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Commodification of Tragedy in Society of the Spectacle: NOPE Film (2022)

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Abstract

This study examines the commodification of tragedy through the theoretical framework of Guy Debord's "Society of the Spectacle" and the commodification processes of diffusion and defusion. Through qualitative textual analysis, the research investigates how various producers – from media organizations to the victims themselves – transform tragic events into marketable spectacles. The findings reveal that social media platforms accelerate this commodification process, creating a digital ecosystem where tragedy becomes entertainment. The analysis demonstrates that NOPE serves as a critical commentary on contemporary media culture, where the monetization of suffering has become normalized. The film highlights the role of social media mechanisms intensify this commodification, ultimately leading to the loss of humanity and the perpetuation of exploitative systems. This research contributes to ongoing discussions about digital media ethics and the fundamental dehumanization that occurs when tragic experiences are transformed into consumable content. This research contributes for media literacy to understand commodification in using and producing information for social media users critically.

Keywords: commodification, Nope, spectacle theory, social media, film, media studies.

1. Introduction

In today's society, the influence of media, advertising, and image-driven culture has transformed social interactions, experiences, and relationships into a spectacle-driven phenomenon. This process is described by philosopher Guy Debord in his seminal work Society of the Spectacle (Debord, 2014), which posits that our lives are increasingly mediated by images and representations. In this digital age, these images are not only produced and disseminated by traditional media agencies but also by individuals. As Mubarok (Mubarok, 2011) elucidates, almost all aspects of life are saturated with various forms of spectacle, shaping our values and goals. In such a society, spectacle dominates, leading to a loss of authentic human connection and a distortion of reality. Debord argues that the spectacle creates a passive population – detached from meaningful engagement with the world and critical thinking – consumed instead by superficial appearances and illusions (Debord, 2014). This mediation creates a separation from the real world, causing individuals to live in a state where the line between reality and representation becomes increasingly blurred. Experiences, identities, and even social relationships are packaged and sold back as images and narratives. Within this framework, even the most profound and heartfelt human experiences – such as tragedy – undergo a transformative process: they become commodities. Tragedy, once deeply personal and emotionally resonant, is meticulously crafted and packaged for mass consumption, thereby blurring the lines between genuine human empathy and profit-driven motives.

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In digital era, social media platforms play a crucial role in both producing and disseminating these commodified narratives. Commodification itself refers to a process that transforms various entities – including physical goods, services, experiences, relationships, and even parts of the human body – into standardized objects of trade (Dahms, 2012; Lumbreras, 2019); in simple terms, it is the process by which a thing or a person is treated or considered as a commodity. Haenfler (Haenfler, 2023) defines commodification as "the act of taking something's original form and commercializing it, turning it into an object of trade and capital." Within this framework, two sociological mechanisms operate: diffusion and defusion. In the context of the commodification of tragedy, the mechanisms of diffusion and defusion play significant roles. Diffusion occurs when tragic events, inherently personal and often private, are introduced to a wider audience through various media channels – such as news coverage, films, or social media platforms – which rapidly spread these narratives. Once recognized, these tragedies become accessible commodities for consumption. Defusion, on the other hand, involves altering the presentation of these tragedies to make them more marketable. Existing tragic events, when transformed into entertainment products, often undergo changes – such as emphasizing certain aspects, adding dramatic elements, or altering the narrative – to evoke specific emotions from the audience. By manipulating their presentation, tragic events become palatable commodities, ready for mass consumption. In essence, diffusion brings tragic events into the public sphere while defusion reshapes them to fit market demands, a process increasingly driven by a diverse array of producers operating within both traditional and digital media landscapes.

This trend of the commodification of tragedy finds vivid expression in contemporary media and popular culture, where tragic events are sensationalized, packaged, and sold to consumers to gain financial benefit. The entertainment industry, news media, and social media platforms play pivotal roles in constructing these narratives. Tragedy in popular films, television shows, and digital media often reflects and reinforces this commodification, presenting a distorted version of reality where human suffering is transformed into entertainment and consumable spectacle, and empathy is eclipsed by the pursuit of profit. Dawson (Dawson, 2007) explains how real-life tragedies are reshaped and enhanced into big spectacles in Hollywood movies – where death is put on display through dazzling high-tech special effects, and film companies turn tragedy into spectacular entertainment for box-office profits. Moreover, the increasing influence of social media in this process highlights how individual producers – beyond institutional entities – contribute to the normalization of tragedy as a commodity.

Scholarly inquiry into the commodification of tragedy has been extensive. Dawson (Dawson, 2007) sheds light on how contemporary films often simplify and distort real tragedies, transforming them into consumable entertainment. Lobodally (Lobodally, 2019) explores the portrayal of disasters in television commercials as commodities serving the interests of the capitalist class. Stone and Grebenar (Stone, Grebener, 2022) delve into "dark tourism," investigating how tragedies shape visitor experiences. Walus and Wilcox (Walus, Wilcox, 2020) criticize how TV shows like 1000 Ways to Die maximize the spectacle of death – inviting schadenfreude while minimizing its tragic and human components. These studies underscore the transformation of tragedy into a marketable commodity, revealing the pervasive influence of capitalist dynamics on human experiences and narratives. Yet, while much research has focused on large-scale media institutions, there is a growing need to examine the role of varied producers, including individual content creators and victims on social media, in shaping this phenomenon.

Against this backdrop, Jordan Peele's film NOPE emerges as a poignant critique of the commodification of tragedy within the societal framework of the spectacle. Through the story of individuals who commodify their own tragedies, NOPE interrogates the disturbing trend of turning personal suffering into marketable spectacle. The film follows the Haywood siblings, who become obsessed with capturing definitive footage of a UFO responsible for their father's death – eschewing genuine mourning in favor of a profit-driven pursuit of fame. In parallel, the narrative also explores the case of a former child actor who transforms a tragic TV show accident into a self-commodified spectacle. Together, these stories illustrate how in a society dominated by the spectacle, personal traumas are not only diffused across digital platforms and traditional media but also actively repackaged and exploited for public consumption and commercial gain.

Within this context, this research embarks on a unique exploration of the commodification of tragedy within the societal framework of the spectacle, specifically examining the characters and narrative of Jordan Peele's film NOPE. What distinguishes this study is its focus on how the film

foregrounds the role of producers – extending beyond big studios to include victims – in constructing and commodifying tragedy. Through an analysis of the film's narrative and character dynamics, this research aims to unravel the layers of commodification, examining the subtle nuances by which tragedies are transformed into marketable commodities. This nuanced analysis expands the academic discourse on this topic and provides critical insights into a broader societal landscape where empathy and genuine human connection grapple with the allure of commodified tragedy, thereby enriching our comprehension of the complex dynamics between media, society, and the human experience. Indeed, this research is significant in media literacy, especially understanding commodification for social media users in using and producing information carefully and critically.

2. Material and methods

This research used qualitative textual analysis as the method and employed Guy Debord's "Society of the Spectacle" along with the commodification processes of diffusion and defusion as the theoretical framework. Qualitative research relies on verbal narrative like spoken or written data (Panda, 2019). Qualitative research uses the theory as a broad explanation for behavior or attitudes (Creswell, 2018), which in this case the theory of society of the spectacle to explain the commodification of tragedy that was carried out by the characters. The instrument used in this research is the researcher's in-depth observation, achieved through repeated viewings and detailed note-taking of Jordan Peele's film *NOPE* (2022). The unit of analysis is the film *NOPE*, which is critically examined for its portrayal of the commodification of tragedy by various producers in the film. The technique of data analysis involved an analytical and perceptive review of the film, with key themes coded and interpreted through the lens of the society of the spectacle, supported by secondary sources such as scholarly articles, books, and reports.

While previous research on *NOPE* has significantly advanced our understanding of its multifaceted narrative – addressing themes such as animal exploitation (Miquel-Baldellou, 2025), extractive capitalism (Turcios, 2024), affective representations of Black interiority and grief (Sobande, 2023), multispecies relations (King, 2024), and digital resistance (Cvar, 2023) – these studies generally concentrate on singular thematic or theoretical dimensions. In contrast, this research distinguishes itself by focusing on the processes through which diverse producers – from traditional media agencies to digital content creators and even victims – actively construct tragedy as a commodity. By integrating Guy Debord's Society of the Spectacle theory with the commodification framework of diffusion and defusion. In media-saturated society, the interplay between diffusion and defusion is further accelerated by digital culture. Social media platforms, as Fuchs (Fuchs, 2021) and Castells (Castells, 2010) observe, not only facilitate rapid dissemination of content but also actively shape the way experiences are framed and consumed. This convergence of traditional media mechanisms with digital technology underscores the ethical and cultural implications of commodifying tragedy, revealing how personal suffering is manipulated and repackaged as a marketable spectacle.

3. Discussion and Results

First tragedy: the chimpanzee rampage

Gordy's Home! was a fictional sitcom featured in flashbacks throughout the film. Set years before the film's main events, the show depicted a chimpanzee named Gordy living with a human family – father Tom, mother Phyllis, daughter Mary Jo, and son Ricky "Jupe" Park. During one of the sitcom's tapings, Gordy unexpectedly went on a violent rampage, mauling Mary Jo's face and attacking Tom before ultimately being shot. Jupe, only a child at the time, witnessed the horrifying event from a hiding place.

The incident is primarily shown from Jupe's perspective. The film presents the event as terrifying, with blood scattered everywhere and Mary Jo's body lying on the floor as Gordy repeatedly hits her, an effect conveyed in part through off-screen sounds. Gordy's attack on Tom is also depicted off-screen, accompanied by loud screams and visible blood, further emphasizing the horror of the scene. Gordy is portrayed as a menacing figure, his hands, shirt, and mouth stained with blood. In a critical moment, Gordy spots Jupe hiding and approaches him. Unexpectedly, Gordy seems to regain his senses and reverts to his usual friendly demeanor, attempting to reassure Jupe with a fist bump. However, he is abruptly shot by the arriving police, leaving Jupe in shock and traumatized.

Following the incident, Jupe's life is profoundly affected. Despite surviving the tragedy, he continues to work in the entertainment industry, eventually growing up, getting married, hosting his own reality show, and ultimately building a western-themed amusement park called Jupiter's Claim near the Haywood ranch – the primary setting for the film's main events. In the wake of this incident, various producers capitalize on the tragedy by transforming it into commodified spectacle in distinct forms, such as:

Museum Exhibition

In his office, Jupe creates a hidden room that acts as a museum for Gordy's Home! memorabilia. The room is filled with artifacts from the show, including personal mementos like the first fist bump he shared with Gordy the chimpanzee. Jupe admits to the Haywood siblings that he makes a profit from allowing people to visit the room, turning it into an exclusive, paid experience. Far from being merely a victim of the Gordy's Home! tragedy, Jupe has transformed his personal trauma into a lucrative spectacle. He has become the producer of his own commodified tragedy, actively curating his past into a consumable experience for others. The very room that houses his most painful memories is also a source of income, highlighting the uncomfortable reality that even survivors can become complicit in perpetuating the spectacle.

Jupe: You know, I usually charge a fee for this. (00:18:51)

This commodification aligns with dark tourism, which refers to the visitation of sites associated with death, tragedy, or suffering (Foncesa et al., 2015) Experiences centered on death, disasters, and atrocities are becoming a common element in modern tourism. As a result, they increasingly offer travelers the chance to embark on spiritual journeys, especially for those who wish to witness both authentic and re-created encounters with death (Stone, 2006). Jupe's hidden room functions the same, as it transforms the tragedy into a structured attraction.

Jupe's museum serves a dual function of diffusion and defusion, making his tragedy both widely recognized and emotionally neutralized. Diffusion occurs as his story is repeatedly circulated, ensuring that the Gordy's Home! tragedy remains relevant in public discourse. However, this widespread exposure does not lead to deeper engagement; instead, the event is repackaged as entertainment. Defusion, on the other hand, occurs as the raw horror of the incident is diluted through sentimentality and controlled narrative framing. By turning the violent reality of Gordy's Home! into a curated experience, Jupe replaces terror with nostalgia, making it palatable and marketable. This process aligns with Stone and Grebenar's (Stone, Grebenar, 2022) concept of "making tragic places," in which sites of suffering are transformed into commodity. Jupe understands that his tragedy has become a public obsession, and instead of rejecting it, he chooses to capitalize on it.

Jupe's commodification of his past does not emerge in isolation – it is fueled by a digital culture that sensationalizes trauma before it is consciously repackaged as a product. The digital age amplifies this process, as the Gordy's Home! incident has been widely circulated on the internet, with Emerald even noting that she could find it on YouTube. Social media platforms have not only immortalized the event but have also enabled the formation of a vibrant fan base that revels in the spectacle. The relentless digital attention reinforces Jupe sense of sensationalism, transforming him into a figure whose personal tragedy is not only acknowledged but fervently craved by the public. This pervasive digital validation drives him further into commodifying his trauma, as he internalizes the audience's fascination with his past and begins to see it as a marketable identity. By capitalizing on this morbid interest, Jupe consciously steps into his role as a producer of spectacle, thereby perpetuating a cycle where tragedy becomes both a commodity and a mark of celebrity.

This phenomenon aligns with Briziarelli and Armano's (Briziarelli, Armano, 2017) concept of "Spectacle 2.0," which redefines digital media as dynamic spaces of narrative production rather than passive repositories of tragic events. In their framework, social media users actively transform personal suffering into publicly circulated commodities. Every like, share, and comment on Jupe's content contributes to a feedback loop that blurs the boundaries between producer and spectator, co- creating his public identity and illustrating how digital capitalism reshapes subjectivity by fusing individual trauma with market-driven media production. Similarly, Giroux (Giroux, 2007) critiques digital capitalism for crafting an environment where suffering is aestheticized, repackaged, and sold as entertainment, while Gotham (Gotham, 2007) shows that repeated exposure to mediated disasters fosters emotional detachment – prompting audiences to engage with tragedy as spectacle rather than as a call to empathy.

The digital spectacle does not replace Jupe's Museum but reinforces its function, allowing for both diffusion and defusion on a larger scale. Diffusion occurs as his story is circulated across

digital platforms, ensuring that his trauma remains a permanent part of public discourse. However, defusion neutralizes its emotional impact, as the raw horror of the event is diluted through repetition, commentary, and cultural remixes. As Debord (Debord, 2014) critiques, in a society governed by spectacle, individuals are no longer engaged participants in reality but passive spectators consuming an endless cycle of commodified images.

Jupe's willingness to capitalize on his trauma is not just a personal decision – it is a symptom of a broader cultural transformation driven by digital spectacle. In an era where attention is currency, suffering is no longer an experience to be processed but a resource to be extracted and repurposed for profit. As NOPE critiques, modern media does not merely consume tragedy – it conditions individuals to see their own suffering as marketable content, ultimately reinforcing exploitative systems where pain is just another product in the economy of spectacle.

Satirical Magazine Cover

In one scene, Jupe meets with the Haywood siblings to negotiate the purchase of one of their horses. During the conversation, Emerald Haywood's attention is drawn to a framed cover of *MAD Magazine* hanging on the wall of Jupe's office. The cover directly references the infamous *Gordy's Home!* Incident – a traumatic event from Jupe's childhood that continues to haunt him and shape his identity.

Direct citation from the script: *Em stands in front of a door with a mounted framed MAD magazine. On the cover, Alfred E. Newman crouches on a table in a chimp costume on a sitcom set. With a multicolored birthday hat and a handful of pink cake, Newman grins slyly at us as if to say "What Me Worry"?* (Peele, 2022: 25).

MAD Magazine is a real-life satirical publication known for its irreverent humor and sharp social commentary. It was founded in 1952 by editor Harvey Kurtzman and publisher William Gaines and became a cultural touchstone, famous for its distinctive blend of comic strips, humorous illustrations, and biting written satire. The magazine's mascot, Alfred E. Neuman, with his iconic gap-toothed grin and the catchphrase "What, me worry?", became a symbol of cheerful indifference, embodying the publication's approach to mocking various facets of society. However, beyond critique, satirical magazines often serve as tools for commodifying tragedy, turning real-life suffering into digestible, marketable entertainment.

Boland (Boland, 2012) argues that the satirical industry plays a key role in repackaging national crises into humorous narratives, reinforcing a capitalist logic in which pain and disaster become mere commodities to sustain public engagement. In the digital sphere, Abidin (Abidin, 2022) identifies a similar phenomenon in "grief hypejacking," where influencers and media outlets profit from turning human suffering into trending content. MAD Magazine, like other satirical publications, is produced by well-established media institutions that not only shape cultural discourse but also leverage tragedy as a commercial asset. By reinterpreting real historical tragedies as humor, such media entities ensure that even suffering remains a marketable product, reinforcing the broader structures of commodification in mass media.

A specific issue of MAD Magazine referenced in Nope encapsulates the magazine's ethos by transforming the Gordy's Home! Incident – a moment of extreme violence and tragedy – into a satirical spectacle aimed at eliciting humor. On the cover, Alfred E. Neuman is depicted in a chimpanzee costume, crouched on a sitcom set with remnants of a birthday cake smeared across his face and body. The scene, which should evoke horror due to its association with a brutal attack, is instead rendered absurd through the whimsical portrayal of Neuman. This stark contrast between the original incident's violence and the magazine's playful depiction exemplifies how media distorts and commodifies real-life tragedies, turning them into products for entertainment.

However, this transformation is not just about satire – it is part of what Debord describes as the spectacle, where everything, including trauma and tragedy, is reduced to a consumable image. Debord (Debord, 2014) argues that the spectacle is capital accumulated to the point where it becomes an image. This means that media representations like the MAD Magazine cover are not merely commentaries on reality – they replace reality itself. Instead of allowing audiences to confront the actual horror of the *Gordy's Home!* incident, the spectacle presents a sanitized, entertaining version that can be sold.

The transformation of the *Gordy's Home!* incident into a satirical image serves as both a diffusion and defusion strategy. On one hand, the cover diffuses the tragedy, spreading awareness of it through mass circulation in a popular magazine. On the other hand, it defuses the incident's emotional impact by reframing it as comedy. By replacing blood with cake cream and Gordy's

terrifying visage with Neuman's grinning face, the cover creates a sanitized version of events that distances the audience from the gruesome reality of the original attack.

This portrayal exemplifies Debord's concept of the Society of the Spectacle, where authentic experiences are commodified and stripped of their original meaning, becoming mere representations that serve the spectacle's need for continuous consumption. Modern media thrives on repackaging trauma as a commodity, allowing audiences to consume suffering without fully engaging with its reality. The MAD Magazine cover reduces the traumatic event of Gordy's rampage into a consumable image, transforming it into a product that can be bought, sold, and laughed at.

This aligns with Debord's assertion that in a society dominated by spectacle, individuals become passive consumers of images rather than active participants in reality. In this mediated hyperreality, the line between tragedy and entertainment blurs, as real-world horrors become commodities for public consumption. The cheerful image of the chimpanzee gleefully trampling a birthday cake belies the violent reality of the Gordy's Home! incident, offering a distorted version of events that prioritizes spectacle over substance.

The fact that Jupe frames the MAD Magazine cover in his office alongside posters of his movies is a critical reflection of his internalization of the spectacle. Instead of rejecting how his trauma has been commodified, he embraces it. Jupe's decision to display the MAD Magazine cover as part of his legacy demonstrates how the spectacle doesn't just distort reality – it creates a new version of it. Debord states, "The spectacle presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable, and inaccessible. It says nothing more than: 'That which appears is good, that which is good appears' (Debord, 2014). In other words, because Jupe sees his commodified trauma as a success, he accepts it as part of his identity. His pride in framing the MAD Magazine cover alongside his movie posters reflects the hollow victory that comes with commodification in a spectacle-driven society. While he may appear to have triumphed over his past by turning it into part of his brand, the reality is that he remains trapped within the mechanisms of the spectacle.

By celebrating the commodification of his tragedy, Jupe inadvertently perpetuates the very system that dehumanizes him. His identity is no longer solely his own; it has been shaped and sold by the spectacle. Nope ultimately critiques the troubling ways in which media and capitalism distort human experiences, reducing even the most personal and painful moments into mere products for mass consumption.

Comedy Sketch

When Emerald questions Jupe about the details of the incident, he eagerly describes a *Saturday Night Live* skit rather than the event itself. Laughing and smiling, Jupe reveals his distorted connection to the tragedy, preferring the humorous spectacle to the genuine pain and horror of the experience. This reflects a preference for the commodified version of the Gordy incident over its real impact

Jupe: *You haven't seen the Bad Gordy sketch on SNL? I mean, they pretty much nailed it better than I could. No? Saturday Night Live? Darrell Hammond as Tom. Ana Gasteyer as Phyllis. Cheri Oteri as Mary Jo Elliot. Scott Wolf is the host. He's me. But, of course, the star of the sketch is Chris goddamn Kattan as Gordy, and he is...undeniable, okay? Bit goes like this. Everyone's trying to celebrate Gordy's birthday, but every time Gordy hears something about the jungle...Gordy – Kattan – goes...off. And it's...it's Kattan.He's just crushing it. He is a force of nature. He is killing on that stage. Yeah. It's legendary.*

Legendary shit (00:20:33)

Saturday Night Live (SNL) itself is a long-running American late-night live comedy and variety show, airing on NBC since 1975. Its Famous for its blend of sketch comedy, parodies of current events, and pointed political satire, and features a cast of seasoned and newer comedic actors, a live guest band, and a celebrity guest host. It reflects and satirizes contemporary society, celebrity culture, and politics, entertaining audiences while simultaneously fostering a deeper engagement with current events through a mix of silly and critical sketches.

SNL represents not only the artistic expression of its cast and writers but also the production process of television as an institution. As a cultural institution, SNL transforms contemporary events into digestible entertainment, embodying Debord's (Debord, 2014) observation that "the spectacle presents itself simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as a means of unification". Through its production process and widespread broadcast, SNL converts raw events into marketable content, illustrating Debord's concept that "all that was once directly lived has become mere representation".

The SNL skit about Gordy's Home! epitomizes Debord's assertion that "the spectacle is not a collection of images but a social relation among people, mediated by images". By transforming the tragic incident into comedic performance, the skit exemplifies how the spectacle repackages reality into consumable products. This transformation aligns with Debord's observation that "in the spectacle, a part of the world represents itself to the world and is superior to it". The incident's gravity diminishes to mere entertainment, with Jupe celebrating Chris Kattan's performance rather than acknowledging the event's profound implications.

The skit's comedic framing operates as what Debord describes as "the diplomatic representation of hierarchic society to itself". By converting the Gordy incident into a source of laughter, the spectacle performs its function of distancing viewers from genuine horror, creating what Debord calls "a permanent opium war". This comedic approach not only trivializes the trauma but also fulfills Debord's prediction that "the spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life". Jupe's preference for discussing the SNL skit over the actual tragedy demonstrates what Debord terms "the self-movement of the non-living". His eagerness to highlight the comedic portrayal rather than engage with actual pain reveals how deeply the spectacle has penetrated his understanding of trauma. This repackaging process, as Debord notes, ensures that "reality emerges within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real", prioritizing entertainment value over critical engagement (Debord, 2014).

Through Jupe's reaction, NOPE critiques the insidious nature of the spectacle, challenging us to reflect on the ethics of profiting from pain and the cost of turning human suffering into spectacle. The film invites viewers to consider the true impact of living in a world where even the darkest moments are repackaged as entertainment, urging a deeper engagement with the realities behind the spectacle.

Second Tragedy: Ufo Killing People

Jean Jacket is the name OJ gives to the UFO, a term borrowed from the names of his family's old horses. This UFO is characterized by its saucer-like shape and its high-speed movement among the clouds. At the beginning of the film, Otis Haywood, the father of OJ and Emerald, tragically falls from his horse after being struck by debris from the sky. This debris is later revealed to have originated from Jean Jacket. The incident results in Otis's death in front of OJ. Following this, OJ witnesses their horse, Ghost, being abducted by the UFO.

Initially, the characters in the film view Jean Jacket as an alien spacecraft inhabited by intelligent beings. This perception aligns with the common portrayal of extraterrestrial entities as advanced and sentient in popular media. However, a significant twist occurs midway through the film: it is revealed that Jean Jacket is not an intelligent alien craft but rather a wild, predatory creature. This revelation comes when Jupe, his family, and the visitors from Jupiter's Claim are lifted by Jean Jacket and subsequently shown to be in the process of being digested. As the narrative unfolds, various producers capitalize on the tragedy by transforming it into commodified spectacle in distinct forms, such as:

Feeding attraction

Jupe transformed Jean Jacket into a commercial spectacle by orchestrating a dramatic public display where he fed the UFO using a horse purchased from Haywood Ranch. This transformation into a spectacle involves both diffusion and defusion strategies. Diffusion is evident in Jupe's creation of a novel experience centered around Jean Jacket, which he presents as a captivating alien encounter. By integrating this spectacle into his entertainment offerings, Jupe leverages the public's fascination with extraterrestrial phenomena. The novelty of the UFO as an otherworldly entity is designed to attract attention and generate interest, capitalizing on the allure of the unknown. This approach aligns with the spectacle's tendency to transform unique or extraordinary phenomena into commercially viable experiences.

Defusion is demonstrated through Jupe's use of familiar elements to package the spectacle. Specifically, he employs the concept of a feeding attraction, a format commonly seen in zoos where animals are fed in front of an audience. This familiar setting helps to normalize the extraordinary and unsettling nature of the encounter with Jean Jacket, making it more accessible and engaging for spectators. By presenting the UFO in a context that feels controlled and entertaining, Jupe mitigates the inherent horror of the situation, turning it into a palatable and entertaining event. This strategy of "defusion" aligns with Debord's (Debord, 2014) observation that the spectacle often "presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as instrument of unification".

In this case, the spectacle of the UFO feeding serves as a unifying experience, drawing people together while simultaneously neutralizing the potential for genuine fear or anxiety.

Through these strategies, Jupe not only commodifies the alien presence but also attempts to manage the inherent terror by presenting it within a controlled and familiar format. However, the film's narrative subverts expectations. In the midst of the attraction, Jean Jacket reveals its true nature by lifting all the visitors at Jupiter's Claim, including Jupe and his family. Initially, the film misdirects the audience to believe that Jean Jacket is an alien spacecraft, implying an abduction scenario. The suspense builds as the scene shifts, cutting from the dramatic lift-off to the shocking revelation of Jean Jacket's true nature. Instead of an extraterrestrial ship, the audience discovers that Jean Jacket is a predatory animal. The visitors are shown within the digestive tract of the creature, in the process of being digested. This revelation underscores the disconnect between the spectacle Jupe has created and the true, uncontrollable nature of the creature.

Jupe's spectacle, while designed to entertain and capitalize on public fascination, ultimately fails to control or contain the reality of Jean Jacket. The transformation of Jean Jacket – from its initial portrayal as an advanced, intelligent alien craft to its eventual revelation as a wild, predatory animal – highlights Debord's assertion that the spectacle presents itself as an indisputable and inaccessible reality. By initially portraying Jean Jacket as a high-tech, sophisticated UFO, the spectacle, as Debord argues, 'says nothing more than "that which appears is good, that which is good appears". This manufactured image, presented as truth, obscures the genuine danger posed by Jean Jacket, encouraging passive acceptance from the public and hindering critical engagement with the actual perils involved.

Jupe's attempt to control Jean Jacket through the spectacle reflects Debord's idea that the spectacle is a social relation mediated by images. By prioritizing the image of the creature for entertainment, Jupe constructs a reality that obscures the genuine threat it poses, ultimately alienating himself from the true nature of the situation. Jupe's attempt to manage Jean Jacket through spectacle and defusion demonstrates the limitations and perils of turning profound and uncontrollable phenomena into mere entertainment. This critique underscores the spectacle's impact on how we perceive and engage with the unknown, revealing the gap between marketed illusions and harsh realities.

Chase video

OJ and Emerald, the film's protagonists, initially exhibit a profound attachment to their family ranch, which stands as a testament to their heritage and familial bond. The film poignantly captures their grief following their father Otis Haywood's sudden death. OJ's commitment to preserving the ranch is evident in his refusal to sell it despite financial struggles and his efforts to repurchase horses that were sold off to cover expenses. This dedication underscores the deep emotional connection he has to the family legacy and the land that has been central to their lives. However, the revelation that their father's death was caused by a UFO, which they later name Jean Jacket, dramatically shifts their focus.

Despite the initial shock and mourning, OJ and Emerald become engrossed in the potential for spectacle and profit. They are driven by the idea of capturing the "Oprah shot" – a definitive piece of evidence proving the existence of Jean Jacket. Emerald eagerly discusses the monetary value of such footage, envisioning it as a lucrative opportunity. This pivotal shift from personal grief to the pursuit of spectacle and financial gain marks a significant change in their priorities. This shift aligns with Debord's assertion that "the spectacle concentrates all gazing and all consciousness, effectively shaping individuals' desires and actions" (Debord, 2014). In the pursuit of this spectacle, OJ and Emerald become increasingly focused on capturing the event for external validation and financial gain, rather than confronting their grief and processing their loss.

Furthermore, the digital ecosystem significantly fuels this drive. Established websites and online communities dedicated to UFO sightings and alien encounters motivate them by archiving and promoting alien-related content. These platforms offer incentives such as recognition and even monetary rewards, creating a culture in which capturing and sharing UFO footage is not only encouraged but actively celebrated. Consequently, OJ and Emerald are influenced by this digital environment, which propels them to embark on their chase video project. Their decision to document the UFO encounter is driven in part by a broader online culture that valorizes and monetizes extraterrestrial phenomena. This aligns with Debord's observation that the spectacle alienates individuals from their true selves, their work, and their genuine experiences. By prioritizing

the pursuit of fame and fortune through the spectacle, OJ and Emerald become alienated from their grief, their family history, and the authentic experience of encountering the unknown.

As they begin to plan their approach, OJ and Emerald meticulously prepare to capture footage of the UFO. They become the producers of their own tragedy – placing high-quality cameras around the ranch and hiring a professional cinematographer to ensure they obtain the best possible images. The ranch, which once symbolized their familial heritage, is transformed into a stage for this high-stakes pursuit. This transformation underscores how the spectacle can commodify and instrumentalize even the most personal and intimate spaces. Debord argues that "the spectacle is the true reflection of the production of things, and the false objectification of the producers" (Debord, 2014). In this instance, the ranch, a place of family history and emotional significance, becomes a mere backdrop for the creation of a marketable spectacle, its authentic value subsumed by the pursuit of capturing the perfect image for public consumption.

By presenting the encounter with Jean Jacket as a thrilling action sequence, OJ and Emerald transform a potentially terrifying and life- threatening event into a spectacle for consumption. This portrayal, while designed to be entertaining, obscures the true nature of Jean Jacket, a dangerous predator, reinforces how spectacle alienates individuals from their true selves, their work, and their genuine experiences. In this case, the pursuit of spectacle alienates OJ and Emerald from the genuine fear and awe that the encounter with Jean Jacket should evoke. They become so consumed by the desire to create a captivating narrative that they lose sight of the true danger they face. Through the characters of OJ and Emerald, the film illustrates how the pursuit of spectacle can overshadow genuine human connection, ethical considerations, and a deeper understanding of the world.

Accident photo

The film introduces a TMZ reporter, emblematic of a media culture obsessed with sensationalism and the commodification of personal tragedies. TMZ, a notorious news website, thrives on scandal, controversy, and the relentless pursuit of spectacle. The reporter's role in the film is a stark representation of how far this culture will go to exploit misfortune for profit. Initially, the TMZ reporter arrives at the Haywood Ranch with the clear intention of capitalizing on the mysterious disappearances in the area, unaware that these are the result of Jean Jacket's predatory behavior. His goal is to turn this tragedy into a sensational story, one that would undoubtedly draw public attention and financial gain. However, his pursuit of spectacle takes an ironic and dark turn when he crashes his motorcycle while speeding towards the ranch. The accident leaves him with severe injuries, including broken bones, and in a state of visible distress. Speeding towards the ranch. The accident leaves him with severe injuries, including broken bones, and in a state of visible distress.

In this vulnerable moment, the reporter's response is both shocking and deeply revealing. Instead of accepting OJ's offer of help, he desperately begs OJ to film his broken body. This behavior exemplifies Debord's (Debord, 2014) assertion that "the spectacle is not just a matter of images, but of social relations mediated by images". His immediate concern shifts from his own physical well-being to the potential for capturing a dramatic and sensational image of his own suffering. This request underscores a critical commentary on the Society of the Spectacle: everything, including personal pain and tragedy, can be commodified and turned into a spectacle.

This scene also highlights the pervasive and insidious nature of the spectacle, where nothing is immune from being turned into a commodity. As Debord argues, "The spectacle presents itself simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as a means of unification" (Debord, 2014). The TMZ reporter, a figure who normally exploits the tragedies of others, finds himself commodifying his own pain when the opportunity to create the spectacle he originally sought slips through his fingers. His choice to prioritize creating a shocking spectacle over seeking help illustrates what Debord describes as "the concrete manufacture of alienation" (Debord, 2014), where even in moments of personal crisis, the potential for profit and public attention overrides basic human instincts for self-preservation and dignity.

Moreover, this moment serves as a critique of the broader ethical implications of a culture that values spectacle over humanity. Debord observes that "the spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life" (Debord, 2014). The reporter's willingness to exploit his own suffering for potential financial gain reflects a societal trend where the worth of an individual is increasingly tied to their ability to generate attention and profit. In this sense, the TMZ reporter's actions are not just an example of personal desperation but also a commentary on the dehumanizing effects of living in a society dominated by the spectacle.

The TMZ reporter's actions reveal how digital culture normalizes accident imagery and personal trauma. This aligns with Debord's prediction that “all that once was directly lived has become mere representation” (Debord, 2014). In his haste to capture and broadcast his own accident, he effectively becomes the producer of his misfortune. This behavior exemplifies what Debord terms "the autonomous movement of non-life" (Debord, 2014) where the representation of experience takes precedence over the experience itself. This normalization, propagated through platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter, reinforces the tendency to prioritize capturing and sharing misfortunes over attending to personal safety.

Moreover, this individual-level behavior is further amplified by the broader digital ecosystem, where algorithm-driven platforms continuously valorize and circulate graphic content. Research indicates that social media algorithms prioritize sensational content because they drive higher engagement (Marwick, Boyd, 2011; Tufekci, 2018). This normalization process reinforces Debord's assertion that "reality emerges within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real". In this environment, the graphic display of personal pain becomes routine, and viewers come to expect – and even celebrate – such representations.

Through the TMZ reporter’s demise, NOPE extends its critique beyond Jupe’s commodification of tragedy and into the broader digital ecosystem, where spectacle-driven logic governs human actions. The insatiable demand for viral content – whether from entertainment media, news agencies, or individual content creators – ensures that pain and disaster are not only captured but expected, normalized, and rewarded. This sequence, then, serves as a chilling reminder of the dehumanizing consequences of a world governed by the spectacle: even at the brink of death, participation in the cycle of commodification is not just encouraged but, for some, inevitable.

4. Conclusion

Guy Debord's Society of the Spectacle provides a crucial theoretical framework for understanding how NOPE critiques the pervasive commodification of tragedy. The film demonstrates how genuine, often painful experiences – such as the Gordy’s Home! incident and the revelations surrounding Jean Jacket – are repackaged and sold as marketable spectacles. This transformation is driven not only by traditional media agencies but also by the active participation of individuals, including victims themselves, who become complicit in producing and disseminating their own suffering. Through practices of diffusion and defusion, these diverse producers transform personal tragedy into a consumable product, effectively blurring the line between genuine trauma and entertainment.

Social media further amplifies this commodification by rapidly circulating sensational content and normalizing the consumption of graphic images and personal misfortunes. Online platforms, which valorize and monetize this type of content, reinforce the spectacle’s hold on public perception. This digital ecosystem propels individuals to prioritize capturing and broadcasting their experiences, even at great personal risk. In doing so, they not only contribute to the cycle of commodification but also underscore the dehumanizing effects of a society where the value of human suffering is reduced to mere profit.

Ultimately, NOPE challenges audiences to critically engage with the ethical and societal consequences of this relentless pursuit of spectacle. By interrogating how various producers – and the digital media environment – actively transform personal tragedy into a marketable commodity, the film prompts a deeper reflection on the loss of humanity inherent in such processes and the broader reinforcement of exploitative systems in contemporary culture.

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