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*Jurassic World* is anticapitalist, antimanagerialism, and anti-GM; it is also antifeminist, racist, species-ist, and decidedly not queer. It is fun entertainment, with its thrills always accompanied by an immediate sense that all will be well. What underpins all this is the film’s anxiety and ultimate reassurance about ideal reproduction, which has to be imagined as white, middle-class, heterosexual, male-led, and human.

It is not necessary to see the film to know that it is about a zoo-cum–theme park featuring prehistoric creatures, some of which get loose and create havoc until they are beaten back. Folded into this basic situation are two stories that offer a way into the wider spectacle: one tracks two brothers, Zach and Gray, who visit, and get lost in, the park; the other tracks two of the park’s employees, Claire Dearing (Bryce Dallas Howard) and Owen Grady (Chris Pratt), who by the end the film become a couple; the two stories are connected because Claire is the brothers’ aunt. All of these protagonists play a role in defeating the creatures run amok.

Procreation anxiety runs through both the story of the prehistoric creatures and that of the fraternal and heterosexual couples. The most dangerous creature is not just a prehistoric giant generated from dormant biological material, as are most of the other creatures and as was the case in the *Jurassic Park* films; rather, it is an “Indominus rex,” a laboratory-produced combination of different genetic elements that have made it not only huge and powerful but also intelligent and predatory. This monstrous product of improper biological procreation is balanced by the two human dangers to the ideal vehicle of reproduction: the divorcing family (Zach tells Gray that most of the families he knows have separating parents) and the independent woman (Claire early on dismisses any idea that she wants children). The defeat of Indominus rex is swiftly followed by the arrival of Zach and Gray’s mother and father, come to find them at the end of the mayhem, and by Claire and Owen’s walking off together, “to survive” as he puts it, which surely implies their participation in the survival of the species.

This concern with reproduction makes *Jurassic World* progressive in some ways, but decidedly regressive in others. Its anticapitalism is based on a perception of the logic of capitalism being the pursuit of profit at whatever cost. In the *Jurassic Park* films there was a sense of capitalism enabling the pursuit—albeit foolhardy and hubristic—of science and wonder, a notion delivered to the audience through Richard Attenborough’s warmly visionary performance as developer John Hammond (perhaps borrowing from his brother David’s famed television promotion of the wonders of nature). This figure is reduced in *Jurassic World* to a maverick owner, Simon Masrani, for whom the park is a rich man’s plaything, where he is not to be troubled with money matters.

In the actual development and running of Jurassic World, however, money is the point, science and wonder merely the means to generate profit. This imperative is presented in the film itself by Claire, in practically Marxist terms: the necessity for profit to continue to expand by stimulating new demand based on ever more singular and spectacular product.

The director of *Jurassic World*, Colin Trevorrow, has couched the critique in more moralistic terms, identifying
the Indominus rex as a consequence of “our greed and our desire for profit” which feeds off a constant desire for more “wonder . . . bigger, faster, louder, better,” that is, the inherent greed of corporations is matched by the pathological needs of their consumers. Monstrosities like Indominus rex, then, are a logical outcome of capitalism, both in their very existence and in the reluctance of capitalist organisations to curb their excesses. For example, Claire runs the park, yet takes quite some time to recognize the need to prioritize immediate human survival over the park’s function as a business enterprise.

Of course, the film itself is founded on exactly that same promise of “bigger, faster, louder, better.” Externally this promise is manifested in its relation not just to the Jurassic franchise but to the surrounding Hollywood narrative of ever-improving special effects. Internally, within the film, alongside Indominus rex, there’s a swarm of pterosaurs breaking out of their aviary, picking off visitors and playing catch with them, as well as the behemoth/leviathan mosasaurus, a humungous sea creature out-mobying Moby Dick. The behemoth’s size is made all the more breathtaking by being introduced in the context of a SeaWorld-style attraction, leaping out of the water to snaffle tidbits hung above it, but later grabbing a pterosaur with its human prey in its beak, and later still (spoiler alert) the Indominus itself.

Claire’s reluctance to close down the park is the culmination of her parroting management-speak throughout the first part of the film. The creatures are “assets,” security is about “asset containment,” the park needs “the wow factor,” Owen is employed to work with velociraptors to “evaluate patterns of vulnerability,” the creatures’ breakout is “a containment anomaly,” and so on. I often wonder, when faced in life with the implacable mendacity and vacuousness of managerialism, whether I find it more appalling that managers actually believe what they say—or that they don’t, and are just deeply cynical. Bryce Dallas Howard’s performance suggests something even more disturbing: that questions of belief or cynicism don’t even come into it, that the managers are on automatic pilot, perfectly turned-out Stepford people.

Indominus rex is referred to as a “genetically modified hybrid.” Since the United States does not yet exhibit the anxiety about GM crops that is seen in Europe, where the sobriquet of “Frankenstein foods” has proved hard to dislodge from public consciousness, perhaps it is a stretch to suggest the film is altogether anti-GM. However, the notion of secretive meddling with nature, with no thought for the consequences, is deeply rooted in US science fiction. Although he is the sole character carried over from the Jurassic Park series, the chief geneticist, Dr. Henry Wu, is undeveloped in this film and shows no sign of conscience or remorse. When disaster strikes, he busies himself putting engineered embryos into safe containers, aided by Vic Hoskins, nominally head of security but actually associated with the shadowy InGen organization, the very model of the military-industrial complex, which seeks to use the products of Wu’s genetic engineering as weapons of war or other unimaginable forms of sinister social control.

Claire is made to bear the brunt of the film’s progressive critiques, even though the actual, dangerously powerful figures are all male: the owner, the scientist, the military man. As the leading lady, she is central to the film and its vestigial romcom elements (she and Owen, ex-lovers, are at first antagonistic, then in each other’s arms and finally walking off together to coupledom). She is also pivotal to the film’s gender politics. Her immaculately groomed robotic presence furthers the goals of capitalism, managerialism, and genetic engineering and also underlines the distance of the independent, career woman from her proper role in reproduction. Not only does she explicitly reject the prospect of motherhood, she is even a lousy aunt, alternately forgetting how
much time has passed since she saw her nephews and dis-patching them straightaway to her assistant, Zara. The latter
is no better: Zara is too busy with her cell phone to keep an
eye on the boys, so they sneak off and into danger. It is Zara
who becomes the human prey of the pterosaur, snatched by
the mosasaurus; she’s the genre’s usual and useful snotty Brit,
there to provide the spectacle of human sacrifice. And being
a Brit, she allows the film to avoid the common (though in-
creasingly politically incorrect) trope of offing the minor-
character-of-color.

Claire in turn has to learn to be more like a man. The
right kind of man. A joke is made of her becoming a macho
action man like Owen, when, in response to his scorn of her
not being much use to pursue the Indominus “in those ridic-
ulous shoes,” she adjusts her clothes to make them more
practical. He’s not convinced that such a cosmetic change
will really hack it, but she proves able to handle herself al-
most as well as he can, even shooting dead a pterosaur peck-
ing away at him. And in those shoes. The first shot of her
starts from the shoes and cranes up, and the shoes are repeat-
edly shown in close-up before and after she becomes an
action woman. When he holds his hand out to help her run
away from one of the creatures, she bolts past him, high
heels or not, and he does a double-take in surprise and admi-
ration. But she has more to learn from him than traditional
macho values. She has to learn ethics, to consider the well-
being of people and animals above the profit motive.

Owen is the right kind of man par excellence. Partly by
virtue of cinematography (elevator doors slide open to reveal
him lolling center screen unfeasibly buff beneath the
clothes), partly by virtue of the backstory of Chris Pratt’s
makeover from lovable chubby to stubbled hunk, he is the
contemporary beau ideal of masculinity. Like any action
hero, he can handle himself in a difficult situation, but he
also has the ideal relationship to nature.

Owen lives on the island where the park is situated, but
by himself, far from any other human habitation. When
Claire goes to fetch him to take a look at the security of the
Indominus rex enclosure, she finds him mending a motorcy-
cle, that curious American emblem of the natural male’s
on-the-road freedom. He is at one with nature, rejecting
Claire’s view that the park’s creatures are not real animals.
He caresses raptors, gives comfort to dying dinosaurs.

However, he is also in charge of nature. His first scene has
him training four velociraptors, later explaining that they
have learned to treat him as their alpha male. Toward the
end of the film, the raptors are called on to attack the
rampaging Indominus. When it turns out that they share
some DNA with the Indominus and begin to side with it
against the humans, Owen reasserts his authority so that they
turn on the Indominus. He may be with the animals, but he is
in a commanding relationship to them (like Tarzan) and able
to use them against each other in the interests of humanity.

Naturally, Owen and Claire are white, as are Zach and
Gray and their parents. The proper whiteness affirmed at
the end of the film is perhaps lightly reinforced by an almost
daring moment earlier in the film, when adolescent Zach, al-
ways eyeing the girls, flirts with a young black woman, until
interrupted by pre-adolescent Gray, who is worrying about the
future of their parents’ marriage. The black girl, how-
ever, disappears from the film after this moment in typical
mainstream-film fashion. The casting of the secondary
parts in *Jurassic World* is nominally racially inclusive but the
roles ensure that they remain subordinate. The only really
dangerous man, Vic Hoskins, played by Vincent D’Onofrio,
is white. The chief scientist is Chinese-American (B. D.
Wong), the park owner Indian (Muslim actor Irrfan Khan).
Barry, one of Owen’s helpers with the raptors, is played by
black French actor Omar Sy, but if not recognized he could
be taken for a native of another island, with almost nothing
to do except to be rescued at one point from the Indominus.
If the casting was not explicitly intended as racist stereoty-
ing, it certainly allows for it: the inscrutable Oriental, the
playboy Indian, the good but incapable Black.

Khan and Sy are major stars in their countries of origin. 3
Casting them at once adds to the appeal of *Jurassic World* in
the Indian and French (and perhaps, given Sy’s parentage,
African) markets, while also acknowledging a degree of
global and specifically American recognition too. This inclu-
sive but opportunistic casting goes hand in hand with their
characters’ extreme marginalization, as do the self-inflicted
death of Khan’s character (by recklessly taking the controls
of a helicopter and crashing into the pterosaur aviary) and
Sy/Barry’s amiable helplessness. Their marginality affirms
Hollywood’s place at the top of the hierarchy of global cin-
ema (somewhat misleadingly) while also suggesting that the
fittest survivors to further the human race are not only white
and gender- and sexuality-conformist but also American.

At the end of the film, all creatures quelled, Owen and
Claire come together in silhouette against a shaft of light that
is shining into a hangar where the survivors are all being at-
tended to. There is a geometrically precise corridor separat-
ing the two crowds of wounded and worried victims and
customers, as if it is the shaft of light itself that separates
them. Then Owen and Claire walk up this corridor of light:
they are the future, the white woman conscripted into the
couple on the white man’s terms.
Also present are Zach and Gray’s parents, Karen and Scott, earlier revealed (in Gray’s comment to Zach) to be on the verge of divorce. The strong bond finally forged between Owen and Claire stands in stark contrast to the weak one linking Karen and Scott, with him constantly in the background and her emoting in the foreground (and so overwrought when the boys are away that she keeps people waiting at a meeting at her workplace). They endanger proper reproduction, both by failing to provide the security necessary for the boys’ growth and by threatening not to stick together. At the end, it’s no longer clear that they will divorce: they are together and present for their sons at the end, with Owen and Claire on hand as the very model of what the ideal reproducing couple should be. This finale has already been anticipated in the archetypal grouping of Owen, Claire, and the boys: first, with Owen standing in front of them, stretching his arms out in symbolic protection, then standing behind them, the reassuring masculine ground for the display of woman and children.

Claire and Owen are pivotal to the film’s entertainment value. All films are posited on reassurance: they are after all “only” films, and entertainment films must guarantee
a happy ending. That is their presumed contract with the audience. However, some horror, action, and thrill films take the implicit promise of reassurance as an occasion to give their audience the possibility of safely experiencing and enjoying grimness, terror, pain, and an abandonment of secure coordinates, whereas others—James Bond, buddy franchises—maintain a jaunty, often humorous tone throughout. While Jurassic World may occasionally touch on terror for some audience members (one couple with a little girl hurried out before the end of a screening I attended), it mostly maintains a sense of fun, including a thread of verbal and visual jokes: Owen and Claire and the shoes; the boys’ mother advising them merely to run from any marauding creatures and Claire similarly suggesting they hold hands for safety; self-reflexive in-jokes such as Gray looking at stills from the 1925 The Lost World on a ViewFinder, a guy wearing a Jurassic Park T-shirt bought on eBay and the boys escaping in an abandoned Jurassic Park jeep.

The sense of fun is achieved partly through the very setting of the film, which combines two of the major forms of fun-for-a-day attractions, the zoo and the theme park. It is the former that is crucial here, for in many ways it embodies the human image of the animal world and humankind’s relationship to it. While it may seem presumptuous, or just a sign of profit-driven escalation, to reclassify this Jurassic park as a world, it is also consonant with the way that people have made of the actual world a zoo, complete with pens, fields, pastures, parks (local, national, safari), reserves, and designated wildernesses, a world that ensures human animals are separate from and in control of all other animals. True, as in Jurassic World, the animals may occasionally break out, but an escape only affirms how strong and reliable the system is most of the time. What the image of the world as zoo suppresses, of course, is the slaughter of so many other animals for food, adornment, aphrodisiacs, and sport, and the destruction of habitats that threatens the survival of most animals in the wild. Instead this is a world in which animals are petted, give rides, and above all provide literally spectacular entertainment.

As Owen embodies this ideal of the symbiotic relationship of human to all other animals, caring and at one with them and yet separate and in charge, Claire as his ideal mate learns to be the same. Their relationship, in its lovable rom-com sparring, gags about Claire’s clothes, and Owen’s almost ridiculous hunkiness, is a major source of the film’s sense of fun. Plus, they save the boys. And, looking to the future, they provide an impending model of ideal reproduction to ensure that, even if this particular unnatural, genetically messed-up zoo world fails, Claire and Owen will continue to produce the world as a white, straight, American ideal.

Perhaps there is just a hint of strain in this affirmation. The film’s plotting is elliptical, vague about time and space and reliant on implausible coincidences and rushed explanations, no doubt assuming the thrill and threat of the stunningly realized creatures will carry it along. However, although less busy and physically impossible than much CGI cinema, Jurassic World is still careless about the coordinates of space and time, so that the happy ending is more a product of sleights of hand than resourcefulness or even luck. More to the point, the final shot of Claire and Owen has a quality of excessiveness to it: the forced abstraction of their coming together in silhouette, the unnaturalness of the shaft of light, the portentiousness of Owen’s manly words “To survive” and the silhouette-creating walk toward the light.

There is here a shard of uncertainty about whether the world as zoo really has a future, or the world with humans in it at all, and thus whether the underlying reassurance offered by the film really has much substance. The last shot of the film is not actually that of Owen and Claire walking toward the light, but one where the camera skims across the park. It has done so several spectacular times before, to lay out for the viewer the awesome scale of the place and the crowds visiting it. This time, however, the park is empty of humans, and the camera comes to rest on the Tyrannosaurus rex that earlier attacked the Indominus and thus saved Owen, Claire, and the boys and in effect most of the visitors to the park too. The Tyrannosaurus was engineered back to life but is not genetically modified, and unlike the Indominus, it’s a male.

This, then, is a final shot that signifies an end to meddling and a start to leaving the creatures in peace on their island. It
also reaffirms the rightful masculine possession of territory. But perhaps it also hints at the real future: not the bright light embracing Claire and Owen as they go forth to multiply, but one without humans at all, not just in a Jurassic World but in the darker, off-screen world itself.

Notes

1. GM is common shorthand for “genetically modified” foods or, in this case, animals.


3. Hindi cinema is one of the largest in the world and Khan also had international success with the British-made, Hindi-language, Indian-set film The Warrior (Asif Kapadia, 2001) and in an impressive secondary role in Slumdog Millionaire (Danny Boyle, 2008). Sy is best known as a comedian in France but has also had a considerable international art house presence thanks to the success of a pair of films by Olivier Nakache and Eric Toledano: The Intouchables (2011), especially, and Samba (2014).

4. The second Jurassic film was of course called The Lost World in homage to this film, while the ViewMaster was an early stereoscopic device anticipating the immersive thrills of films like Jurassic World.