BEYOND REPRESENTATION: CINEMATIC INTERTEXTUALITY AS AN AESTHETIC POLITICS OF RESISTANCE IN THE FILMS OF JORDAN PEELE

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INTRODUCTION

The opening credits to Jordan Peele's *Nope* (2022) conclude with a direct allusion to *The Horse in Motion* (Eadweard Muybridge, 1878), widely regarded as a landmark work for the development of filmmaking. This foundational reference—examined in detail later in this article—introduces a central theme of the film: the figure of the Black jockey, rendered invisible in film history, and his descendants. In this way, Peele questions the very logic of the cinematic archive: which images are canonised, which are rendered invisible, and how formal strategies may critically intervene in film history. Of central importance in this context is intertextuality, understood both from the dialogic and implicit perspective articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), later developed by Julia Kristeva (2024), and through Gérard Genette's systematic and narratological concept of transtextuality, defined as "all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts" (Genette, 1997: 1).

Beyond these theoretical formulations, intertextuality also operates as a procedure that raises questions about the transmission of images, the distribution of cultural value, and the relationship between visual memory and racial hierarchies. These are operations that Jean-Luc Godard undertook in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1989–1999) by editing together fragments from different films and playing with their visual texture and sound. The quotations, references and connections to other works thus operate as more than historical allusions, functioning as well as sites of intertextual negotiation. As Robert Stam suggests, films are produced within a "dense informational network", which includes other films, literary texts, genres, styles and discourses that the new film "can take up, amplify, ignore, subvert, or transform" (Stam, 2000: 68), reaccentuating earlier materials in new historical and ideological contexts. This network

is shaped by the historical moment in which the new film is made, by the intentions of its creators, and by the dynamics of audiovisual production and consumption. Intertextuality is not a neutral space but rather a battlefield where meanings are won and lost, and where ideological values are confronted and challenged:

> Cultural studies view texts similarly, as the site of a series of struggles for meaning. The dominant ideology, working through the form of the text, can be resisted, evaded, or negotiated with, in varying degrees by differently socially situated readers (Fiske, 1987: 41).

These considerations raise the question of whether cinematic intertextual analysis can serve as a bridge between formal analysis and cultural critique, whether it can shift the debate beyond the politics of representation towards a deeper interrogation of the racialised logics inscribed in film history. Along these lines, Racquel Gates (2017) argues for a return to the formal and aesthetic dimensions of African American cinema—an area often eclipsed by debates about representation—and demonstrates how attention to these can shed light on the ideologies of race, class, and gender that structure these images. Gates suggests that this endeavour should not be dismissed, but rather that it should be pursued as "a study of black images that was never 'there' in the first place" (Gates, 2017: 44).

Although representation has been a central concern in film studies—from André Bazin's ontology of realism (2004) to Siegfried Kracauer's social theory of cinema (1960)—and particularly in analyses of African American cinema (hooks, 1992), its limitations are obvious: essentialism, reductionism and an inability to fully engage with form, affect, filmic materiality or historical complexity. As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) argue, an approach focused exclusively on representation risks reducing film studies to a moralising framework, neglecting questions of form, the archive, and aesthetic genealogy. From a different perspective, Laura Marks (2000) demonstrates that images embody sensory and intercultural memories that exceed the mimetic paradigm, inviting an understanding of visual experience beyond representational transparency. These limitations point to the need for an analytical framework attentive not only to what images show, but to how they produce desire, vulnerability and memory: an approach especially pertinent to contemporary African American cinema, and particularly to the reconfigurations of racial horror in Jordan Peele's work.

With the above in mind, this article explores whether cinematic intertextuality, with its reinscription of images in new formal contexts, may constitute an aesthetic politics of symbolic resistance through its processes of identifying and resignifying other films. As a point of departure for this discussion, a selection of audiovisual allusions in Jordan Peele's films—*Get Out* (2017), *Us* (2019) and *Nope*—are examined to offer what is not merely as an introduction to his filmography, but as a kaleidoscopic view of intertextuality as a critical tool.[1] This approach seeks to move beyond the politics of representation by exposing the racialised aesthetic logics that continue to shape US cinema through an analysis of Peele's oeuvre.

The references selected for analysis cover narrative, staging, thematic and visual registers: the masked ritual sequence in *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrick, 1999); the family visit by the interracial couple in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967); the subterranean world of human-

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oids in *C.H.U.D.* (Douglas Cheek, 1984); the television broadcast of the Hands Across America fundraising initiative (1986); and the aforementioned pioneering photographic sequence, *The Horse in Motion*. The aim of this study is to analyse their resignification in Peele's films, their combinations and the aesthetic and political effects produced by their recontextualization.

NESTED ALLUSIONS: CEREMONIAL-RITUAL CONSUMPTION OF BODIES FROM *EYES WIDE SHUT* TO *GET OUT*

Nested intertextual allusions can be understood as references that contain layers of embedded quotations, each marked by its own formal, contextual or political inflection, producing a textual stratification akin to the effect of matryoshka dolls. As Julia Kristeva suggests, "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (2024: 64). Intertextuality, therefore, is not merely the presence of one text within another, but the staging of a complex network of relations, often hierarchical or interconnected in nature. This stratification is evident in the ceremonial-ritual consumption of bodies in *Get Out*, where the sadistic figure of the libertine is nested through the aesthetic variations introduced by the allusion to *Eyes Wide Shut*. What are these variations? What remains? What disappears? What is resignified? And how do these shifts affect the film's social and political critique?

Eyes Wide Shut is the only film explicitly named in *Get Out*. The quotation occurs in a phone conversation between Chris (Daniel Kaluuya) and his friend Rod (Lil Rel Howery), who warns him: "You in some *Eyes Wide Shut* situation"[2] (1:05:20–1:05:25). This warning comes in response to the unsettling reappearance of a long-lost acquaintance, Andre Logan King (Lakeith Stanfield) at the garden party organised by the white family of Chris's girlfriend, Rose Armitage (Allison Williams). This direct reference functions as a colloquial shortcut that condenses what *Eyes Wide Shut* represents: a film about secret societies and a couple's breakdown, which Rod reinterprets as a story of sexual enslavement of the Black male body in the context of a ritualised orgy. This presents an anomaly that Mikhail Iampolski describes as a moment that forces the spectator to search for the meaning elsewhere, "to seek its motivation in some other logic or explanatory cause outside the text. The search is then conducted in the realm of intertextuality" (Iampolski, 1998: 30).

On this point, it is crucial to note how the dimension of lust and sadism organises the symbolic core that connects *Eyes Wide Shut* to *Get Out*. In Kubrick's film, this regime of desire recalls the aristocratic vampirism of Hammer Films' *Dracula* series,[3] characterised by an aesthetic of saturated reds, with a particular emphasis on deep reds that functions not merely as decoration but as a means of turning the violence and the body into a visual "spectacle", intensifying its erotic dimension (Hutchings, 2021: 34). This ritualised theatricality is controlled by elites who suck the vitality out of subservient bodies, as many Hammer horror films stage violence as ceremony, using a theatrical *mise-en-scène*, exaggerated gestures and repetitive ritual actions that transform individual acts into symbolic performances (Hutchings, 2021: 47). This logic also connects to the exploration of erotic power as domination in *The Night Porter* (Il portiere di notte, Liliana Cavani, 1974), and with the dynamics of masks, subtle coercions and bourgeois tensions developed by Arthur Schnitzler in his novella *Traumnovelle* (1925), which provides the literary foundation for Kubrick's film (Boa, 1987: 45).

In Peele's work, sadism is not constructed in opposition to the family but embedded in the inner workings of the household itself: Rose derives pleasure from capturing her Black partner-victims; her brother perpetrates physical violence upon them as a form of subjugation; their mother

controls them by means of hypnosis; and their father commodifies their bodies in surgical operations. In both films, the libidinal and the sadistic constitute more than a domain of sexual desire; they function as the dispositif that structures the circulation of power, the gaze, and the cinematic form, determining how bodies—seduced, exposed, or violated—are organised and interpreted in the story.

Kubrick's film also operates as a formal model for the auction scene in *Get Out*: Black bodies are not merely observed but commodified through a ritualised white bourgeois performance. As Chris walks through the garden with his girlfriend, the white guests bid on his body using gestures and numbered cards. The auctioned body is mediated by a framed photograph of Chris in a medium shot, holding his camera—the symbol of his profession—which becomes an object of desire for the blind art dealer who longs to possess his gaze. This racialised desire, which bell hooks describes as "eating the Other" (hooks, 1992: 21), forms the core of the cultural consumption of Blackness, operating as a form of political lust that converts the vitality of the Black body into biological capital (Waldby and Mitchell, 2006). As John Pultz observes, "photographic albums in particular were used by nineteenth-century Europeans for the fetishistic collecting, controlling, and defining of the bodies of native inhabitants of newly colonized lands" (Pultz, 1995: 21).

The photographic image of Chris functions as a fetishised icon, sold at an auction whose intertextual resonances are both historical (slave auctions) and cinematic (the masked ritual in *Eyes Wide Shut*). In Kubrick's film, the sexually consumed bodies are placed at the centre of a circle in a room, where a master of ceremonies marks participation in the orgy by striking a staff, accompanied by diegetic organ music (Image 1). In *Get Out*, the composition is square-shaped rather than circular, but equally central: the framed photograph is inside the square formed by the garden pergola's columns that surround the auction's master of ceremonies, Mr. Armitage, whose gestures acknowledging the bids are underscored by non-diegetic organ music (Image 2). In Kubrick's film, the elite absorbs and neutralises the libidinal agency of those who enter its orbit, transforming the protagonist—Dr. William Harford (Tom Cruise)—into an exposed body which, once discovered, also occupies the centre of a circle as a vulnerable intruder at the orgy (Image 3). This



Figure 1. Stillframe from the sexual ritual sequence in *Eyes Wide Shut*



Figure 2. Stillframe from the auction sequence in *Get Out*



Figure 3. Stillframe of the intruder within the circle in *Eyes Wide Shut*

condition finds its analogue in *Get Out* in Chris's fragility in the face of the power structures that operate as invisible yet omnipotent presences in these body markets—whether spaces of sexual exchange or contemporary slave auctions—in the two films.

Hollywood films addressing slavery in the United States or the transatlantic slave trade, such as *Mandingo* (Richard Fleischer, 1975), *Django Unchained* (Quentin Tarantino, 2012) and *12 Years a Slave* (Steve McQueen, 2013), often depict slave auctions with explicit brutality. Such overexposure of suffering runs the risk reproducing the very domination they are intended to condemn, as Saidiya V. Hartman warns when she asks: "How does one revisit the slave scenes without replicating the grammar of violence?" (Hartman, 2008: 4). In contrast, US independent films such as *Sankofa* (Haile Gerima, 1993), or Afro-Caribbean films such as *Nèg Maron* (Jean-Claude Flamand-Barny, 2005), proposes alternative aesthetic and narrative strategies by shifting the violence into more introspective codes, where memory, spirituality and cultural resistance become central (Woolford, 1994). Films such as *Get Out* and *Eyes Wide Shut*, however, depict the processes of choosing and purchasing bodies as ritualised scenes of power: silent theatres of control, coded and choreographed, where violence operates symbolically and psychologically rather than overtly—at least at first.

These closed worlds unsettle the spectator, as the camera movements, music and choreography all suggest institutional oppression—whether racial or sexual-economic, disguised as bourgeois civility in one case and elitist festivity in the other. The camera movements and focal techniques further accentuate the contrast between the two secret societies: the fluid movements of the camera in the masked orgy are contained in an enclosed space in *Eyes Wide Shut*, while zooming and static framing compress the open garden setting of the auction scene in *Get Out*. The colour choices ultimately define both environments: the intense baroque reds expose the bodies in the first film, while a desaturated, naturalistic palette of browns, whites and blacks foreground an ostensibly ordinary setting centred on skin colour.

The updating of the intertextual reference, and its formal variation, shifts the critique towards racism not only through the content but also through an aesthetic that destabilises essentialist narratives of Blackness by unsettling the spectator's cultural and affective codes. Intertextuality here not only articulates thematic resonances, but also defines formal modulations of desire and violence that connect the two films. In *Get Out*, the auction visually echoes Kubrick's ritual, but here it is racialised—not so much by quantifying the Black presence on screen as by employing an aesthetic strategy that defines African American cinema, which Michael Boyce Gillespie describes as "a highly variable and unfinalizable braiding of art, culture, and history" (Boyce Gillespie, 2016: 6).

INTERRACIAL TEMPORAL PALIMPSEST: FROM *GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER* TO *GET OUT*

Get Out establishes an intertextual dialogue with *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, an emblematic work of liberal American cinema on interracial relationships, which Jordan Peele has acknowledged as one of his main inspirations: "[if you] take the race out of it, everybody can relate to the fear of meeting your potential in-laws for the first time. So, at some point I had a revelation that that was also the way to get into this film [*Get Out*]" (Goldsmith, 2017). In the final moments of the film's opening credits, Rose arrives at her boyfriend Chris's apartment. As they get ready to go visit her wealthy white family, Chris expresses his worries, but Rose reassures him by telling him that her parents "are not racist. I would have told you. I wouldn't be bringing you home to them" (08:20–08:38). The plotline introduced here di-

rectly recalls *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, in which Joey Drayton (Katharine Houghton), the daughter of a progressive white couple (played by Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn), introduces her parents to her fiancé, John Prentice, a Black doctor portrayed by Sidney Poitier. Before their arrival, Joey reassures him that her parents are open-minded.

At first glance, this may appear to be a simple narrative recycling, with the family visit as the catalyst for the drama. However, a closer comparison—particularly of the dinner-table scenes—reveals substantial differences in the representation of racism. The scene where Chris meets Rose's parents in *Get Out*, clearly modelled on its counterpart in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, is charged with veiled racial tensions: allusions to Obama, to the supposed physical superiority of Black bodies and to the figure of the benevolent white liberal. In Kramer's film, the parents' shock upon learning of their daughter's interracial relationship shakes their convictions but ends in reconciliation. At the same time, their Black housekeeper voices doubts about the relationship, introducing an intra-racial perspective absent from the white liberal worldview that structures the main narrative. In *Get Out*, her counterpart appears equally servile and compliant, until it is revealed that her behaviour is the product of a system of control: the servants are, in fact, victims of hypnosis. Shots of Chris are juxtaposed with those of the parents—a psychologist and a neurosurgeon—during a barely disguised interrogation. Their questions about his family and habits create a visual unease in a domestic environment that initially appears familiar and safe but soon becomes clearly disturbing.

Whereas Kramer's *mise-en-scène* places the interracial couple in tension with the older generation, culminating in a verbal confrontation between father and daughter, the figure of the Black doctor is ultimately accepted as an exceptional, morally and professionally exemplary individual. His presence is tolerated on the basis of what bell hooks calls "conditional acceptance", whereby white progressives admit the Black subject "without divesting of white supremacist thinking about Blackness" (hooks, 1992: 10). This dynamic resonates with Frantz Fanon's notion of "wearing the white mask", a metaphor for alienation and self-discipline, referring to the obligation imposed on Black individuals in white-dominated spaces to excel and assimilate in order to be accepted: "It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed" (Fanon, 2008: 180).

Chris, however, does not seek approval; he has been chosen without his knowledge. The white family that claims to admire Black bodies has selected him to be a host for another consciousness. This perverse operation reveals that the admiration is merely a mask for violent appropriation: the Black body is being used as a vessel for white longevity. The dinner scenes—hopeful in one film, charged with latent menace in the other—dramatise what Toni Morrison identified as the utility of the Black subject in the white imaginary, acceptable only insofar as it is functional or exceptional (Morrison, 1994). The Black doctor and the Black photographer embody this logic of utility, albeit in inverse terms. In the 1967 film, initial resistance gives way to moral enlightenment. In *Get Out*, superficial cordiality conceals a brutal and premeditated violence.

When the intertextual reference explicitly addresses race, it creates a palimpsest: a layered inscription that links past and present. As Laura Mulvey argues, "the concept of the palimpsest has special relevance, evoking the way that quotation and reference create layers of time, bringing something from the past into the present, which then inscribes the present onto the past" (Mulvey, 2014: 29). This stratified reading is not nostalgic but diagnostic, as it exposes contemporary forms of racism. At the same time, it projects the present back onto the past, producing an unsettling iro-

ny: the bodies of the Black servants remain under white control, albeit through more subtle and insidious mechanisms. The juxtaposition of these two time-frames ultimately unmasks the social masquerade. The young Black man visiting the white family does so not in pursuit of mutual understanding but in a struggle for survival.

CROSS-REFERENCES: *C.H.U.D.* AND HANDS ACROSS AMERICA IN *US*

From its very first scene, *Us* (2019) establishes intertextuality not as a mere decorative gesture but as a structural principle of its storytelling. The film constructs a complex network of quotations and cultural references that shape a formally sophisticated and explicitly political universe. At its centre, the Wilsons are an African American family who confront their exact doubles (the "Tethered"), inhabitants of a parallel underground world of doppelgangers of the entire US population, created by the government and condemned to mechanically and grotesquely mimic the behaviour of those living on the surface.

The film opens with titles on a black screen: "There are thousands of miles of tunnels beneath the continental United States… Abandoned subway systems, unused service routes, and deserted mine shafts… Many have no known purpose at all"[4] (00:52–01:20). The final sentence lingers a moment, functioning as a warning both visually and conceptually (Image 4). The next shot shows an old television set surrounded by VHS cassette cases: *C.H.U.D.* (1984), *The Goonies* (Richard Donner, 1985), *The Man with Two Brains* (Carl Reiner, 1983) and *The Right Stuff* (Philip Kaufman, 1983). Playing on the screen is a television commercial for the charity campaign Hands Across America—a real-life initiative to create a human chain across the United States to raise awareness about poverty (Image 5). This reference serves not as a nostalgic backdrop, as it does in *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, 1994), but rather as a critical

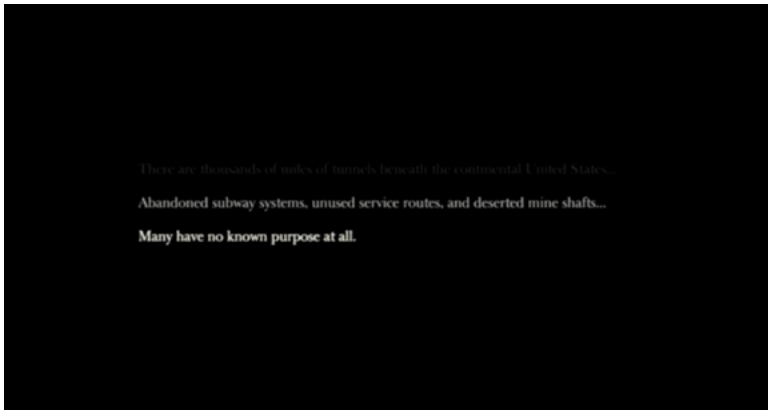


Figure 4. Introductory title in *Us*



Figure 5. References to *C.H.U.D.* and Hands Across America in *Us*

residue: the campaign becomes a symbol of the nation's failure to achieve solidarity, a catastrophe that exposes the myth of the American Dream.

Each VHS cassette case visible in the shot reinforces a central theme of the film:

— *The Man with Two Brains* introduces the idea of duality and identity theft.
— *The Goonies*, a film about children exploring subterranean tunnels, evokes the world inhabited by the Tethered.
— *The Right Stuff* evokes the patriotic idealism of the Reagan era, which constitutes the film's ideological backdrop.
— *C.H.U.D.*, the most significant reference due to its critical charge, articulates an intertextual operation in opposition to Hands Across America: a B-horror film that functions "as a cultural remnant of low prestige, whose residue shifts meaning from the margins, desta-

bilising and questioning established symbolic hierarchies" (Richard, 1998: 15).

In *C.H.U.D.*, the city literally buries its marginalised population: homeless people who are exposed to toxic waste by the government itself, and are thus transformed into monstrous beings. This story dramatises what David Halperin, drawing on Foucault, describes as a strategy of exclusion that confines bodies deemed deviant from the norm to both physical and symbolic marginalisation (Halperin, 1995: 17). Monstrosity here is not innate but institutionally imposed through systemic neglect and repression. *Us* reinterprets this logic: externally, the Tethered are not monsters but reflections of normative US society—shadows of the dominant subject, created for control and later abandoned to a mechanical, voiceless existence. The film's title itself invites a double reading: *Us*, the first person plural, but also the acronym used for the United States. Marginalisation is not peripheral to the system but constitutive of it. The oppressed are simultaneously the shadow and the excess of the oppressor. As Frantz Fanon wrote, "the oppressed will always believe the worst about themselves" (2005: 30), suggesting that the dominated come to define themselves in relation to the dominator, and that their very identity emerges as a direct consequence of domination.

In this context, *Us* stages a confrontation not only between individuals but between specular subjectivities: between surface and subsoil, consciousness and repression. The encounter between Adelaide and her doppelganger Red—both portrayed by Lupita Nyong'o—functions not merely as a narrative device but as an allegorical structure that exposes the fragility of identity and the violence necessary to sustain its coherence. The film offers no closure; in the end, the boundary between victim and perpetrator, original and copy, self and other remains destabilised, underscoring the inescapability of historical trauma and its reappearance through the very bodies it attempted to erase. This duality is further reinforced by the juxtaposition of Hands Across America as the socially sanctioned image and *C.H.U.D.* as the abject image, creating a dialectic between the visible and the repressed in the national imaginary. *Us* thus invokes Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject: that which is expelled by the social and symbolic order but inevitably returns to threaten it from within (Kristeva, 1982: 4–5). This aesthetic and ethical ambiguity resists moral clarity offers no consolatory resolution.

From this perspective, the reference to *C.H.U.D.* is not merely thematic, as it also signals a racial politics in the aesthetic. The trajectory of *C.H.U.D.*, a low-budget film with limited cultural capital, reappearing in *Us*, a high-profile production with broad critical recognition, illustrates what Hito Steyerl (2009) describes as "the displacement of the poor image." Although *C.H.U.D.* was produced in the context of the capitalist film industry and received a commercial theatrical release,[5] its status in the landscape of 1980s B-horror films facilitated its circulation in the form of degraded video copies (Benson-Allott, 2013) whose material instability functions both as an index of marginalisation and as a potential act of cultural resistance (Steyerl, 2009). When such degraded images are reappropriated and resignified, they acquire a new symbolic value, in a process that constitutes a critical rewriting of genre conventions and an aesthetic mode of resistance that exposes the historical erasure of marginalised lives concealed behind the liberal spectacle of progress.

REVEALING INTERTEXTUALITY AS AN AESTHETIC POLITICS OF RESISTANCE: *THE HORSE IN MOTION* IN *NOPE*

The opening credits of *Nope* conclude with a reference to Eadweard Muybridge's *The Horse in Motion*. The galloping horse appears in an almost planar composition that emphasises the image's lateral movement. Peele, however, shifts the viewer's attention from the horse and to the Afri-

can American rider—an anonymous figure whose name has been erased from history. The moving image is framed by what we later come to understand to be the mouth-screen of an extraterrestrial entity that absorbs and devours everything in its path. The rider gradually emerges from a fade to black, becoming clearer and larger through a shift in camera focus, until the image is centred on the rider—specifically, on the colour of his skin—for two reasons: first, the horse is repeatedly blocked from view by the opening credits superimposed over it; and second, the definition of the image itself is quite sharp (Image 6). The editing and cinematographic strategies employed in a dimly lit setting—the lighting, framing and composition—by editor Nicholas Monsour and cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema,[6] in collaboration with Peele, create a complex sequence of overlapping frames that reveal the image of the forgotten rider in all its depth.



Figure 6 – The opening credits block out the horse in *The Horse in Motion* in *Nope*

From this perspective, the analysis of how intertextual quotations are presented reveals the racial politics embedded in aesthetic practices. In this case, Peele not only invokes *The Horse in Motion* but also reformulates its formal qualities in a way that actively counteracts the rider's historical invisibility. The filmmaker proposes an alternative film history told from the margins through intertextual reference. The film's protagonist, OJ Haywood (Daniel Kaluuya), is introduced as a direct descendant of the anonymous rider, thereby linking the visual exploitation of the Black body to the cinematic apparatus itself. From the very beginning of *Nope*, the origins of cinema are redefined not only as a technological achievement but also as an act of racial erasure and distortion—an idea developed extensively by bell hooks (1992)—that involves both an absence and a form of symbolic violence with real consequences for Black identity, recognition and autonomy.

Filmmakers, as readers of the works they incorporate into their own films, possess the ability to reinterpret them, vesting them with new meanings by relating them to other texts. A text does not have a single meaning; rather, its meaning changes according to the cultural position of the reader, the social conditions of the reading and the historical moment in which that reading takes place: "Such a meaning is, of course, not fixed in a universal, empirical 'reality,' but in the social situation of the viewer. Different readings may stabilize texts differently and momentarily, but they do achieve moments of stability, moments of meaning" (Fiske, 1987: 117). From this perspective, the scene quoting *The Horse in Motion* is a critical revelation of the Black figure erased from the history of the moving picture. It underscores the violent relationship between race, spectacle and technological progress. This is particularly significant given the omission of the rider in other media products that reference Muybridge's work, such as Mark Neale's music video for U2's "Lemon" (1993) or the animated short *Muybridge's Strings* (Koji Yamamura, 2011), where the rider appears only fleetingly before vanishing to give way to a narrative centred on Muybridge and his riderless horse. As Jacques Derrida argued, the archive is founded on violence, on exclusion (1995: 11). Cinematic intertextuality, therefore, engages not only with the past but also with its exclusions, and examining how those exclusions are reframed in a

new work can offer a deeper understanding of cinema's shifting relationship to the politics of racialised aesthetics.

In *Nope*, this historical omission is actively counteracted through the fictional Haywood family, who claim descent from the anonymous rider and position themselves simultaneously as heirs to—and challengers of—a tradition of Black invisibility in Hollywood's visual regime, as they continue to work with horses in the worlds of cinema and advertising. These forms of violence persist within the extractive and spectacular logic of the entertainment industry, symbolised in the film by the extraterrestrial mouth-screen that devours and silences everything in its path. *Nope* situates the camera as an instrument of both violence and resistance, particularly emphasising the need for Black narratives to reimagine the archive. In this sense, the film combines archive and imagination to reconstruct erased Black lives as a form of resistance against the enduring forms of violence of slavery, persisting even after its abolition. As Saidiya Hartman suggests, this constitutes a form of "critical fabulation" about the afterlife of slavery, an attempt "both to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling" by combining historical and archival research with critical theory and fictional narrative (Hartman, 2008: 11).

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: BEYOND REPRESENTATION

Jordan Peele develops an intertextual poetics that is not limited to an aesthetic strategy of cultural recognition or to a playful exercise in quotation. On the contrary, his cinema turns intertextuality into a means of destabilising the cultural hierarchies and genre conventions that have historically invisibilised, trivialised or aestheticised Blackness on screen. By borrowing images and narrative structures from different texts, ranging from the liberal prestige of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* to the marginal exploitation cinema of *C.H.U.D.*, Peele activates a stratified reading that exposes the structural racism embedded in the American cultural imaginary.

These formal and narrative operations go beyond a politics of representation centred solely on Black visibility, working instead in multiple directions at once. First, Peele reinscribes on the present what Laura Mulvey (2014: 29) has described as the "intertextual palimpsest": overlapping temporal layers in which the past returns under new conditions of legibility. Thus, *Get Out* reinterprets *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* from the perspective of a present in which liberal cordiality masks racial violence. Second, the filmmaker subverts the cultural status of the texts he references, placing canonical films such as *Eyes Wide Shut* on the same level as marginal cultural objects such as *C.H.U.D.* Third, he transforms the function of the reference itself: instead of evoking nostalgia, it operates as a revelation, exposing the structural violence that the original texts tend to veil. In this way, the accepted Black doctor in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* is contrasted with the Black photographer in *Get Out*, whose supposed integration conceals a project of bodily and symbolic exploitation. The Hands Across America campaign is invoked not as a symbol of solidarity but as an emblem of the nation's failure to realise its own ideals of equality. And the underground monster in *C.H.U.D.* serves as an allegory for a system that produces exclusion as a condition for it to function.

Intertextuality is thus a critical procedure. Mikhail Bakhtin describes these different social voices (which he calls "'languages' of heter-

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oglossia") as "specific points of view on the world", which "may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically" (Bakhtin, 1981: 291–292). These voices are not neutral; they are capable of harming one another. They constitute acts of resistance, intervention and reconfiguration, which refuse to allow history to be forgotten or fully absorbed by systems of power, operating through a fractured temporality that denies closure. Rather than offering definitive answers, Peele's films engage in an exercise of storytelling described by Hartman as "listening for the unsaid, translating misconstrued words, and refashioning disfigured lives" (Hartman, 2008: 12). Intertextuality thus functions as a revelation of that which is repressed in the cultural archive: the racial violence that undergirds both the liberal promise and the national myth. In this sense, it is an aesthetic politics of resistance, destabilising the symbolic order by demonstrating that what is repressed never disappears but returns in spectral and distorted forms.

Ultimately, the intertextual references in Jordan Peele's work do not close the narrative with the satisfaction of recognition; instead, they establish a sense of unease. They reveal that what seems familiar—the dinner table, the home, the media spectacle, the American landscape—is always inhabited by the strange. This estrangement is not incidental; it compels us to see how the dominant culture is constituted through exclusion, appropriation and the repression of racial difference. Peele's aesthetic politics thus involves more than merely representing Black bodies on screen, constituting a restructuring of the very act of seeing. His use of intertextuality reveals that although mainstream American culture has attempted to control or suppress certain narratives, the racial history of the United States cannot be relegated to a forgotten past, as it constitutes the very material of its present. ■

NOTES

1. This practice of recycling films of the past can be found in Peele's early television work with Keegan-Michael Key in the sketch series *Key & Peele* (2012–2015), which can be read as a laboratory of cinematic intertexts. This series laid the conceptual groundwork for his feature films with its parodic sketches charged with political critique. Keegan-Michael Key and Jordan Peele, *Key & Peele*, Season 5, Episode ("Hoodie: Hoodie Ho?!"), 2015, YouTube video, 5:12, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztRSm_SJP58
2. *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017). Streaming platform copy, Netflix, https://www.netflix.com/es/title/80149258
3. Hammer Film Productions was a British film studio that played a crucial role in the reconfiguration of horror cinema beginning in the late 1950s, particularly through its use of colour, the eroticisation of the body and the reformulation of classical myths. In the case of vampirism, it produced a series of nine feature films about Dracula from 1958 to 1974, beginning with *Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1958). See Peter Hutchings (2003, 2021).
4. *Us* (Jordan Peele, 2019). Streaming platform copy, Prime Video, https://www.primevideo.com/-/es/detail/Nosotros/0RE22OX69O5EH00UUQOYDMB4DA
5. *C.H.U.D.* grossed a total of US$4,654,423 at the box office (https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0087015/), a respectable figure given its modest production budget of approximately US$3 million. However, its cultural significance was largely consolidated through its subsequent distribution on VHS, the success of which led to a sequel, *C.H.U.D. II: Bud the Chud* (David Irving, 1989), released directly to video.

6. James Whitaker interviews *Nope* cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema about his approach to the film's visual aesthetics. Van Hoytema implemented a pioneering technical solution for the film's night scenes, pairing an IMAX camera with a Panavision 65mm camera modified for infrared photography, recording the same scene simultaneously on both devices in order to enable selective compositing in postproduction. See James Whitaker (2022).

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BEYOND REPRESENTATION: CINEMATIC INTERTEXTUALITY AS AN AESTHETIC POLITICS OF RESISTANCE IN THE FILMS OF JORDAN PEELE

Abstract

This article examines the work of Jordan Peele—*Get Out* (2017), *Us* (2019), and *Nope* (2022)—through the lens of intertextuality as an aesthetic politics of resistance, deployed as a critical strategy to expose the racial violence inscribed on film history and the American cultural imaginary. Through references to films such as *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrick, 1999), *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967) and *C.H.U.D.* (Douglas Cheek, 1984), the Hands Across America media campaign (1986) and Muybridge's photographic series *The Horse in Motion* (1878), Peele destabilises symbolic hierarchies and reinscribes the memory of historically erased Black bodies and subjectivities by means of temporal and formal shifts that transcend his own filmography. In this way, he seeks to move beyond the politics of representation by exposing the racialised aesthetic logics that continue to shape US cinema.

Key words

Jordan Peele; Intertextuality; Cultural studies; Aesthetic politics of resistance; Racism

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MÁS ALLÁ DE LA REPRESENTACIÓN: INTERTEXTUALIDAD CINEMATOGRÁFICA COMO POLÍTICA ESTÉTICA DE RESISTENCIA EN LA OBRA CINEMATOGRÁFICA DE JORDAN PEELE

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la obra de Jordan Peele —*Déjame salir* (2017), *Nosotros* (2019) y *Nop* (2022)— desde la intertextualidad entendida como política estética de resistencia, que se despliega como estrategia crítica que revela la violencia racial inscrita en la historia del cine y en el imaginario cultural estadounidense. A través de referencias a films como *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), *Adivina quién viene esta noche* (1967) o *C.H.U.D.* (1984), y de la campaña mediática *Manos a través de América* (1986) o la serie fotográfica *El caballo en movimiento* de Muybridge (1878), Peele desestabiliza jerarquías simbólicas y reinscribe la memoria de cuerpos y subjetividades negras históricamente borradas, a través de juegos temporales y formales, que trascienden su propia obra. Este enfoque pretende trascender la política de la representación al exponer las lógicas estéticas raciales que continúan modelando el cine estadounidense.

Palabras clave

Jordan Peele; Intertextualidad; Estudios culturales; Política estética de resistencia; Racismo.

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