, leading to an explosion of blood (and presumably other matter) into Jupe's face. The first "exploding" fist bump, indeed.

[9] Although, it is later revealed that Mary Jo Elliot did not die in the *Gordy's Home* incident and was only disfigured and heavily injured, it is likely that young Jupe would have thought she was dead or dying from her still, injured form.

the natural world as a general threat, beyond the threat of the chimpanzee himself, painting nature itself as a "monstrous" force (Alaimo, "Discomforting Creatures"). However, Peele questions this reimagined dynamic between human cultural productions and nonhuman beings, both through interrupting Jupe's interpretation with violent shots of the incident, and through the major narrative arch of the film, which soundly punishes Jupe's approach to nonhuman beings as foolish.

**Unidentified Flying Objects/Organisms (UFOs) Inspiring Spectacle**

The scenes discussed thus far, namely those addressing *Gordy's Home,* exist as a nearly self-contained image displayed in juxtaposition to the rest of the narrative, comprising of only ten and a half minutes in a 2 hour and 10-minute film. Outside of the ill-fated sitcom filming studio, *Nope* defies standard genre definitions, exhibiting traits of a thriller, a western, and a science fiction film.[10] The film follows the Haywood family, owners of Haywood's Hollywood Horses, as their farm is besieged by an unseen and unknown flying object. After Otis Sr is mysteriously killed by the UFO, his children, OJ and Em, struggle to maintain the family business training horses for film and television. The physical position of the Haywood siblings disrupts typically narratives of black life, in which "black people's lives in relation to their environment [are] rendered invisible", isolating representations to urban spaces (Finney 78). Instead, the Haywoods are rural landowners, who fight to retain their home. Tormented by the

[10] While I later discuss the film's clear connections to horror and creature feature films, drawing the lines between the thriller and the science fiction film, I do not deeply address its Western influences. Much of its western influence is found not in the themes of the film, but in the landscape and the presence of horses. In many ways, it resists and critiques the tropes of the western through the depictions of the Jupiter's Claim theme park. In particular, the film retains its connection to urban spaces, even as it embraces the isolated rural ranch and rejects the narrative of rugged individualism.

UFO, which appears to be abducting horses, the siblings set their sights on capturing an image of it to monetize. This task quickly appears easier said than done as the UFO disguises itself as a cloud and disrupts all electronic equipment in its vicinity. Through encounters with the UFO, the siblings realize it is not a ship as they first imagined, but rather an alien creature that only looks like the archetypical flying saucer. Concurrently, Ricky "Jupe" Park, the owner of a neighboring western theme park and former child star of "Gordy's Home", seeks to transform the UFO into an entertainment show for his own profit, providing the creature with horses to eat. Attacking the theme park and eating the guests, the creature resists the control of the to-be image maker. Back on the farm, the Haywood siblings, Frye's tech salesman Angel and videographer Antlers Holst craft a plan to immortalize the creature on film. Forced from hiding, the creature confronts the group with its own spectacle of image, while still resisting the reproduction of its image through photography.

Through its deep discussion of the stakes of spectacle creation, *Nope* clearly draws upon the tension between those creating the circus-spectacle and those who are used within it, particularly nonhuman beings who do not willfully participate. In drawing out this tension, Peele calls upon the horror sub-genre of the creature feature which "feature[s] nonhuman creatures at odds with humanity" (Barclay and Tidwell 269). While these films can be generally understood as ultimately vilifying nature and unsettling work to move past delineations between nature and humanity by portraying their similarities as horrific (Alaimo, "Discomforting Creatures" 280), Barclay and Tidwell "argue that creature features provide a space for considering environmental issues … often lead[ing] viewers to identify or empathize with the creatures and against the human making bad decisions" (270). In a typically Peele fashion, *Nope* both participates within and subverts this genre dynamic. Peele creates sympathetic and understandable protagonists for

his films, even as they make misguided choices. Jupe, following his exposure to the dangers of implicating nonhumans in spectacles, is arguably the least sympathetic character. When confronted with a UFO that sucks horses into, he attempts to use the being in his money-making ventures at Jupiter's Claim, the western theme park. Purchasing OJ's horses with the promise of buy-back possibilities, Jupe instead feeds the horses to the UFO every Friday afternoon in a live show, complete with showmanship, soundtrack, dancing children in alien costumes and snacks for the audience (*Nope* 1.05.00). Dressed in a red western-style suit with a bejeweled embroidered UFO on the back, Jupe seeks to sell an experience of "an absolute spectacle" through a tenuous relationship of control over the UFO (*Nope* 1.06.56). Due to the creature's disruption of all electronic devices, the alien escapes from most instances of technological reproduction, resisting the new relationships of perception Benjamin describes. However, in this current mode of perception, the characters fail to find other ways of engaging with the image. In reaction to the UFO's technological impermeability, Jupe seeks to create a reproducible theme park experience which can then be sold into the capitalist consumption of images repeatedly, as guests visit every week. Jupe seeks to emulate this era's mode of artistic relation, mirroring Benjamin's assertion that "*replicating the work many times over, its substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence"* (254, emphasis in original). Even the necessarily unique experiences are made into a mass existence through repetition. However, after imbibing a non-organic horse statue that disrupts its digestion, the alien breaks script and instead devours the entire cast, crew, and audience of the live show, leaving only Lucky, OJ's aptly named horse, alive. Despite Jupe's previous experience with unpredictable animal stars, the theme park owner seems willfully ignorant of the dangers of his actions engaging with the creature. Jupe's willingness to sacrifice

the horses and his general salesman demeanor places him as a foil to the sympathetic figures of OJ and Em.

In opposition to Jupe, OJ seeks to produce the spectacle of the alien in an act of desperation to save the ranch. Under the influence of his fame-seeking sister, Em, OJ pursues the same capitalistic sale of spectacle as Jupe as a much more relatable figure, as an underdog. In addition, OJ approaches his encounters with the creature through a different mode of relation. As he puts it, "We're not the reason it settled down here. That was Jupe. He got caught up trying to tame a predator. You can't do that. You got to enter an agreement with one" (*Nope* 1.30.45). OJ does not hold the illusion of domestication with the alien being; however, his conceptual understanding of his relationship with the alien is similarly contested. The Haywood's efforts to "enter an agreement" with the alien are initiated by the act of naming it "Jean Jacket". This name is representative of the Haywood's attempts to conquer Jean Jacket, both from the name's origin[11] and from the act of naming itself. As Derrida describes, the act of naming, both biblically and conceptually, is an act of powerful imposition, fixing the definition and identity of the other into place (16, 32). Suitably, the moment of naming marks a turning point within the film, in which the Haywoods move from hunted to hunters. While they have sought to capture Jean Jacket on film throughout, success only occurs after naming the creature, defining it to their will, even as it maintains their inability to understand or predict Jean Jacket. In suitable contrast to Jupe, OJ and Em survive their encounters with the creature, despite seeking to create a spectacle. In the creation of the spectacle, the nonhuman beings in this film become dangerous through their interactions with humans, instead of through any deliberate action or agenda of

[11] The name Jean Jacket follows from OJ and Em's childhood, after the horse Em was supposed to train as her first horse. Instead, her father and OJ trained Jean Jacket for use in a Hollywood film. Em never trained her first horse.

their own. As in discussions of eco-horror, "'villainy' is a product of transformation" (Murray and Heumann 21). While Murray and Heumann describe this dynamic through the tropes of "genetic alternation or chemical or nuclear environmental disasters", I would argue that this same site of transformation occurs in the creation of the image of spectacle (21). In the creation of the spectacle as a commodity, the animals are shaped and changed by their exposure to the apparatus of film and react through violence, disrupting the recursive Debordian spectacle through their (assumed) lack of engagement as a spectator. In addition to the chimpanzee in *Gordy's Home* reacting to the balloons popping in exposure to film lights, Lucky, one of Haywood's horses, has a similar reaction to the filming apparatus. While preparing to film a commercial, Lucky reacts poorly to a reflective metal ball being placed before his eyes and kicks a makeup artist standing behind him (*Nope* 0.12.48). Similarly, Jean Jacket becomes a threat through Jupe's attempts to tame it, which causes it to view the valley as its territory. Each of these encounters is situated through the perceptions of the individual animals, emphasizing their distinctive perspectives. Through the ill-begotten encounters with humans, the creature is transformed into a simultaneously sympathetic and antagonistic figure.

**Theatricality of the Impossible Shot**

Narratively, the plot of the film is driven by the desire to capture and reproduce the fleeting image of Jean Jacket. However, this goal is made nearly impossible by Jean Jacket themselves. Returning to a time before Benjamin's so-called age of technological reproducibility and resisting the taxonomizing gaze of the human, the UFO rejects and neutralizes all electronic technology, deadening cameras, cell phones, vehicles, and lights alike. This ability appears to be and extreme type of camouflage. In addition to evading capture by digital camera, the creature

disguises itself among the clouds, rendering it effectively unseeable. Its cloud disguise is finally revealed through a time-lapse video that reveals one cloud standing still as the rest of the clouds blow past it over the course of the day (*Nope* 0.56.19). OJ, Em and Angel are able to capture this image, taken from a distance, but it is not sufficient for their goals. Essentially, the challenge the UFO presents toward film is the same challenge that Benjamin identifies within film and photography as a genre. As the image is reproduced, it is separated from its source of authenticity—its "here and now" (Benjamin 253). The value in an image of a UFO is its authenticity, such that it stands in as proof of the existence of extraterrestrial life. Without authenticity, the image does not retain its value. Yet how can an infinitely reproducible image retain its authenticity, particularly in the era of special effects and photoshop? The Haywoods and their team must confront this question and strive to capture the impossible shot: "undeniable, singular—the Oprah shot" (*Nope* 0.32.18). To be an "Oprah shot", they must capture an image that is simultaneously technologically reproducible (and therefore able to be shown on Oprah) and singular. The image of the cloud is not this shot: "It's good but it ain't Oprah" (*Nope* 0.57.19).

In detailing the saga of pursuit of an impossible image—singular, utterly authentic and yet infinitely reproducible and sharable—*Nope* additionally participates in the creation of its own singular, sharable image. In its creation of this image, *Nope* incorporates thematic elements of the horror genre, particularly those of theatricality. As described by Loiselle, "horror resides in *the excessive display of aberrance* that clashes audiovisually with the generic signs of normality that comprise most of the story" (5). Ultimately, horror relies upon the inherent "artificiality of representation" as the impetus for its most iconic scenes and expressions (Loiselle 6). The composition of affective horror through artifice is apparent in repeated scenes of the film. In the

*Gordy's Home* scenes, which are arguably the most realistic horrific events within the film, artifice still seeps into the scene. Beyond the inherent artifice of a sitcom film studio, throughout the incident one of Mary Jo Elliot's shoes stands up on end, precariously still and almost suspended in space. The shoe's stillness (and the sense that at any moment it may come crashing down and set off a new chain of violent events) increases the tension and fear within this scene beyond that of observing an act of violence. The sense of anticipation, never resolved or realized, creates the scene's affective quality as the viewer observes a horrific event and yet continues to wait for the other shoe to drop.

Beyond *Gordy's Home*, the theatricality of the events within *Nope* composes the film itself into a spectacle through the juxtaposition of artifice and realism. After the creature eats the audience at the theme park, it returns to the ranch house, asserting its control over its territory. As it slowly digests and crushes the people within it, their screams are heard by Em and Angel within the house. Yet the vivid and theatrical scene of horror occurs as it purges itself of the non-organic matter it had eaten, embedding keys into the front porch, depositing a wheelchair on the roof and drenching the house in blood.[12] As a storm rages outside, the creature blocks the rain from the house and replaces it with the blood of those it has eaten. This scene, with blood streaking down the windows is easily identifiable within the horror genre. It is, itself, a spectacle, created by the juxtaposition of realism and artifice in the presence of an alien monster. Additionally, it plays upon present fears of the Anthropocene – driven by the realization that human-made objects persist and shape the environment in unexpected ways. Human-created objects are devoured by Jean Jacket, harming it, and are turned back upon the humans as harmful

[12] In this scene, the cause for Otis Sr.'s death is fully illuminated. Struck by a high-velocity quarter in his eye, Otis Sr. is the first human victim of Jean Jacket, but the means of his death remain elusive for much of the first half of the film.

objects. As Alaimo explores through oceanic pathways, "there is something uncanny about ordinary human objects becoming the stuff of horror and destruction" (*Exposed* 130). While this dynamic occurs constantly for nonhuman beings encountering the ever-present masses of plastics, rarely is it so visibly and violently turned back upon humans themselves. The relationship between artifice and realism persists in the final showdown with the creature, resulting in a spectacle of images simultaneously fantastic and humorous in the tension between the theatrical and the realistic.

The UFO's camouflage and disruption of recording equipment appears to be linked to a larger desire to be unseen. Onto-epistemologically, the physical conditions of Jean Jacket's relation to the world deliberately disrupts human abilities to learn about or understand it. It resists relationality and refuses the gaze of those who seek to see it. Despite these challenges, OJ connects its actions to its hunting patterns, remarking, "I don't think it eats you if you don't look it in the eye" (*Nope* 1.27.38).[13] Unfortunately, not looking Jean Jacket in the eye is easier said than done because the creature does not have an identifiable ocular organ. How do you avoid the eyes of something without eyes? For OJ, you refrain from looking directly at it at all. In their later attempts to draw out and corral the creature for reproduction by a non-electric camera, strategically looking at it, or giving it the impression of being looked at by false eyes grants the team the ability to both direct and evade the creature (*Nope* 1.46.03). OJ strategically looks down and away from Jean Jacket to dissuade it from targeting him. Alternatively, to lure the creature into the eye of the non-electronic camera, OJ places false eyes on the back of his hoodie, which

[13] The creature's preference for only eating things that look at it may indicate that it is an obligate carnivore. It cannot digest non-organic matter and it does not ingest plant matter intentionally. The attention toward eyes may be an adaptive mechanism to pursue only suitable prey.

fool the creatures (unknown) sight.[14] Ironically, Jean Jacket's protections against being seen ultimately enable the Haywood team to locate it. In anticipation of its electronic dampening field, the Haywoods, Antlers, and Angel steal car batteries and car dealership air dancers. They place the multicolored air dancers, powered independently by the car batteries in a grid across the valley. As Jean Jacket flies over the valley, the deflated air dancers indicate its presence. The air dancers additionally contribute to the film's theatricality of dissonance in these final scenes. In combination with the mid-afternoon sunny day, videographer's camouflage tent, the pictorial landscape, the remnants of blood still staining the ranch house, the serious face of OJ on Lucky, riding in full western tack and split reins, and the boisterous soundtrack of "Exuma, the Obeah Man" by Exuma,[15] the air dancers further emphasize a sense of dissonance, both in the composition of the scene and its resistance against standard thriller or horror tropes. Instead of chased and hunted in the dark by the creature, these protagonists make their stand in broad daylight, using incongruous tools.

The resulting image has an almost humorous affect, created through the aesthetic disjunction between the forms of the alien and the tools they use to capture it on camera. Even

[14] This is particularly interesting because it shows that the UFO's understanding of sight is similar to our own, which is not a guarantee for an extra-terrestrial life form. Jean Jacket is fooled by the false eyes on OJ's hoodie, meaning that it reacts based upon its own perception of the eyes (perceived by an ocular apparatus unrecognized by our anatomical understanding), not based upon an alternative sense like telepathy, in which it would perceive itself being viewed in the minds of others. This ocular dynamic is echoed in Jean Jacket's interactions with cameras. While Jean Jacket disrupts electronic recording equipment, it does so indiscriminately from other electronic equipment. However, this assertion (that the UFO does not react to specific cameras) is mediated an earlier encounter, in which one camera was close enough to Jean Jacket to "go down" while the other was blocked by an out-of-season praying mantis. Given that several horses run toward Jean Jacket when it feeds (Lucky is the exception), it seems likely that Jean Jacket may have some influence over animals and their actions, even, perhaps, a praying mantis. If the praying mantis is not an unfortunate coincidence blocking the shot, it indicates that Jean Jacket is aware of specific cameras and acts to block them. Regardless, Jean Jacket does not seem able to perceive a non-electric camera, or perceives cameras through an ocular function, instead of an alternative, alien sense.

[15] This song, written and performed by a black Bahamian artist, who regularly sings about the black experience in diaspora, calls for compensation for the generations of slavery (Strachan 55).

among their tools, there is an aesthetic divide. Antlers Holst's mechanical film camera, while being specially designed for this purpose, feels antique, using a hand crank and requiring the use of a mobile darkroom to change film when the roll is expended. The image of the old-fashioned mechanical camera establishes a relationship with "the desire that cinematography inaugurated … of allowing reality to "speak for itself"" (Cowie 1). Prohibiting extensive editing through technological difficulty, early documentary films seek to combine unassailable reality with the pleasure of spectacle, deriving a sense of spectacle through the revelation of hidden reality (Cowie 14). In opposition to the lofty aesthetic of documentary, the rainbow of air dancers, liberated from their usual spaced alongside the highway, cannot be separated from their modern origins and capitalist aesthetic. The disjunction between the alien and the air dancers is even more stark. Just as Loiselle describes in horror, the affective response of awe toward the finally revealed UFO[16] draws strength from its juxtaposition with the mundane (and humorous) image of the air dancers. The full underside of the creature is revealed, rippling with clearly organic flesh, as it flies onto its side to avoid the streamers OJ releases from his saddlebag, streamers which had previously disrupted its digestive systems (*Nope* 1.47.25). Its massive size is revealed by Lucky and OJ's comparatively miniscule forms (*Nope* 1.47.29). All of these elements serve to present the creature in a sublime light, the recognition "that some natural" (or extraterrestrial) "phenomena will simply always lie beyond the compass of human reason, regardless of scientific progress" (Heymans 34). The resulting image emphasizes its alien form and the relative futility of human pursuits. Even if OJ and Em are able to sell the footage of the UFO, how will they

[16] Up until this point in the film, the UFO has been primarily obscured from the shot, either by clouds, darkness, or camera angles. This moment, when the in-narrative camera finally captures it, the UFO comes into full view of the film's camera as well.

keep their ranch if the UFO still claims it as its hunting ground? And yet, they continue to pursue this image of sublimity as their only salvation.

Heymans reinterprets Kant's sublime through the pursuits of eco-horror, establishing a notion of an ecological sublime, which "requires a reconciliation between humanity and animality … combining as it does a humbling awareness of the animal's independent existence with an exhilarating recognition of biological interdependence" (Heymans 26). This concept of an ecological sublime requires a shifted mindset, one that OJ has already demonstrated. OJ draws a distinction between taming an animal and entering an agreement with one. Entering an agreement calls upon a larger acknowledgment of the dangers of engaging with this animal, and requires a more intentional interaction. Drawing upon his knowledge of Jean Jacket, OJ does not attempt to garner good will by feeding it, as Jupe did, but instead uses his previous encounters with it against it, through the use of the false eyes and the streamer. Even though the creature is likely extraterrestrial, it still stands in biological interdependence with the inhabitants of the valley, a relationship which OJ acknowledges. Yet this agreement is futile – ultimately destroyed in the documentation of an alien spectacle. While OJ may have the view to experience an ecological sublime, his efforts to capture this image ensure that it will not continue.

In addition to OJ's "agreement" with the creature, the creation of spectacle in this scene is distinctly different from that in *Gordy's Home*. While the film apparatus of *Gordy's Home* seeks to produce the distinctive circus-spectacle, characterized by its dissonant forms and careful control over the animal beings within, the Haywoods seek a different spectacle. Unconcerned with the aesthetic nature of their image, the Haywoods pursue authenticity, proof of alien life that they can sell. Unintentionally, the goals of their pursuit of the image of spectacle align with the disrupting spectacle, occurring as the animal bursts forth, coming out of control. While it

appears that they have gotten the footage they need from the alien from their contrived scene, creating a circus-spectacle, the alien is not done with them—and neither is Antlers. Antlers is obsessed with the aesthetic image, stating that "the light is gonna be magic soon". He is insistent on pursuing the impossible image. While the entire endeavor fails to respect the creature's needs or wishes, Antler's insistence upon crafting the creature's representation through his vision escalates the act of filming to a confrontation. Running up onto the hill with his mechanical video camera and drawing Jean Jacket's attention, Antlers is eaten, filming all the while he is sucked into the maw. The UFO goes upon a final attack, seeking to eat each of the remaining people. Upon the failure of this final attack toward OJ, Em, and Angel, Jean Jacket transforms in the background, revealing a dynamic new form. No longer constrained as a stereotypically grey flying saucer, Jean Jacket unfolds into a white form with an open hot-air balloon like top and multiple floating tendrils, waving in the wind.[17] The circus-spectacle is shattered, and the spectacle of rebellion emerges. However, in distinction against *Gordy's Home*, OJ and Em do not need the circus-spectacle, but any spectacle. Returning to the western theme park, luring the creature on an electric bike, Em captures the final image, at the cost of the creature's life. Knowing the creature's attraction to beings looking at it, Em releases a giant balloon statue of Jupe above an old-fashioned film camera within a false well. Jean Jacket takes the bait, and, still image by still image, Em immortalizes the final moments of the creature, finally capturing "the Oprah shot" (*Nope* 2.00.54). Attempting to digest the giant balloon, the creature pops, the lights and soundtrack of the western theme park returning as the electrical disruption field dissipates upon the creature's death.

[17] In form, the creature now calls to mind the image of Georgia O'Keeffe's pelvis series, particularly Pelvis with the Distance, 1943 and Pelvis with the Moon, 1943. These paintings display the abstract form of a bone pelvis, floating against the blue sky.

**Posthumanist Becoming through Aerial Tentacles**

Previously insular and contained, in its last moments Jean Jacket emerges as a tentacular form, reaching outward and forging new connections. As Kelsi Rutledge, scientific coordinator on *Nope* describes, Jean Jacket[18] is an airborne cephalopod, inspired by physical features of cuttlefish, sea urchins and octopi (Miller). In posthumanist thinking, tentacular creatures provide unique opportunities for thinking through the myriad connections between beings. As Haraway describes, "they weave paths and consequences but not determinisms" (31). Jean Jacket represents both new possibilities and fatal danger for the humans that encounter it, yet the results are not pre-determined. Additionally, Jean Jacket is markedly vaguely defined in its own depiction, making it difficult to determine the most basic features of its being. The extraterrestrial origins of this creature are never confirmed, leaving its origin and "natural" ecological entanglements undefined. It may be of Earth origin, but adeptly evaded scientific recognition[19] alongside many deep sea creatures, dwelling in the so-called " "azoic," or devoid of life" zones of the "bathyl, abyssl, and hadal" (Alaimo, "Violet-Black" 233). Extraterrestrial[20] or cloud dwelling, Jean Jacket's existence brings radical life to another region often conceptualized as empty space for the projection of human goals and dreams: the sky. Just as the depths of the ocean were thought to be lifeless, the atmosphere is often situated as ancillary to other

[18] Jean Jacket is taxonomized by the scientific consultant as *"Occculonimbus edoequus,"* creating a new phylum in the animal kingdom: "*Nubaria,* which means 'of the clouds'" (Miller).

[19] Although it have been otherwise encountered over time, leading to rumors of UFOs present both in *Nope* and our own world.

[20] It seems somewhat unlikely that the UFO would actually have an extraterrestrial origin. It appears to be biologically similar to fleshy invertebrate and is killed by an explosion of pressure within it. Additionally, it hunts by sucking in air. Based upon all of these factors, it seems unlikely to survive the vacuum of space, leading to the conclusion that it is either from our planet or received technological transport here.

ecosystems. While all terrestrial creatures depend upon it, they do so from a clear relationship with the ground, with all creatures returning to the Earth despite their forays into the sky. Following from this understanding, the sky has been conceptually enveloped into the structures of capitalism and the imaginations of human-centric understanding, parceling and selling even the airwaves and attempting to define the blustery horizons of the atmosphere by terrestrial political boundaries. Jean Jacket, a (typically) nomadic being that lives in the clouds, disrupts this vision. Additionally, the creature's presence as a tentacled monster of the sky moves beyond Haraway's conception of "the chthonic ones [which] are precisely not sky gods … not friends to the Anthropocene or Capitalocene" (53). Jean Jacket represents a chthonic figure entering the space of "sky gods", populating and corrupting the empty space of the sky. While Jean Jacket lives and resists photographic representation, the sky is no longer a black space upon which to project the goals and proclivities of capitalism. Beyond a mere struggle for survival, the conflict between Jean Jacket and the Haywoods is a battle for the state of the sky: to either become a spectacle in service of capitalism or a space for living.

Despite these lofty symbolic goals, Jean Jacket falls in service of the spectacle, captured on film in a process that sacrifices its life. This conclusion echoes the typical plot of creature feature, in which the protagonists heroically escape the threat of the creature is eliminated (Alaimo, "Discomforting Creatures"). Em Haywood turns the creature's instincts against itself, launching a giant inflatable cartoon figure of Jupe. Confronted with the cartoon eyes watching it, Jean Jacket reveals his own "eye,"[21]a multi-layered bright green square inspired by octopuses' square pupils (Miller). Using the repetitive undulating movement of the streamer-like

[21] Although this "eye" organ cannot operate as a typical eye does because it was fully enclosed within the creature until its final form is revealed.

appendages on its eye to mesmerize its "prey," Jean Jacket devours the balloon triumphantly, only to be undone and torn apart by its last meal as it attempts to return to its disk-shaped form. While this ending is reassuring for the human characters of the film, I would argue that it is at best bittersweet, inducing a longing for the destroyed creature. Against a colorful sunset, Jean Jacket is rent apart, the remnants of its body drifting among the clouds, carried by the wind. The majestic and striking creature is thus destroyed, never to be witnessed again but in the film and photographic representations of the spectacle that destroyed it. While the film results in the death of the creature, it construction firmly reversed the "vertical semiotics" often found in creature features, which leave "humans free to float above the nature of the beast" as they escape (Alaimo, "Discomforting Creatures" 280). *Nope* does not allow this same dynamic to emerge; instead, the 'beast' exists perpetually above the humans, precluding any opportunity of escape into the California sky. Instead, they must face it from below. By inverting this relationship, *Nope* disrupts the semiotic associations of humanity as the uppermost species on a chain of hierarchy. Instead, the humans find themselves to be the positional (and thematic) underdogs, transfixed by the opportunity of the spectacle.

After capturing photographs of Jean Jacket's spectacular death at the theme park, Em herself is now made into a spectacle, as a crowd of reporters and press agents film her in the moment of her exhausted and broken triumph, cordoned behind police tape, situating her image within a familiar symbolic discourse of criminality and race. Once the antagonistic animal is removed from the text, the social dynamics of racialization and exploitation resume their presence in the character's life, as Em is now fungible as a object before the camera (Jackson). In the act of producing a spectacle, of creating a particular type of image, people and animals are enveloped within an apparatus of production. This apparatus, inevitably, consumes those within

it, particularly the non-humans. The spectacle, as thus critiqued and created, emerges both from the modes of production within film and from the "capitalist exploitation of film" which "obstructs the human [and nonhuman] being's legitimate claim to being reproduced" (Benjamin 262). This critique of the spectacle as a form of capitalist exploitation is necessarily qualified by medium of its delivery. Even as nonhuman beings emerge as sources of resistance to the Debordian spectacle, they are always enveloped within the culturally produced and commercially distributed film playing out before us.[22] Yet in Peele's presentation, it is not necessarily the production of the image that creates the violence of the spectacle, but the consumeristic, capitalist production of spectacle for sale. And yet, the form and structure of the art of film serves as the medium to critique this method of production. Even as it creates a spectacle of images—aliens, chimpanzees, air dancers, horses—*Nope* articulates a clear criticism of such spectacles, particularly in their treatment of nonhuman beings. As they are coerced and forced into the view of a camera, nonhuman and nonconsenting beings repeatedly express their resistance – through force, their only consistent mechanism. With nonhuman eyes gazing into the camera and making their own judgements, the spectacle is created, transformed, and inverted by Peele's critique of its own form.

[22] This struggle to escape representation as a source of commodification and therefore truly act in resistance to the society of the spectacle echoes Baudrillard's assertions that "the real is no longer possible" (Baudrillard 38). If the animals hold potential to escape the spectacle through their non-participation as spectators, does their complete envelopment within the film itself impede resistance to the spectacle?

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