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The Horrors of Racism

An analysis of the representation of racism in Jordan Peele's Get Out

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Abstract

This thesis aimed to investigate how Jordan Peele's Get Out (2017) provides social commentary through representation of racism and discrimination in America. In order to examine this representation, I utilized two different approaches. First, I analyzed the narrative through specific scenes in the light of terms and concepts from critical race theory, and explored how these scenes represent black Americans' lived reality. Secondly, I looked at the movie through the lens of the genre conventions, and discussed the way in which *Get Out* utilizes these to provide commentary on racial issues. This thesis shows that the horror movie can be a fitting tool to portray societal issues, as it can inspire change within the viewer.

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Introduction

Jordan Peele's horror movie *Get Out* (2017), was "[…] a huge box office success, grossing over $250 million worldwide" (Landberg, 2017, p.629). This success could potentially be attributed to the political point the movie is trying to convey to the viewers. In the movie, we are introduced to Chris Washington (Daniel Kaluuya), an African American photographer from New York, who is in a relationship with Rose Armitage (Allison Williams), a white woman. They are going on a trip to Rose's family, despite concerns expressed by Chris' friend named Rod (Lil Rel Howery), who works for airport security. The idyllic car ride on their way to the Armitages quickly changes, as they hit a deer with their car. The police officer arrives at the scene, and asks for Chris' identification papers, but Rose refuses, and the officer leaves. When arriving at the house, Chris is introduced to Dean and Missy Armitage. Dean (Bradley Whitford) is a neurosurgeon, and Missy (Catherine Keener) a psychologist who specializes in hypnosis. Later, Rose's brother Jeremy (Caleb Landry Jones) also arrives. The family is not the only ones living in the house. The Armitages have two servants, a housekeeper named Georgina (Betty Gabriel), and a groundskeeper named Walter (Marcus Henderson). Chris quickly realizes that there is something strange going on, especially due to the way Georgina and Walter behave. At night, Missy manages to hypnotize Chris without his consent, introducing him to a sub-conscious state of mind that she calls the sunken place. The next day, a lot of white people arrive at the Armitages' house. They all seem interested in Chris and comes with remarks related to his race. He notices another black man, named Logan King (Lakeith Stanfield), who also behaves in the same strange way as Georgina and Walter. Chris takes a picture of Logan, and his behavior changes. He lunges at Chris urging him to get out. Chris and Rose feel uncomfortable, so they leave for a walk. When they are gone, the partygoers attend an auction, curtesy of Dean Armitage. The auction is not a normal auction, as they are bidding on Chris. A blind man and art dealer named Jim Hudson (Stephen Root) wins the auction. While this was going on, Rose and Chris agreed that they should leave the Armitages house. This does not happen, as when they return to the house, Chris discovers that there is something sinister going on. He attempts to leave but is hypnotized and thrown back into the sunken place. Chris wakes up tied to a chair. Through a video, the process of the "Coagula" is explained. The black brain is removed from the black body and replaced with the white mind. This is a family business, started by Rose's grandparents. Furthermore, it is revealed that Georgina and Walter have been through this procedure, and

they are living with Rose's grandparents' brains in their body. During this, Rod realizes that Chris is missing and attempts to involve the police. They do not believe him, and no help is sent to Chris. Chris then has to escape the house by his own means, killing the Armitages in the process. At the very end, there is a fight for survival between Rose and Chris. A vehicle with a siren approaches, and it is revealed that Rod, and not the police, has come to Chris' rescue (Peele, 2017).

Based on this narrative, it is clear that the movie attempts to make a comment on racial relations and discrimination in America. When watching the movie, I got interested in exploring how the movie's representation of racial issues in America mirrors reality, and how the movie operates within the genre conventions to create a form of racial resistance. Based on this interest, this thesis will attempt to answer the following question: "How does *Get Out* discuss racial issues in the American society through its narrative and genre, and how does the movie contribute to racial resistance?"

There are many critics who have offered interesting and enlightening perspectives of the representation of race in *Get Out.* Due to the vast amount of literature on the matter, it was necessary to pick out the theories and opinions that would contribute to my reading and analysis of the movie. To explore the racial relations in the movie, I have applied terms from critical race theory. To discuss how the movie performs within the conventions of the genre, I have applied Robin Wood's (2020) theory and description of the American horror genre (p. 108-135). In addition, Wood's (2020) term "the Other" (p.111), used when referring to the monster in horror, is essential to this thesis and will be discussed in detail in chapter one and two. When it comes to how the movie can be seen as a form of racial resistance, Alison Landsberg's (2018) article "Horror vérité: politics and history in Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017)" (p. 629-642), and Anthony Ryan Hatch's (2017) essay "New Technologies of Resistance" (p. 125-132) have been especially helpful in the creation of my argument.

In chapter one, I will present the essential theory that will be applied to the analysis of the movie. The chapter is divided into two subchapters. First, I will be defining the terms microaggressions, stereotypes, white privilege, double consciousness, systemic racism, and racial resistance. There are, of course, many other terms from critical race theory that could have been utilized in this thesis. However, I had to make a selection, and these terms were chosen because I deemed them most appropriate for the argument and analysis I have attempted to make. They are presented in this order as it aligns with the way they appear in the analysis. The second subchapter discusses the conventions of the horror genre, and here I also made a selection of terms and theories based on their relevance to the problem statement.

In chapter two, I have selected some scenes to analyze in light of the terms from critical race theory, that have been presented in chapter one. I analyze how these terms can be applied to different aspects of the narrative, and how it comments on racism in America. The plot twist in the movie allows for the scenes to be seen with a different perspective. To access these different perspectives, I will analyze the scenes from what I have called the "pre-revelation" and the "post-revelation" position. This allows me to uncover anterior motives for portraying these types of racisms and racial issues, and these are presented in chapter two.

In chapter three, I look at how *Get Out* uses the genre conventions of the horror movie to emphasize social and political commentary on racial issues. Furthermore, I place the movie within the subgenre of horror vérité, and discuss how the movie, as a combination of narrative, genre, and technology, can be seen as a technology of racial resistance.

Chapter 1 - Theory

In this chapter, I will present the theoretical terms that will later be applied in the analysis of the movie. These terms are essential to the analysis, and they will therefore be defined in detail.

Microaggressions and stereotypes

One of the forms of racism people meet in contemporary society is microaggressions. They can be described as "[…] brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). They are often "[…] subtle and covert forms of racism that typically appear to be unintentional or result from ignorance or insensitivity on the part of the perpetrator" (Wynter, 2020, subchap. 7, para. 1). Microaggressions are still highly discriminatory and racist, even if the perpetrator is unaware of the severity. It is therefore very necessary to bring attention to them. Microaggressions can be divided into subcategories based on the type of discrimination they represent, and Sue (2007) proposes three different subcategories of microaggressions. The first subcategory is the microassault, characterized by "[…] a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions" (Sue et al. 2007, p. 274). They are also explicitly racially motivated, as they could be considered closest to "[…] what has been called "old fashioned" racism conducted on an individual level" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). The second subcategory is called microinsults, which "[…] is characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). Even though it might be unknown to the person uttering these insults, they "[…] clearly convey a hidden insulting message to the recipient of color" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). The last subcategory is called microinvalidation. It is "[…] characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). An example of such microinvalidations could be that a person of color can be told that they speak English well and with no prevalent accent, or asked where they were born. (Sue et al., 2007).

Many microaggressive acts can trace their origins to the underlying stereotypes about African Americans and people of color. This especially applies to the people who enage in microaggressive behavior, as they "[…] are likely to hold negative stereotypes toward other groups […]" (Sissoko & Kevin, 2021, p. 87), reinforcing the "us vs. them" mentality that describes these racist acts. Taylor (2016) identifies some common stereotypes that affect African Americans, such as that they are "[…] particularly dangerous, impervious to pain and suffering, careless and carefree, and exempt from empathy, solidarity, or basic humanity […]" (p. 3). Though microaggressions are downright derogatory and reinforces harmful stereotypes, there are instances where the person who utters these microaggressions might not have meant it in a harmful way (Wynter, 2020, subchap. 7, para. 1). Yet these utterances, as well as the person they came from, could still be interpreted as having malicious intent, due to its close relation to the stereotypes upon which they are built. In W.E.B. Du Bois' and Chandler's (2015) work on double consciousness, one can see an example of racially motivated microaggressions. When commenting on his encounters with white people, he states that:

> "They approach me in a half hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or
> compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a
> problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at
> Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil?" (p.67).

Through this, one can see that Du Bois' experience with white people comes in the form of interrogations that conceal the question about what it is like to be black and American, and that these comments reflect a sense of othering. These types of interrogations are also present in *Get Out* and contribute to the representation of racism in the movie. I will therefore discuss specific scenes where Chris experiences discrimination and examine these scenes in the light of microaggressions and stereotypes. I will also be commenting on how the Coagula process, the process of transferring a white brain into a black body, is a representation of double consciousness.

White privilege

White supremacy and white privilege are terms that are dependent on each other. White supremacy has its origins in post-slavery United States, where it "[...] was the response to the supposed threat of "Negro domination" - the idea that the end of slavery and the reforms of Reconstruction would reverse the roles of Blacks and whites" (Taylor, 2016, p. 209). This

attempt at preserving the racial roles where white people saw themselves as and acted as superior, meant removing black people from places of influence, such as politics, in turn making it difficult to access money, which induced financial pressure on the black community. In addition, it was created to keep the fears of black people within the white community, maintaining the superiority created in the slavery era (Taylor, 2016, p. 210). In short, one can say that the white supremacy is the system in which racism towards other people of color operates.

Grillo and Wildman (1991) states that "to people of color, who are victims of racism/white supremacy, race is a filter through which they see the world" (p.398). This does not apply to white people as "whites do not look at the world through filter of racial awareness […]" (Grillo & Wildman, 1991, p. 398). This is because whiteness is seen as the norm due to the white supremacy, and the option to disregard race is a part the privilege of being white. Even though a white person might not be racist and be against white supremacy, one still benefits from the system only because of one's skin color. In *Get Out*, the white characters seem aware of how the American system is based on racism. Yet, these characters make many uninformed actions that convey a discriminatory message. Therefore, in chapter two, the term white privilege becomes essential in the analysis of the actions of different characters.

Double consciousness

The concept of double consciousness, is concerned with how the African American population faces a double reality, where on one hand, they are black, with all the history and trauma it entails, and on the other hand, they are Americans. (Du Bois & Chandler, 2015, p.67-75). This duality is impossible to escape according to Du Bois and Chandler (2015), who describes this in the following way: "One ever feels his two-ness, - an American, a Negro two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (p. 68). This can be interpreted as America not seeing black people and other people of color as American enough. They are American, yet face violence and racism for not being capable, according to the white population, at performing the role of American fully due to them not being white. Du Bois and Chandler (2015) further connects this inability to the lack of opportunities given to black people and states the following: "He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to both be a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without

losing the opportunity of self-development" (p. 69). Here, Du its explained how, as a black person in America, one cannot escape this double reality, because both aspects of their identity intersect. He states that as a black man, he will encounter racism. As an American, he should have equal opportunities for self-development, yet he will not, due to his racial background. This term is applicable to *Get Out*, as there are instances in the movie where the is an allusion to the duality an African American person experiences in society. I will also be commenting on how the Coagula process, the process of transferring a white brain into a black body, is a representation of double consciousness, as there exists the representation of both – the white American brain, and the black American body.

Systemic racism

Du Bois' and Chandler' (2015) ideas about double consciousness can be directly linked to systemic and institutionalized racism, due to this type of racism reducing black people's access to the same opportunities. Braveman et al. (2022) describes systemic, and by extension, structural racism as a "[…] pervasively and deeply embedded in and throughout systems, laws, written or unwritten policies, entrenched practices, and established beliefs and attitudes that produce, condone, and perpetuate widespread unfair treatment of people of color" (p.171). Furthermore, Bonilla-Silva (2021) describes that even though the system is inherently racist, the people and acts that make up the system are "[…] living, real things enacted and carried out by individuals, most of whom (particularly on the White side) engage in *racial acts* without much thought or clear intent" (p. 519). He continues to explain that the system is built up by norms that has been a subject to change over time, and that the change brings "[…] a new racial structure with new ways of conducting race business […]" (Bonilla-Silva, 2021, p. 520) and that "[…] actors tend to follow them which reproduces racial domination" (Bonilla-Silva, 2021, p. 520). There is also a difference between being white and being a person of color in a society that is built on systemic racism. Bonilla-Silva argues that everyone is a part of systemic racism but that they have different roles. "[…] not all Whites participate in SR to the same extent and degree and some even fight against it" (Bonilla-Silva, 2021, p. 520).

The American system is inherently racist because it is based on " […] deeply rooted, unfair systems that sustain the legacy of former overtly discriminatory practices, policies, laws, and beliefs" (Braveman et al., 2022, p. 172). "For 400 years […] Black people were brutalized in the slave owners' farms, were raped, murdered, and generally treated as chattel"

(Iheme, 2020, p. 225). The treatment black people received as a result of a sort of imagined white superiority has left marks very difficult to erase, resulting in an American system stained by racism. It is so deeply "[…] embedded in systems that it often is assumed to reflect the natural, inevitable order of things" (Braveman et al., 2022, p. 172). In chapter two, I will discuss how *Get Out* alludes to the origins of systemic racism by including imagery and a narrative that reflects slavery, effectively showing the link between today's society and the society from which it originated.

This presence of attitudes motivated by racism, as well as influence by it in politics are often seen in different sectors of the American government. One of these areas where systemic racism and discrimination is common practice, is in the American law enforcement. Studies show that "There is abundant evidence that race plays an important role in law enforcement officers' decision to use lethal force" (Sivaraman et al., 2020, p. 569). Statistics from the years 2009 to 2012 shows that black people are disproportionately affected by police brutality, "[…] with a fatality rate 2.8 times higher among blacks than whites" (DeGue et al., 2016, p.S173), where "[…] black victims were more likely to be unarmed […]" (DeGue et al., 2016, p. S173). Statistics from 2012 to 2018 estimates that, though there were more white men than black men killed by police during this period, black men are killed at a much higher rate than white men. "During this period, Black men were killed by police at a rate of at least 2.1 per 100 000 population, Latino men were killed by police at a rate of at least 1.0 per 100 000, and White men were killed by police at a rate of at least 0.6 per 100 000" (Edwards et al., 2018, para. 23). Pleskac et al. (2018) offers research on what makes a police officer more likely to shoot a black person, armed or unarmed, and concludes with that "[…] the race effect is more pronounced for gun objects, perhaps reflecting the nature of the stereotype expectancy that drives the behavioral bias (i.e., that Blacks are expected to have guns, not that Whites are expected to have non-guns)" (p.1323). These results reflect how the system is inherently racist and biased, because it subsists on harmful stereotypes that often have dire consequences.

Closely related to police brutality and violence is the presence of systemic racism in the statistics of incarcerations in America. "Nearly one in three black men will ever be imprisoned, and nearly half of black women currently have a family member or extended family member who is in prison" (Wildeman & Wang, 2017, p.1464). According to Taylor (2016), "[…] the imprisonment of Black men has led to social stigma and economic marginalization, leaving many with few options but to engage in criminal activity as a means of survival" (p. 3) The American law enforcement and justice system becomes a loop one is

unable to escape, due to the constant threat of being mistreated because of racial backgrounds.

Also related to systemic racism in the encounters with the police and justice system is the tendency to treat African Americans with less urgency or respect, and on some occasions, they are ignored all together. Hatch (2017) states that there are "[…] multiple forms of institutional racisms that impinge on the civil and human rights of African Americans and identified problems of heightened police surveillance and violence, mass incarceration, racist media representations, unequal medical treatment, entrenched poverty, and environmental racism" (p, 125). Furthermore, "[…] the voices and experiences of people of color are often silenced or discredited when they speak truth about the effects of individual and institutionalized racisms […]" (Hatch, 2017, p. 128). This silencing of voices hinders important experiences to be told, further cementing the systemic racism in America. Originating from the suppression of black voices come the need for their voices to be heard through other means. These means could be written narratives, social media, or motion pictures, and these "[…] technologies enable iconic cultural reproductions of racist realities to speak on their behalf" (Hatch, 2017, p. 128). In chapter two I will discuss the movie in relation to systemic racism in law enforcement. In chapter three, the concept of technologies will become a big part of the argument I make when I attempt to answer the part of my problem statement that is about how the genre and narrative functions together to create a form of racial resistance.

Racial resistance

The way the justice system and the law enforcement treat black Americans have not gone unnoticed, as "police departments throughout the country have come under intense public scrutiny because of police brutality and fatal shootings […]" (Bell, 2008, p.669). The sheer amount of violence causes outrage, and people take to the streets in protest, demanding a change in the system (Bell, 2008, p.669). The protesting against the systemic racism present in America can be considered racial resistance. But protest can come in many ways. As mentioned above; different technologies are utilized to promote the suppressed experiences of black Americans and can therefore also be used in protest. These technologies are many, and even the concept of race has itself "[…] has been conceptualized as a technology whose cultural meanings are malleable over time and place" (Hatch, 2017, p. 127). Essentially, race becomes a tool, or technology, enabling racist systems due to its

history, which has applied value to race, and where one race has been historically interpreted as superior. Coleman (2009) describes it in the following way: "Race as technology recognizes the proper place of race not as a trait but as a tool—for good or for ill—to reconceptualize how race fits into a larger pattern of meaning and power" (pp. 184-185). In other words, how people and systems relate to and put a value to race, "[…] are the material practices that make racisms possible: the material linkage between the superstructures of white supremacy and African American bodies. This is what gives technologies their political power" (Hatch, 2017, p. 126). Technologies are utilized in acts of racial resistance. In contemporary times, personal technology, such as smartphones and computers have become an essential part of racial resistance. Using these, people can easily access information, and use "[…] social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to communicate with one another about what is going on in their own communities, nationally and globally, and when, where, and how to protest against racist violence" (Hatch, 2017, p. 130). Hatch (2017) describes this as a positive and important technology for racial resistance within the black community, because it "[…] flattens hierarchies within social movements, removes the media filters that select particular stories for promotion and circulation, and has the potential to expand movement participation" (p.131). Though there are many positive sides of using these sorts of technologies in the fight against racism, there are some unfortunate sides to it. Hatch (2017) states that "[…] police organizations are using social media platforms to conduct surveillance on African American protest movements, a recasting of old strategies with new technologies" (p. 130). Police involvement in surveilling black activism online can be seen it further cementing the systemic racism, as it offers no area of escaping the constant threat of being exposed to racist treatment. This is essential in my reading of technologies in the movie, and in chapter three, I will be discussing the way in which the movie itself can be seen as an act of racial resistance, by using the movie, or motion picture, as a technology to achieve it.

Conventions of the horror genre

The horror genre, and especially the American horror movie, is built up by certain genre conventions that make it perfect for commenting on societal anxieties and fears. It has also been "[…] a reliable barometer of America's cultural degeneracy and social deterioration" (Wynter, 2022, introduction, para. 1). This deterioration can come from fears and can emerge from ideas or thoughts that society does not discuss due to the possibility of rejection and

ostracization. Therefore, one might define the aim of the horror genre as the following: "[…] the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses: its reemergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, the "happy ending" (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression" (Wood, 2020, p.113). Based on this, it can be difficult to pinpoint exactly what horror is, because all societies, and individuals within those societies, repress different things. Therefore, what one person might interpret as horror, could be different from another person's perception of horror, all based on societal and cultural differences. There is however one fear that is used as a motif in almost every horror movie, namely concept of otherness.

In the following paragraphs, I will be discussing the different genre conventions, and to do this, I will utilize Robin Wood's (2020) article called "An Introduction to the American Horror Film" (p.108-135) along with other sources to further explain the concepts. I will also be relating these conventions to race and discrimination. These terms and definitions will aid my discussion in chapter 3, where I will attempt to answer the second half of my problem statement, namely: how does the movie use the genre conventions to comment on racial issues, and how can the movie be seen as a form of racial resistance?

Firstly, Wood (2020, p. 116) proposes that one of the main conventions of the horror genre is the idea of normality. His definition of normality is "[…] conformity to the dominant social norms […]" (Wood, 2020, p. 116). According to Wood (2020), what constitutes normality in a horror movie is very repetitive. It is the nuclear family, the closed and heterosexual relationship, and institutions such as law enforcement and the church (p.117). What perhaps could be defined as the main convention of a horror movie is that "[…] normality is threatened by the Monster" (Wood, 2020, p.116), and therefore the relationship between the two essential parts is important. Wood (2020) considers "[…] the figure of the doppelgänger, alter ego, or double […]" (p.117) as the most usual form through which the relationship is portrayed. In addition, Wood (2020) mentions the "Terrible house" (p. 126) as a genre convention as well. He goes on to state that "[…] it represents an extension or "objectification" of the personalities of the inhabitants" (Wood, 2020, p.126).

The monster can be seen as a personification of a repressed fear, and it takes the shape of otherness. "The Other" (Wood, 2020, p.111) is also a representation of how fear operates within culture, and how it is linked to repression and subsequently oppression of "the Other" (Wood, 2020, p.113). Wood (2020) defines the concept of otherness through the psychoanalytic perspective. He states: "Its psychoanalytic significance resides in the fact that it functions not simply as something external to the culture or to the self, but also as what is

repressed (but never destroyed) in the self and projected outwards in order to be hated or disowned" (Wood, 2020, p. 111) This definition makes for an understanding of how monsters are created within the horror genre. They are brought to life from the fears that society represses, and are then projected out towards someone or something, a nonhuman object or a human (or human like creature), that is perceived as different from oneself. From the repression, comes the fear of "the Other". As a result, "The Other" is with faced with oppression, and with that comes hate from the society that represses them. Wood (2020) presents a list discussing how the fear of the other results in personification on screen. He mentions other people, the woman, the proletariat, other cultures, ethnic groups, ideological and political systems other than one's own, sexualities that deviate from society's norm, and children (pp. 112-113). Furthermore, I would like to especially focus on "the Other" represented by other people, other cultures, and ethnic groups, and relate it to racism in America. Throughout the history of filmmaking, there has been "[…] the intractable presence of "negative stereotypes" in the film industry's depiction of blacks" (Snead, MacCabe & West, 1994, p.1). These negative stereotypes undoubtedly come from what Snead, MacCabe and West (1994) explains: "from the very first films, black skin on screen became a complex code for various things, depending on the social self-conception and positioning of the viewer; it could as easily connote superiority and self-regard as black inferiority" (p. 2). As described in chapter one, where I defined the terms for critical race theory, there are a lot of racism in America that leads to the othering of black Americans. Pinedo (1997) mentions that when movies use a racial minority as the monster, it "[…] plays openly on prevailing cultural anxieties [...]" (p. 112-113), and a repressed fear due to anxieties then takes the shape of a monster coded as a black person. There are however critics who claims that the contemporary horror movie does not use racially coded monsters. Halberstam (1995) states that "[…] within contemporary horror, the monster, for various reasons […] show […] less clearly the signs of class and race" (chap. 1, para. 8). Furthermore, this notion is shared by Pinedo (1997), who states that "race is a structuring absence in the milieu of the contemporary horror film where monsters, victims, and heroes are predominantly white, a racially unmarked category" (p.111). Halberstam (1995) argues that coding the monster as a racial minority is a "discursive minefield" (chap. 1, para. 9). The reason for this is that since "[…] race has been so successfully gothicized within our recent history, filmmakers and screenplay writers tend not to want to make a monster who is defined by a deviant racial identity" (Halberstam, 1995, chap. 1 para. 9). Halberstam (1995) continues to explain what is meant by a discursive minefield, claiming that "[…] the difference between representing racism and representing

race is extremely tricky to navigate" (chap.1, para. 10). This can relate to the way *Get Out* represents the other through race. This will be discussed further in chapter three.

A horror movie can be about racism even if the movie does not code the monster as a person of color. Here, it is beneficial to discuss race horror. Means Coleman (2023) defines race horror, or rather, black horror, as horror movies that "[…] have an added narrative focus that calls attention to racial identity, in this case, Blackness - Black culture, history, ideologies, experiences, politics, language, humor, esthetics, style, music, and the like" (p.8). Means Coleman (2023) continues by defining black horror as "black film" (p.8), and describes it as being "[…] about Black experiences and cultural traditions – a cultural milieu and history swirling around and impacting Blacks' lives in America. Black film becomes such when its iconography, themes, expressions, tones, allusions, and stories emerge out of Blackness, not as an object but as a subject" (p.8). In other words, black film and black horror are about what it is like to be black. They are portraying the black experience through all parts of the narrative. Especially do they focus on racism, and as mentioned above, horror movies are about repressions. These movies provide important commentary on how the system treats people differently based on skin tone, and it displays it from the perspective of those who experience it. Pinedo (1997) uses postmodern horror and race horror interchangeably and mentions that "the postmodern horror film violates the assumption that we live in a predictable world by demonstrating that we live in a minefield, a world in which the ideological construct of safety systematically unravels" (p.112). To strengthen the notion that safety vanishes, the postmodern horror movie places its narrative in a situation or place where it is less expected and it achieves this because it "[…] seeks to disrupt everyday life and supplant security with paranoia […]" (Pindeo, 1997, p. 112). It does this by placing the horror movie's motif, the threatening of normality, in an "[…] ideologically safe environment: the rural, innocent pastoral realm, or the suburb […]" (Pinedo, 1997, p. 112). It does this to avoid association with the cityscapes, where the threat of violence is more prevalent and expected (Pinedo, 1997, p. 112). By placing the narrative in a suburban house, the expectancy of disruption of the safe and normal is less expected. There are also horror movies that somewhat comments on blackness, but their aim is not to comment on racism and the black experience. These movies are called "Blacks in horror" (Means Coleman, 2023, p. 7). These horror movies have some black characters, but "[…] have, historically, and typically, been produced by non-Black filmmakers for mainstream consumption" (Means Coleman, 2023, p.7). This does not apply to *Get Out*, but defining it makes it clearer what kind of horror movie the black horror movie is, and what it is not.

There are however difficulties when it comes to what should be considered a horror movie, as Neale (2000) explains that horror movies are often difficult to distinguish from other similar genres such as crime movies, adventure movies, science fiction and fantasy (p.92). This is due to the conventions of the genre as mentioned above. Wood (2020) proposes that the categorization of a horror movie cannot be completely rigid, as the conventions can be shared with other genres. He calls this "The Reactionary Wing" and it describes the way in which the conventions of the horror genre can bleed into other similar genres (p.129). He lists a few motifs that are often shared with other genres to explain this phenomenon. First, regardless of the compassion one might have towards monsters in horror movies, they are often always coded as evil through gruesome appearance and a threatening presence. This can be seen in genres such as fantasy and science fiction. There is almost always a fight between good versus evil, and the evil is often some sort of monster (or alien, in most science fiction movies) that has evil represented by its looks (Wood, 2020, p.129-130). Secondly, he discusses the audience's sympathetic feelings towards a monster, and that when a monster is represented my something nonhuman, such as "[…] a mass of viscous black slime […]" (Wood, 2020, p.130), the tendency to sympathize weakens. Lastly, Wood (2020) mentions Christianity or what "[…] it signifies within the Hollywood cinema and the dominant ideology" (p.130), in addition to "the confusion (in terms of what the film wishes to regard as "monstrous") of repressed sexuality with sexuality itself" (p. 130). The movie *Get Out* has been placed and nominated for awards in many different genres, other than the one the producer intended for it. Discussions of where the movie has been placed on the spectrum of genres will be further investigated in chapter three, where I will argue for the movie being placed in the genre of horror, but more specifically the subgenre "horror vérité" (Landberg, 2017).

Chapter 2 – Analysis of *Get Out*

The plot of the movie makes it difficult to determine the motivation for displaying racially discriminatory behavior, statements, and attitudes. As mentioned earlier, the Armitages and the members of the "Order of the Coagula" are deliberately hunting down black people in order to use their bodies as a biological shell to house their own white minds. This essential information about the malicious intent is withheld and not revealed before the end of the movie. This influences how the actions of the white characters can be read and analyzed, since the revelation can provide new points of view. It opens for a comparative analysis and interpretation of certain scenes and themes. Therefore, I will be referring to what I have decided to call "pre-revelation", and "post-revelation" in the part of the analysis when I find it necessary for the understanding and reading of racism in the movie. "Pre-revelation" is the part of the narrative taking place before Chris and the audience is shown the video explaining why he has been chosen for the coagula process (Peele, 2017, 01:13:14). I decided on this particular scene as it is pivotal to the understanding of why certain scenes that portray racial discrimination were included, as they aid in the social and political commentary. This scene also changes the way previous scenes can be interpreted, and examples of the difference in interpretation will be discussed in this chapter. "Post-revelation" is comprised of the scenes following the explanation of the coagula transplant (Peele, 2017, 01:13:14), and it will mostly be used as a term for describing how certain scenes from "pre-revelation" can be seen in a different light trough the "post-revelation" perspective.

The following analysis is grouped together in smaller sections. These are titled after the terms that will be discussed in relation to the representation of racism in the movie. The subchapters are called microaggressions, double consciousness, systemic racism, and racial resistance. These terms, including white privilege and stereotypes, will be used in the analyzation of other terms than its own delegated subchapter. This is because the presence of these terms exemplified on screen occurs simultaneously and can illuminate each other.

Microaggressions

This change in interpretation from "pre-revelation" to "post-revelation" is especially important in the reading of the microaggressive comments and actions made by white characters. This is due to the nature of microaggressions, being that they are often performed by someone who does not realize that their behavior and actions are racist (Wynter, 2020,

subchap. 7, para. 1). There is also a presence of many microaggressive comments that is enabled by stereotypes. If one sees the actions and comments before the revelation, the white characters can be seen as unintentionally racist because they are affected by their own whiteness. They can be interpreted as trying to be overly nice and welcoming towards Chris, resulting in statements in the shape of microaggressions. In the following paragraphs, I will analyze the microaggressions and stereotypes coming from Rose, Dean and Jeremy, and the members of the Order of the Coagula.

Rose is an interesting character to focus on when discussing white privilege and microaggressions. Within the first few minutes of Rose's screentime, the viewer can see her actions being affected by white privilege. The scene where this is prevalent is when we first see Chris and Rose together (Peele, 2017, 06:39 – 08:29). They are discussing if Chris has remembered to pack all the necessary items when she notices that he seems uncomfortable. She walks over to him and sits down on his bed. Chris stands at the foot of the bed looking down on her. When Chris expresses that he is concerned with the Armitages not knowing he is black, she responds "No. Should they?" (Peele, 2017, 07:22 - 7:26). Chris then states that he thinks it would be appropriate to mention his race to her parents, and she follows up with "Mom, Dad, my, um, my… my black boyfriend will be coming up this weekend, and I just don't want you to be shocked… that he's a black man" (Peele, 2017, 07:37 - 7:47). To explain his own concerns with meeting Rose's parents, he states "You said I was the first black guy you ever dated. […] Yeah, so this is uncharted territory for 'em. You know, I don't want to get chased off the lawn with a shotgun" (Peele, 2017, 07:48 - 7:56). Kevin Wynter (2022) discusses the importance of this line, claiming that Chris "[…] is referring to well-documented episodes of racial terror and intimidation in on the ledger of American history" (subchap. 4, para, 2). A part of white privilege discusses the option white people have to see the world as being unaffected by race. Without taking her actual malicious intent behind this utterance into consideration, this statement shows exactly that. In this situation, she does not think that Chris' race matters, and makes a condescending comment about Chris' concerns. Due to her own skin color, she manages to distance herself from the concept of race and the implications one can encounter if one's skin color is not white. Rose undermines Chris' concerns about meeting a white family because to her, the world she lives in is not affected by race and racism the same way as Chris' is. This can be called a microinvalidation, which was previously described as ways of interacting that conveyed a message where a person of color's experience of the world was negated or nullified (Sue et al. 2007). By not taking

Chris' concerns seriously, she denies that Chris' concerns come from his lived experience as a black man, and subsequently makes fun of him for having a different reality to her.

Looking at this interaction from a "pre-revelation" perspective, Rose's intentions with these statements is that she is trying to make Chris comfortable with going to her parents' house by ensuring him that they are not racist, and that these comments results in microaggressions due to her own racial ignorance. However, if one looks at this interaction "post-revelation", it becomes clear that she is trying to make him comfortable for the purpose of luring him to visit her parents, since she after all is "[…] not an ally, she is a slave catcher" (Poll, 2018, p. 84). Although not shown on screen, one can imagine that Chris is not convinced by her attempts at making him comfortable with the situation, which subsequently makes him uncomfortable. "Post-revelation" makes the "pre-revelation" Rose's supposed ignorance to race due to white privilege carry a different meaning. She is fully aware that she needs to convince him that her family is not racist so that she can bring him to the house. In order to obtain that trust, she deliberately says words that are supposed to calm Chris and ease his concerns. Rose is fully aware of the implications Chris can face when meeting her white family, showing that she is indeed aware of how different races can conjure discrimination and racism. The words she uses are however shrouded in microaggressions, showing that she is very affected by white privilege, even though she is racially aware. Including this in the movie makes room for commentary on how even if white people are aware of racial issues, they can still be very affected by white privilege to the point where they are unknowingly coming with discriminatory and racist statements. *Get Out* also discusses white privilege through the presence of horror, or rather the threat of horror in the form of racism, for Chris as a black man, and the lack thereof for Rose as a white woman. "[…] White people are incapable of recognizing that horror can be enfolded into their everyday lives, that horror can be constitutive of the everyday. […] for White people, the experience of horror is unexpected and contingent, not foundational to their identity and world view" (Poll, 2018, p.69). According to this notion, "pre-revelation" Rose would not be affected by this view of the world, and therefore she is expected to perform acts that are instigated by white privilege.

The characters Dean Armitage is also seen performing microaggressive acts that are also affected by white privilege and stereotypes. When Rose and Chris first arrive to the house, Dean wants to take Chris for a tour around the house. During this tour, he makes comments regarding the decoration coming from other cultures (Peele, 2017, 16:19 – 17:00). The following conversation between him and Chris shows the white tendency to approach

other cultures as something they can take part in and also take with them. Dean, while showing off two sculptures he had bought on holiday, he says the following: "Picked these up in Bali. It's, uh, pretty eclectic. I'm a… I'm a traveler, and I can't help it, I… I keep bringing souvenirs back. It's… such a privilege to be able to experience another person's culture. You know what I'm saying?" (Peele, 2017, 16:43 - 17:00). Wynter (2022) argues that the tour of the house and the showing of the artefacts "[…] suggests that white privilege is rooted in colonialist logic. The objects are all emblems of access and unimpeded movement into other cultural and geographical spaces" (subchap. 6, para, 3). By stating that it is a privilege to be able to experience another culture and also remove artefacts from that culture is an attitude passed down from colonial times, where the white people invaded other cultures and imposed their own culture on them. This line is also "[…] an important early indication of the mind-set that leads them to believe that literally hijacking the body from another race is perfectly acceptable" (Murphy, 2020, chap. 5, para. 22). Because stealing other people's culture and imposing one's own is exactly what happens in the movie. This could be called medical colonization, because a black body from another culture is stolen, the mind which holds the culture is removed, and being replaced with a white mind holding another culture. In other words, history repeats itself. White culture is imposed on black, but in a more sinister and gruesome way.

After this conversation, the tour around the house continues, and Chris is introduced to Georgina and Walter. Dean takes Chris out for a walk in the garden, where he expresses understanding for the way having live-in workers doing manual labor for them looks like a modern take on slavery (Peele, 2017, 17:00 - 19:06). He says "I know what you're thinking. […] White family, black servants. It's a total cliché. […] we hired Georgina and Walter to help care for my parents. When they died, uh, I just, I-I-I couldn't bear to let them go. I mean, but, boy, do I hate the way it looks" (Peele, 2017, 18: 19 - 18:50). Through a "pre-revelation" perspective it seems that Dean as a general understanding for how having Georgina and Walter working for them mirrors enslavement. "Post-revelation", it becomes clear that this is just a cover up to make Chris loose the suspicions he would get from seeing the two black people working manual labor for a white family. It is also interesting that he says that he hates the message it sends, since they essentially are his mother and father. Dean seems to realize that what he is discussing with Chris is racist. He further tries to convince him and saving his own image by saying the following: "by the way, I-I would've voted for Obama for a third term if I could. Best president in my lifetime. Hands down" (Peele, 2017, 18:55 – 19:01). This information, especially coming right after the lines about having black workers,

carries microaggressive connotations. Firstly, it is a microaggressive statement because it is used as an excuse. Through such statements, "[…] white people attempt individually to excuse themselves from the functioning of a racist society" (Ilott, 2020, chap. 8, para. 4). Dean tries to excuse himself from the racist connotations of having Georgina and Walter working for them by saying that he would vote for Obama again. In other words, he is saying that he cannot be racist because he thinks Obama was a great president. Secondly, it can be linked to the following statement Du Bois and Chandler (2014) made about what it is like to black in America: "[…] I know an excellent colored man in my town […]" (p. 67). Through this statement, he insinuates that when white people are coming with positive commentary on a person of color, they are less likely to be perceived as racist. The same thing is happening in the conversation between Chris and Dean. Dean is trying to excuse himself by saying that he liked Obama, a black man. It becomes a microaggression because, due to his partiality towards Obama, Dean cannot be racist in his own eyes. Wynter (2022) also comments on this, stating that it "[…] is really just another version of the all-too familiar colorblind claim, "I have Black friends, so how can I be racist?"" (subchap. 4, para. 3).

There is also the presence of stereotyping black people in the movie. One instance of this comes from Rose's brother Jeremy. During dinner on the first night Chris spends with the Armitages, Jeremy becomes intoxicated on alcohol and asks Chris if he is into martial arts (Peele, 2017, 21:50 - 26:06). Rose reacts immediately to this, but Jeremy does not stop. Chris answers "Yeah, nah, too brutal for me" (Peele, 2017, 24:23). Jeremy does not seem happy with this answer and follows up with "You ever get into street fights as a kid?" (Peele, 2017, 24:27 - 24:29). Through this, Jeremy is "[…] implying that Chris was a ghetto child running wild" (Means Coleman, 2023, p. 319). Chris responds that the did attend training for judo for a short period as a child. After a few more interactions between Chris and Jeremy, Jeremy prompts Chris to stand up. He goes over to Chris and grabs his arm. Chris deescalates the situation by saying "Yo, I got a rule: no-no play-fighting with drunk dudes" (Peele, 2017, 25:43 - 25:46). This interaction fronts the idea that black men have been historically stereotyped as violent (Howard et al., 2021, para. 1), and Jeremy, being drunk and influenced by white privilege, does not seem to find this racist, only that he is showing interest. Him being affected by white privilege becomes visible in the following line: "You're dating my sister, right? […] I can't get to know the guy?" (Peele, 2017, 24:05 - 24:14). He uses what he believes to be true about black people, and as a result he stereotypes Chris. A "post-revelation" reading of this scene can reveal that Jeremy could be aware of his discriminatory actions, but that it is intentional. It can also be seen as foreshadowing, as it could be that

Jeremy was attempting to uncover Chris' knowledge with martial arts in case there were complications with the coagula procedure, and he would fight his way out.

The members of the Order of the Coagula also stereotype Chris, this happens during the scene where Rose and Chris walks around the property and are introduced to the members of Order (Peele, 2017, 42:25 – 43:58). An older, white man asks "You, uh, you ever play golf?" (Peele, 2017, 42:46). When Chris responds that he doesn't, the old man continues to say that he knows Tiger Woods and expresses a wish to see how Chris would swing the golf club. By asking Chris if he is into golf, and saying that he knows Tiger Woods, the old man stereotypes Chris on the basis of another black man's success. This closely mirrors Du Bois' and Chandler's (2014) idea about how white people will compare black people to other black people who have excelled in some area (p.67). In this interaction, the racist stereotype is hidden behind admiration for another person, and in the white perception of reality, it excuses him from being racist. In a "post-revelation" perspective, this man is a potential buyer of Chris' body. His wife expresses that he used to play golf professionally. His intentions with this interaction could therefore have been to see if Chris was built for golf, as he probably wanted to return to a professional career in golfing. In order to divert suspicion in Chris, he says that he knows Tiger, which results in the stereotyping of Chris.

In the following shot, Chris and Rose speaks to a couple named Lisa and Nelson. The woman is much younger than her husband, who is in a wheelchair and receives oxygen through a nasal cannula. The woman first expresses her admiration for Chris' appearance. Then, she approaches him and starts to rub his arm and chest. She turns to her husband and says "Not bad. Eh, Nelson?" (Peele, 2017, 43:26 – 43:28). Her husband nods agreeingly. Then Lisa turns to Rose and asks "So, is it true? Is it better?" (Peele, 2017, 43:32 - 43:37), while eyeing Chris' body. This interaction is racist because it is based on a stereotype that black men can be hypersexual (Howard et al., 2021, para. 1). From a "post-revelation" perspective, Lisa is a costumer who is checking out the body for sale. If she were to buy Chris, Nelson's mind would be put into Chris' body. She then makes a statement based on this stereotype, wanting to know if she will experience the same as the stereotype implies.

As stated earlier, there were initial difficulty in determining what intention the movie had of portraying the acts of microaggressions, stereotypes and white privilege on screen. Through the analysis of these terms in relation to the movie, I think this duality present in the white characters, and the deliberate choice not the reveal their intentions to the viewer before later in the movie makes room for social commentary on both ends of the spectrum. On one side of this spectrum, before the intentions of the order is revealed, the movie gives space to

comment on how the microaggressions and stereotypes present in the contemporary society can come from people who does not necessarily mean any harm, but that it is racism nevertheless. Through Chris' reactions to the parents and order members' actions and utterances, it also communicates how microaggressions and stereotypes concealed in the intention of inclusion and attempts at relating can be received as negative and oppressive, and result in ostracization. On the other side of the spectrum, after the revelation, the plot twist makes it so that the actions can be interpreted as being deliberate and evil, and it also connects microaggressions and stereotypes to racial based violence. Based on this reading, one can assume that Peele added these scenes to bring attention to the potential harm such acts can pose to the black population. Perhaps they were also added to show how microaggressions and stereotypes, as well as a lack of understanding the impact of white privilege, really is racism and not just unharmful ignorance.

Double consciousness

Get Out also discusses Du Bois' concept of double consciousness, a term that describes a black person's experience of living in America. On one side, one is American, and on the other, one is a black person, and one sees the world through the lens of both consciousnesses. One of Du Bois' and Chandler's (2014) statements applies well to the representation of this duality in the movie. The following is stated "I know an excellent colored man in my town" (p. 67). Through this it is insinuated that a black person will always be compared to other members belonging to the same group, and that there exist behavioral expectations towards black people. In many scenes, Chris is compared by white characters to other black people who have excelled in different areas. Examples of this can be when Dean tells Chris that "[…] I would have voted for Obama a third term if I could" (Peele, 2017, 18:56 - 18:59). and when one of the order-members tells Chris "I do know Tiger" (Peele, 2017, 42:58). Another quote from Du Bois and Chandler (2014) is the following: "How does it feel to be a problem?" (67). This statement connects the duality black people experience with the treatment they receive from other races. The statement further insinuates that there is a certain expectation that black people behave in ways that is harmful to society, a society they themselves are a part of, therefore being labelled a problem. In addition to the expectation held by white people, black people are also expected to understand that this reflects reality. This sort of stance is presented in the movie through the character Hiroki Tanaka (Yasuhiko Oyama). His line is "Do you find that being African American has more advantage or

disadvantage in the modern world?" (Peele, 2017, 54:37 - 54:45). Through this comment, Chris is forced to confront the duality of his existence.

Another example of double consciousness in *Get Out* is the white mind existing within the black body. When shown images of Chris in the sunken place, or the state of hypnosis, one can see that Chris is still present within his own mind, but he is unable to do anything. (Peele, 2017, 36:05 – 36:14). When the man who bought his body describes the procedure to Chris, he states "a sliver of you will still be in there somewhere. […] Your existence will be as a passenger" (Peele, 2017, 01:23:50 – 01:24:07). The sunken place, described as a state of being during the hypnosis, and after the coagula procedure, can also be an example of double consciousness. When in the sunken place, the person floats in a vast space within one's own consciousness, unable to move. One only observes the world from what looks like a distant floating screen above. Du Bois and Chandler (2014) states "One ever feels his two-ness […]" (p.68), and "It's a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (p. 68). This especially applies to after the coagula procedure, where the black mind is separated from the black body and replaced with the white mind. The person only sees the actions performed by one's own body, yet it is seen and controlled by the white mind. Ryan Poll (2018) compares this to the slave and master relationship that is bound in white supremacy. He argues that Du Bois' and Chandler's (2014) statement, namely "[…] through the eyes of others […]" (p.68) signifies the relationship between black and white people during the times of slavery, and that it means "[…] the eyes of whiteness that undergird a colonial way of seeing, framing, and knowing the world" (p.88). When transferring the white mind into the body of a black person, one also transfers this notion of superiority, or as Poll (2018) phrases it, "What becomes internalized, in other words, are the eyes of the Master, who still sees Blacks as subhumans, as slaves" (p.88). Having imagery that replicates this relationship of power between races, makes for a great commentary on systemic racism and the origins of it in America. According to afro-pessimism, we have inherited this view of the relationship between the races from the times of slavery. Poll (2018) describes that the theory is based on the notion that "[…] the modern world was created by Black slavery. The world of the White Masters and the Black Slaves is the world we have inherited and the world we live in today" (p.70). Afro-pessimism also argues that enslavement never disappeared from the American society, because "[…] to be Black, is to be fundamentally, ontologically, marked as a slave […]" (Poll, 2018, p. 71), regardless of the time period. The theory can be seen in relation to the relationship between slave and master, where the black body becomes enslaved to the white brain. This theory is

also beneficial in connecting the dots between double consciousness and systemic racism. It sees *Get Out*'s representation of double consciousness as a direct result of a society that never became free from slavery, as slavery was never eradicated, it just changed its ways of oppressing black people.

Systemic racism

Get Out comments on the origins of systemic racism through on-screen allusions to slavery. "Pre-revelation", it is shown that the Armitages have employees living with them. One of them is a maid named Georgina and the other is a gardener named Walter, and both are black. These jobs, taking care of the house and property, can be traditionally thought of as jobs performed by enslaved people. "Post-revelation" one finds out that the workers are in fact the Rose's grandparents' minds in a black body. What is interesting here is that even though Georgina and Walter are their grandparents, they are still treated as servants and having to work for the family that they belong in. This could perhaps be a comment on how racism is an integral part of what it means to be American, and how love and racism exists side by side. One could assume that the grandparents were loved by the Armitages, yet they are reduced to enslavement the moment their mind is removed from the white body and placed into the black one. This part of the narrative truly mirrors what has been stated previously about afro-pessimism. In this theory, black skin signifies enslavement (Poll, 2018, p.71), and that this is so integrated into society, so that it leads to the enslavement of family members, signifying that there potentially are no relationship that is free from being influenced by racism.

The Armitage house also carries some significance because it has certain features that resemble antebellum architecture, for example the white columns decorating the front façade (Peele, 2017, 14:02). This notion is also mirrored in what the house is used for, and considering the horrors that take place there, the house is essentially a "[…] modern-day slave plantation" (Poll, 2018, p. 85). Further, another allusion to slavery comes through the scene where the Order of the Coagula is seen bidding on Chris. Dean stands in under the roof of a pavilion next to a large picture of Chris. He gesticulates movements that is often seen at auctions to the member of the order who sits in front of him. They are holding up bingo cards to show their interest in buying Chris (Peele, 2017, 58:14 – 01:00:16). This carries an eerie similarity to slave auctions, where potential buyers would bid on the slave presented with the best physical attributes. The same happens in *Get Out*, where the members of the order had previously checked if he would be a good fit for their needs during the party.

Get Out comments on the American system and how it is drenched in racism. As previously stated, systemic racism can be defined as different forms of racism that have been integrated into systems that affect society, such as law and education, and that these systems fronts negative attitudes and beliefs that leads to discriminatory and racist treatment of black people and other people of color (Braveman et al., 2022). In the movie, commentary on systemic racism is present through the inclusion of scenes that portray interactions with law enforcement. One such interaction appears early in the movie. Rose and Chris are on their way to Rose's family, and in a moment of being unobservant due to bantering, the car hits a deer. Shortly thereafter, a white police officer arrives at the scene. Rose talks to the officer while Chris is leaning his body against the hood of the car, looking another way. Then the police officer asks to see Chris' ID. Chris does not show any opposition, but Rose quickly reacts and tells Chris not to show his ID to the police, since he did not drive the car and therefore had not done anything wrong. She insists on not letting Chris show his ID, and the police officer becomes uncertain and leaves them without looking at Chris' document (Peele, 2017, 12:10 – 13:13). In this scene, the movie comments on how police officers and law enforcement have a tendency to suspect people of color of criminal activity at a higher rate than white people. Looking at this scene "pre-revelation" makes it seem that Rose is highly aware of systemic racism and acts up to the police to protect Chris from discrimination. When looking at the scene from a "post-revelation" perspective, it becomes clear that she takes advantage of systemic racism by bringing the officer's attention to it, in "[…] an attempt to keep anyone from knowing Chris' location or her connection to him" (Means Coleman, 2023, p. 318) This particular scene can also be seen in relation to white privilege and the ability to distance oneself from potential racial based violence. As discussed above, Rose decides to talk back to the police officer because of the act she is putting on towards Chris, making her seem racially aware. She also does it to prevent the officer from knowing Chris' identity. What she did not take into consideration was that if the officer did not deescalate the disagreement with Rose, the situation "[…] could potentially escalate into a life and death matter for Chris […]" (Wynter, 2022, subchap. 5, para. 3), due to the threat of violence he is facing in the white police officer. Rose does not seem to think that this is even a possibility, and this is likely due to her white privilege. She does not perceive the law enforcement as a threat to her life, she only sees them as having racist practices. Chris, on the other hand, reaches for his ID without any negation. This can however be seen as a risky move, because in altercations with the police "[…] the risk of being shot or otherwise killed remains open whether one complies by reaching into a pocket to retrieve the very documents

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being requested, or whether one is merely lying motionless face down and obeying the commands being issued […]" (Wynter, 2022, subchap. 5, para. 3). Chris lives with this reality, while Rose does not. She is in fact so affected by white privilege in situations involving the police that she unknowingly puts Chris' life in danger, and by extension also risks her family's prized "merchandise" (Wynter, 2020, subchap. 8, para. 2) to be destroyed.

Another scene where the law enforcement is put under the magnifying glass is when Chris' friend Rod goes to the police to report Chris as missing. He meets with a black police officer, and there he presents his theory of what could have happened to Chris, and also to Andre Hayworth, whose picture he shows to the officer. (Peele, 2017, 01:15: 37 – 01:18:51). She seems to first find the meeting unnecessary, but changes her demeanor when Rod says the following: "He left on Friday with his girlfriend, uh, Rose Armitage. She's white" (Peele, 2017, 01:16:19 – 01:16:26). She lets him finish his elaborate theory on what has happened to Chris. A part of his theory is actually part reality. He says: "I believe they've been abducting black people, brainwashing them, making them work for them as sex slaves and shit" (Peele, 2017, 01:17:25 – 01:17:31). Rod is onto something with this statement. They are abducting black people, but they perform a surgery making their body an object of enslavement instead. The officer seems take this seriously and fetches two other officers to listen to Rod's theory. Once he finishes, the three officers break out in laughter. In other words, Rod is met with disbelief and ridicule for expressing concerns about the wellbeing of two other black men. This scene could be an attempt at commenting on how black people are less likely to be believed when speaking up about racial discrimination and violence to officers who are a part of the system (Hatch, 2017, p. 128). What is interesting about this scene is that Rod explains his theory to three officers of color, and none of them believe him. By only having officers of color in this scene could potentially be Peele's way of describing how entrenched these conceptions of black people really are, to the point where Rod is not believed and is ridiculed by people of his own race.

The last scene of interest when it comes to race and law enforcement happens at the very end of the movie. After defeating all other members of the Armitage family, Chris and Rose are fighting each other in the driveway. Rose is shot in the stomach, and is bleeding out, and Chris is on all four on top of her, trying to strangle her. In the distance, one can see sirens of what looks like a police vehicle. As its approaching, Chris rises to his feet with his hands above his head. Rose reaches her hand out calling for help. It is revealed that Rod, after not being believed by the police, took matters into his own hands and went to rescue Chris (Peele, 2017, 01:36:40 – 01:40:22). What is very interesting about this scene is that Chris

automatically surrenders, and Rose calls out for help. This scene can be related to police violence and not being believed by law enforcement (Hatch, 2017, p. 128). The police are more likely to harm a black person than they are to harm a white person (DeGue et al., 2016, p.S173). As shown earlier in the movie, they are also more likely to not believe a person of color. In this scene, Rose's action is based on systemic racism and white privilege. The system is made for her, and therefore she can confidently reach out for help during this altercation because she expects to be believed and helped. Chris, on the other hand, is most likely aware of how the American law enforcement is racially biased, and therefore he automatically raises his hands in the air, showing that he is willing to cooperate with the police. This scene manages to point out the expectations the viewers have to what they will see. Poll (2018) comments this expectation, saying that "When the red-and-blue lights frame Chris's body, audiences intuitively know how this will play out: he will either be killed or be sent to jail" (p.93). This is due to how the crime scene looks in this scene. There are two dead black people in close proximity to Chris, and one young, bleeding, white girl with a gunshot wound to the stomach. Chris is the only one who is not dead or in the process of dying from physical harm. This immediate connotation between the sirens and Chris being singled out as the perpetrator could also be due to the expectation of black being violent, and therefore more likely to be involved with criminal activity (Howard et al., 2021, para. 1).

Racial resistance

Racial resistance, and allusions to resistance to slavery is especially present during the scenes that portrays Chris' escape. In the scene where Chris is belted to a chair and under hypnosis, he destroys the armrest by unconsciously scratching the leather covering it, revealing a white, fluffy material. To make himself unphased by the sound that induces the state of hypnosis, he stuffs the material into his ear canal. When the sound comes, the material hinders him from going into the hypnotic state, aiding him in his escape (Peele, 2017, 01:22:03 – 01:28:45). The white, fluffy material looks like cotton. Along with the previously mentioned allusion to slavery through the house's appearance, the auction that was held for the Order to bid on Chris' body, and that the grandparents in black bodies work for the Armitages', the cotton and the belts, also makes for a strong image of slavery. Lauro (2020) has also mentioned this, saying that "Chris's revolt weaves together various strategies employed in historical slave resistance […]" (chap.10, para.16) By including these sorts of images, the movie makes a clear connection between today's society and a past where black people were oppressed by

these objects. One of these objects is the cotton, "[…] an obvious reference to the most profitable crop in the US[…]" (Lauro, 2020, chap. 10, para. 14). The same material that oppressed black people in the past, he used to free himself from the shackles of enslavement. The same connotation applies to the belts used to tie him to the chair, which reminds one of the shackles used to limit the enslaved people's mobility. Chris' bloody escape from the Armitages house also alludes to slave revolts because Chris has to use his own strength in addition to objects he finds in his vicinity. He does not have any traditional weapon, similarly to rebelling slaves, who also had to use objects they found around them to achieve their freedom (Lauro, 2020, chap. 10, para.16).

Also present is a form of technology used for racial resistance in the movie. This is the mobile phone. When Chris takes a photograph of Logan King in the body of Andre Hayworth, it seems that Andre returns to be the one in control of the body and lunges towards Chris shouting "Get out! Get out!" (Peele, 2017, 55:26 – 56:08). The photograph enabled a mental switch in Logan/Andre, and therefore also displaying the behavioral difference between Logan and Andre, subsequently showing that something illegal has taken place. This scene emphasizes the importance of documentation in cases of injustice, and the mobile phone enables this possibility. Poll (2018) argues for the importance of the mobile phone, stating that "[…] cell phones have become everyday objects and, more importantly, political tools to capture state-sanctioned violence against African American men, women, and children" (p. 94). Further, he claims that these devices can be used to "[…] document evidence of racially motivated violence that the dominant White culture refuses to see and recognize as systemic and pervasive" (Poll, 2018, p.94). This is the exact purpose of the mobile phone in *Get Out.* The importance of documentation, but also the way in which the police interact with the evidence, is discussed in the scene where Rod goes to the police (Peele, 2017, 01:15: 37 – 01:18:51). Chris has sent the image of Andre to Rod, and Rod uses it to show to the police, as a form of proof that something criminal is happening to black people in the Armitages presence. As previously stated, black people often meet discrimination in contact with law enforcement, and "[…] technologies can provide critical means for rendering the violence of racism visible" (Hatch, 2017, p. 128). An attempt at racial resistance through documentation created by technology is present in the movie, but this attempt fails. As mentioned earlier, Rod was met with laughter and disbelief when presenting the evidence to the police. This can be a way the movie argues that even if there is a presence of technology there to verify these experiences, they will always be approached by skeptically, due to the inherently racist system that America is made up of.

Chapter 3 – *Get Out*, Genre and Racial Resistance

In the following chapter, I will be discussing how *Get Out* utilizes the conventions of the genre. I will first be analyzing the movie from the perspective of Robin Wood (2020, p.108-135), following the outline he made for the American horror movie. I will explain how the conventions are represented in the movie, and then I will discuss how they contribute to the commentary on race and discrimination. Afterwards, I will be discussing the potential other genre that the movie has been placed in by other critics and conclude that horror vérité is the appropriate subgenre for *Get Out* and discuss how the movie in itself can be seen as a form of racial resistance. This chapter is therefore an attempt at answering the second part of my problem statement, namely how the genre contributes to commentary on racial relations and discrimination in America.

The horror genre and representation of racism

Is *Get Out* a typical American horror movie, and does it follow the conventions of the genre? Firstly, I will look at the concept of normality. As mentioned previously, normality is what has been fronted by society as the norm of social lives, and it is a common trope for the genre (Wood, 2020, pp. 116-117). Normality would be different for different societies and cultures, and therefore one could argue that there are two representatives of normality in the movie. The Amritages normality is what fits with the general description Wood (2020) provides as the norm for representations of normality in the American horror. They are a family made up of a heterosexual relationship (p.117). They live in a large suburban home, they are wealthy, and on the surface, they seem like the epitome of the American nuclear family. On the other hand, there is Chris' experience of normality. He does not have a father figure, and his mother died being hit by a car when he was a child. There is another heterosexual relationship in the movie, and that is between Chris and Rose. What makes this relationship slightly different from normality is that the relationship is interracial. Due to systemic racism, whiteness appears as the norm. Therefore, an interracial relationship would be threatening to the normality. "Society does not recognize and acknowledge interracial and multiracial couples and families in all aspects of life" (Onwuachi-Willig & Willig-Onwuachi, 2013, p.418), and there are many areas in which these relationships are discriminated. These couples rarely find their relationship represented on a TV screen, their children are almost never assumed to

belong to them, and sometimes will schools and other institutions assume neglect or little support in the family (Onwuachi-Willig & Willig-Onwuachi, 2013, p.419).

The monster is also a convention that is used in *Get Out.* In the movie, it does not take shape of the more conventional image that comes to mind when thinking of the word monster. The monsters are entirely human. As mentioned previously, what perhaps is the main convention of the genre is that the monster threatens normality, and that the monster is a personification of what those who partake in normality fears, and this monster often comes in the shape of "the Other" (Wood, 2020, p. 111). Through Chris' perspective, the Armitages are the monsters. They are a huge threat to his normality, so large that they are threatening to remove his normality and exchange it with their own. Through the Armitages' perspective, Chris does not pose a threat to their normality before he starts to resist the enslavement they are forcing upon him. He threatens their normality because he destroys it by killing them. By killing them, he kills their whiteness, the nuclear family and the heterosexual relationship that constitutes this normality.

As mentioned previously, there are not many movies who portray the other as a black person (Halberstam, 1995, chap. 1, para. 8). As mentioned by Halberstam (1995), it challenging to navigate the difference between commentary on race and commentary on racism (chap.1, para. 10). *Get Out* solves this by simultaneously commenting on both race and racism by portraying two different normalities that are othered by each other. In chapter one I discussed how one of the main conventions of the genre is the relationship between the normality and the monster is portrayed on screen, and the different forms in which this is portrayed in movies (Wood, 2020, p.117). In *Get Out*, this relationship is portrayed through the imagery of "the double" (Wood, 2020, p.117). To explain this relationship in the form of the double, I also need to look at normality and otherness more closely. For the Armitages, normality consists of their family and the heterosexual relationship, and by extension, their whiteness. Their whiteness is their normality because the American system is built around the concept of whiteness, to the degree that it has become the norm. As shown in chapter two, the family members are highly affected by white privilege that is strengthened by systemic racism. For them, Chris is being othered because he poses a kind of threat to their normality. However, the Armitages do not seem to show their fear of Chris, until the point in the narrative where he is an actual threat to them. But then, he is not a threat to their normality, he is a threat to their lives and their very existence. This can come from the notion that the American system is built for a society that values whiteness, and that this way of thinking has instilled a feeling or conviction of superiority. In other words, the Armitages do not feel

threatened by Chris' presence, because blackness is not a threat to whiteness in the American system. This relationship between normality and "the Other" looks different from Chris' perspective. For Chris, the Armitages are "the Other", and they are threatening his normality, and in Chris' case, this entails his life and also his culture. The difference between Chris and the Armitages is that he experiences this threat physically and mentally through the racism he is faced with, and also, "pre-revelation", through the actual threat they pose on his life. He is so aware of the threat of racism that he expresses these concerns with other black people, and Chris displays these concerns about the threat of "the Other" to people which he feels he can entrust this information to. On a phone call to Rod, he states that he is uncomfortable how the white people that is at the Order meeting interacts with him (Peele, 2017, 50:02 – 51:43), and later in a conversation with Georgina, he says: "All I know is sometimes, if there's too many white people, I get nervous, you know" (Peele, 2017, 52:52 – 52:57). He also seeks solidarity in Andre/Logan and introduces the conversation with him by saying "Good to see another brother around here" (Peele, 2017, 45:01 – 45:02). Using the convention of "the double" (Wood, 2020, p.117) as representation of the relationship between normality and "the Other" showcases and explains how racism occurs in everyday life. It manages this by showcasing both sides of the spectrum. This superiority that the Armitages have comes from the system in which their normality occurs. This system is filled with harmful stereotypes, and these are projected onto Chris. In this movie, "the Other" from the perspective of the Armitages is not a threat to them, but "the Other" is still interpreted by them as different and therefore a subject to hate and discrimination. Chris feels weary of the Armitages because he knows that his normality is different from theirs, and that his normality is stereotyped. White people feel threatened by black people due to harmful stereotypes, and hate comes through that, and the hate comes out as racism. In the movie, black people feel weary of white people due to the threat of racism and discrimination. In other words, the relationship between normality and "the Other" comments on the actual relationship between discrimination and racism, and the threat of discrimination and racism.

Get Out as horror vérité and as racial resistance

As mentioned previously, another important part of the horror genre is how it has "[…] the possibility of extension to other genres […]" (Wood, 2020, p.117). This convention applies to *Get Out*, and it can be seen in instances where for example the "[…] Hollywood Foreign Press nominated the film for Best Picture in the "Musical or Comedy" category at the Golden

Globes" (Gillota, 2021, p.1033). Peele himself reacted to this nomination, responding ""Get Out" is a documentary" (Hornaday, 2017, para. 2) through Twitter. There have been other reactions to this nomination. "[…] *Get Out* was grossly misread and miscategorized" (Poll, 2018, p. 73) Gillota (2021), on the other hand, recognizes elements of the movie that lend itself towards the comedy genre, an argues that the movie has these humoristic elements that can be viewed as satire rather than pure comedy, in order to maintain the seriousness of the social commentary. (p.1034). Peele himself wrote a reply to the comedy categorization. He states that:

> "The reason for the visceral response to this movie being called a comedy is that we are still living in a time in which African-American cries for justice aren't being taken seriously. It's important to acknowledge that though there are funny moments, the systemic racism that the movie is about is very real. More than anything, it shows me that film can be a force for change. At the end of the day, call "Get Out" horror, comedy, drama, action or documentary, I don't care. Whatever you call it, just know it's our truth" (Hornaday, 2017, para. 3).

In other words, Peele himself states that the movie is representation of the reality black people face in the American society. What Peele describes matches with the representation of the terms analyzed in light of the movie in chapter two of this thesis; that the racist interactions that are present in the movie stems real life experiences. He states that "Whatever you call it, just know it's our truth" (Hornaday, 2017, para.3). In chapter one, I explained how black people are less likely to be believed when telling their truth in the American system (Hatch, 2017, p. 128). Placing the movie in an appropriate genre might help in the documentation of the black experience. In the following, I will be discussing the subgenre of horror called horror vérité and use it to explain how the genre helps in portraying racial issues in America. Lastly, I will discuss how the movie can be seen as technology of racial resistance.

Alison Landsberg (2018) defines the term horror vérité as "[…] a style of documentary filmmaking that aimed to reveal the 'truth' of a particular situation, a truth that might otherwise remain elusive, masked by ideology, acting or directorial choices […]" (p. 632). The truth that the horror vérité movie is trying to uncover is the horrors of everyday lives and realities, and "[…] through artificial means […] the present and every day is rendered unfamiliar and grotesque in order to bring the real conditions of society into sharp relief" (Landsberg, 2018, p. 632). In other words, the horror of the horror vérité genre is contemporary reality. By making the movie play out in the present, and be about repressions

placed in the contemporary, it opens up the possibility of reflection in the viewer, and it is therefore "[…] well-suited to the project of consciousness-raising" (Landsberg. 2018, p. 632). Landsberg (2018) continues to discuss how horror vérité uses the conventions of the genre to achieve this. She states that the movies within the genre are using the standard conventions, such as "[…] strong sound and visual cues that shock and unsettle the viewer, editing that also creates surprise and shock, a plot that involves either supernatural/science fiction elements, the struggle for survival of a person who is being chased by a psycho-killer, and/or a haunted house […]" (p.632). These genre conventions are instead used as technologies for bringing attention to the "[…] very real material and historical circumstances" (Landsberg, 2018, p.632) the narrative is trying to portray. This can be applied to *Get Out.* I would like to comment on two of the examples listed above, namely that the movie includes images of the haunted house and imagery of the escape. As mentioned in chapter one, the house is often a symbol of the horrors that lies inside (Wood, 2020, p. 126). Landsberg (2018) comments on the image of the haunted house, saying that "[…] it borrows from the subgenre of the 'haunted house'– or at least a house where the protagonist gets trapped and where terrible things happen to her or him […]" (p. 635). I would like to build on both these statements and propose that the house, its inhabitants, and the horrors which it conceals is a representation of the racist American system. No matter where Chris turns, there are always a presence of racism within the house or its surrounding lawn. He is essentially caught in the house by the people and their ideologies, the same way in which a black person is caught in the American system kept up by an inherently racist government. Chris manages to escape the house and escape the racism that he is exposed to in the house, and seemingly leaves with no further implications based on his race. In the alternative ending, Chris' escape is portrayed differently. "In the alternative ending, Chris ends up incarcerated" (Poll, 2018. p.92). Poll (2018) states that he believes that this ending is the truthful ending – the way that the movie would have ended in the real world (p. 93). I suggest that the imagery of the house and the alternative ending of the movie provides commentary on how one can never really escape the system since it affects all aspects of society. Through the use of these conventions, *Get Out* manages to bring to the forefront the truth of how racism in the system is all-consuming, and therefore also hard to escape.

Landsberg (2018) comments on the political potential of the genre and claims that "a politically motivated filmmaker can exploit the genre for political purposes to make an unimaginable reality imaginable and visible" (p.632). This is the case for *Get Out*, and therefore, it is a fitting subgenre for the movie. By seeing Peele's comments about the genre

confusion and compare it to the description of horror vérité, it becomes clear Peele did have a political motivation behind the movie, as he says that *Get Out* is a representation of the truth and reality that black people live with (Hornaday, 2017, para. 3). Horror vérité aims to uncover these repressed realities, and that is what is done in the movie. Further, Landsberg (2018) states that the movie uses the conventions and the tropes of the horror vérité genre to display and bring attention to reality (p. 633). Here, I would like to refer back to what I have previously written about the horror conventions as presented by Wood (2020, p.108-135) applied to the analysis of the movie, and the relationship between normality and the monster. This reading fits within the genre of horror vérité, because it describes the realities of the relationship between black and white people in America. Both parties project otherness to the other race, and from it comes suspicion and hate. The movie can then be situated within the genre of horror vérité because it describes real relationships, as well as the implications these relationships have to people at the receiving end.

Lastly, I would like to comment on how truth is revealed for Chris, but also for the audience, and attempt to answer the last part of my problem statement, namely how the movie can be seen as a form of racial resistance. I want to bring the attention back to Hatch's (2017) work on technologies. As mentioned earlier, he states that «[…] technologies can provide critical means for rendering the violence of racism visible" (p. 128), and therefore also brings the attention to the importance of documentation. There is also a presence of technology as a means to achieve truth in *Get Out*, namely Chris position as a photographer and his use of the camera. Landsberg (2018) has commented on this, and she mentions that the camera becomes the technology that allows Chris to uncover the truth of the circumstances he finds himself in (p. 637). She comments on how the process of taking a picture, or producing documentation, "[…] becomes the tool that breaks the "coagulated" African Americans out of their trances and thus helps Chris to uncover the truth" (Landsberg, 2018, p. 636). His camera becomes the lens in which he interprets and uncovers reality. This concept of revealing reality through technology also applies to the movie as a whole. The camera of the movie becomes a technology in which the reality of black existence in America is uncovered. I will however argue that the movie in itself is the technology of racial resistance. The concept of "the double" (Wood, 2020, p.117) is repeated here as well: Chris experiences the reality, or the relationship between the repressed and oppressed, through a camera lens, and the viewer experiences the relationship, or in other words, the lived reality of black people, through movie camera's lens. As discussed in chapter two and chapter three, the movie discusses racial discrimination through exemplification on screen. Even the

narrative is not an exact representation of reality, it still comments on and represent real aspects of the extent of racism in America, and how it is to be black within that system. As discussed in chapter three, the genre itself also allows for these truths to be displayed. The movie uses the genre conventions in order to present this truth to the viewer, and by extension, bringing attention to this repressed truth to those who believe that America has a post-racial society (Landsberg, 2018, p. 637). Peele stated himself that "[…] just know it's our truth" (Hornaday, 2017, para. 3). Landsberg (2018) claims that the technology that Chris uses can be connected to the word "woke" (p. 636). She states that the act of becoming woke involves "[…] for whites, even liberal whites, to see their own complicity in black exploitation, and for blacks to recognize the need for their own active resistance […]" (Landsberg, 2018, p. 636), and is represented on the screen through Missy's hypnotization. I would rather argue that the movie itself, and not just Chris, motivates a sense of wokeness in the audience as well as for those who the movie represents. It engages and documents the reality of black Americans, and it encourages consciousness for white people surrounding the issues black people face in society. Landsberg (2018) interprets Chris' camera as "[…] some kind of threat to the Coagula procedure […]" (p. 638). The dual relationship between Chris' experience and the movie as a technology allows for the perspective that the movie camera is a threat to systemic racism. This threat is a form of resistance. The movie resists racism and discrimination by bringing attention to reality through the means of the conventions, the narrative, and the representation of racial discrimination. When combining this into a motion picture, the technology documents the truth and the lived reality of black Americans, and the message of the movie provides the political resistance. Therefore, based on what has been discussed in chapter two and three, I would conclude that *Get Out* is a political technology of racial resistance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the aim of this thesis was to explore how *Get Out* portrayed commentary about racial relations in America through its narrative and the use of genre conventions, as well as discussing how the movie can be considered a form of racial resistance. To answer this, I described appropriate terms from critical race theory and analyzed scenes that comment on racial relations in light of these terms. I also defined the conventions of horror and used these to discuss how *Get Out* uses the conventions of the genre to further cement the commentary on racial relations. This allowed me to discover how the horror movie, through certain conventions, especially that of the subgenre horror vérité, and narratives, can prove effective as social commentary and as a form of racial resistance. This applies to *Get Out,* as it is using the narrative and the conventions as a way to heighten consciousness around issues that black people face in society. It is also a form of racial resistance because it represents and documents the black experience. This thesis has therefore shown that the horror movie can provide a means of documenting reality and as a means for showcasing how black people are affected by inequality, discrimination, and racism in the American society. I will then conclude that this thesis suggests that more attention should be directed towards the American horror movie as a source for social and political commentary on the American society and system, due to its ability to portray realities that do not always align with America's idea of normality.

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