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Playing God in the Anthropocene: Bioengineering and the Ethics of Creation in the *Jurassic World* Franchise

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Abstract

The *Jurassic World* (2015-2025) franchise offers a critical reflection on the entanglement of bioengineering, capitalism, and the ethics of creation in the Anthropocene. By situating the series within the intersecting discourses of ecocriticism, bioethics, and the Anthropocene, this paper argues that more than being just a spectacle-driven science fiction, *Jurassic World* is a cautionary tale about the commodification of life, and the moral costs of exploiting nature for capitalist ends, metaphorised by the various genetically mutated dinosaurs created by the company InGen. This paper examines how the franchise dramatizes the ethical dilemmas of playing God in an era where technological innovation is inseparable from corporate greed. In depicting the collapse of ecosystems engineered for corporate short-term profit, the franchise raises pertinent questions about humanity's role in the current Anthropocene and in shaping futures that may prove to be too unlivable and collapsible to be sustained. Every act of artificial creation is entangled in social, political, and ecological complexities while simultaneously leaving undesired consequences. By employing Donna Haraway's concept of the cyborg the fascinating and terrifying acts of creation in the films can be seen not just as Frankenstein-esque endeavours but also as products of an ineludible future. The franchise additionally appears to engage with Rob Nixon's notion of slow violence, illustrating how the biocapitalistic quest for profit slowly disrupts ecosystems and threatens collective existence. Ultimately, the *Jurassic World* films compel their spectators to confront the ethical limitations of bioengineering practices and to reconsider the responsibilities we must hold toward nonhuman life in an age wrought with severe planetary crisis.

Keywords: Bioengineering, *Jurassic World*, Bioethics, Genetic Engineering, Anthropocene.

Introduction

The *Jurassic World* franchise (2015–2025) positions itself as both a spiritual successor to and

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simultaneously as a departure from Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* trilogy (1993–2001). While the original films were largely framed around awe, wonder, and the terror of resurrecting prehistory through genetic engineering, *Jurassic World* and its subsequent sequels emerge as a narrative of an era dominated by spectacle-driven blockbusters and an increasingly visible Anthropocene consciousness about long-term ecological catastrophes. The first, *Jurassic World* (2015), directed by Collin Trevorrow, opens well into the future, where the dinosaur park has been well operational for a decade and it "is a place of wonder where visitors, employees, and cloned animals live in harmony" (Andersen, 2017, p. 470). But the narrative itself acknowledges through the meta-commentary of some of its characters as to how audiences are no longer satisfied with just "plain dinosaurs" (Trevorrow, 2015, 7:16), and therefore the park authorities must create hybrids, novelties, and ever-larger spectacles with "more teeth" (Trevorrow, 2015, 7:35) for the fans - a narrative that mirrors the franchise's own cultural logic and the demands of twenty-first century consumer capitalism.

Although the films have been excoriated by critics, the box office numbers speak of the mass appeal, and by extension, the profound cultural fears that are central to the franchise: extinction, ecological collapse, and humanity's fraught relationship with science. Dinosaurs, long embedded in popular imagination as symbols of mystery, curiosity, and monstrousness, become vehicles for cinematic spectacle that satisfies collective fascination with the prehistoric past. At the same time, their resurrection through fictional science speaks to recurring fantasies of transcending the natural limits of life, death, and ecological extinction. As film studies scholars would remind us, films, particularly popular films, are as much cultural texts as they are works of fiction. Certain genres such as science fiction have come to "represent our most pressing cultural fears" (Telotte, 2014, para 1). In this respect, *Jurassic World* dramatizes humanity's double-edged relationship with technology in the long term -the desire to control and exploit nature for profit and the simultaneous dread of losing control of this power. Over the course of the films, the dinosaurs serve not just as theme park entertainments but they are also considered as potential weapons of war -trained raptors and militarized hybrids designed to extend corporate power into global conflict (Trevorrow, 2015). The multi-billion dollar conglomerate International Genetic Technology or InGen's role in the films underscores this transformation: from scientific research to corporate profiteering, from paleontological curiosity to biotechnology-for-hire.

Thus, the films themselves engage in what it means to play god in the Anthropocene, an epoch marked by "growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere" (Crutzen et al., 2013, p. 484). In bringing beings from the past into our contemporary times, InGen attempts to quite assertively collapse the linear history of evolution. What separates the Anthropocene from the Mesozoic era of the dinosaurs is that,

> human beings had managed to effect the kinds of large-scale changes to atmosphere, soil, mineral composition, species distribution, and climate that had previously been attributable to such large-scale geophysical events as volcanic eruptions or comet impacts. (Arons, 2023, p. 35)

In creating genetically modified dinosaurs such as the Indominus Rex or the Indoraptor, the films allegorize contemporary debates about biotechnology, cloning, and genetic modification, particularly in the age of exploitative capitalism. These hybrids are not simply cinematic monsters, but they embody the larger debates surrounding dangers of biocapitalism -where life is engineered, owned, and weaponized for and by corporate interests

This study makes use of two theoretical perspectives to support its arguments. Firstly, is Donna Haraway's concept of the cyborg as proposed in "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985). This

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postulation illuminates the relevance of the hybrid dinosaurs –they are creatures simultaneously blurring the boundaries between species and technology and destabilizing the homocentric notions of life and power. Secondly this paper uses Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence in his seminal work *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011) in order to situate the franchise within larger ecological debates, and additionally highlight how the long-term, invisible effects of capitalist exploitation resonate through both the fictional worlds of *Jurassic World* and our own.

Biocapital and the Capitalocene
Dinosaurs as Products
In the original *Jurassic Park* film, the owner John Hammond dreamt of creating a theme-park that was larger than life, unparalleled in its glory and spectacle (Spielberg, 1994). By the time of *Jurassic World* (Trevorrow, 2015), in spite of multiple catastrophic accidents leading to the loss of multiple lives, Hammond's dream has been realized into a sleek corporate venture - Isla Nublar operates as a fully functioning theme park, complete with its own branding, merchandising, and corporate sponsorships. Thus, as the narrative of the franchise progresses, the dinosaurs are increasingly seen not just as the miracle of bioengineering but also as patented intellectual and private property, culminating in *Jurassic World: Rebirth* (2025) where they are seen as viable gene pool sources for big pharmaceutical companies.

This is emblematic of what Kaushik Sunder Rajan calls "biocapital" (2006, p. 3) – the inherent intertwining of biological sciences and capitalistic "market regimes" (2006, p.33) in which life itself is commodified. This, however, as Rajan argues, is not natural but a direct consequence of capitalism:

> The object of bioscience, the practice of bioscience, and the locations of bioscience have all been changing rapidly over the past thirty years, and one of the major directions this change has taken has been toward more corporate forms and contexts of research. But this drift toward corporatization has hardly been natural, inevitable, or without contestation. As demonstrated in 1999 by the angry response of public genome researchers toward the possibility that dna sequences might be patented, the corporatization of the life sciences has simultaneously been rapid and hegemonic on the one hand, and contingent and contested on the other […]. (2006, p. 4)

In this vein, the raptors in *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* are trained as obedient weapons, hybrids are auctioned to global elites, and genetic material becomes a commodity for the black market. When these ventures fail, *Jurassic World: Rebirth* imagines a new phase: mining dinosaur DNA to develop patented pharmaceuticals. The promise is human medicine, but the subtext is clear – as Dr. Henry Loomis suggests in the film (Edwards, 2025), these treatments, like many in real-world pharma, would be priced beyond the accessibility of the working class. Thus, InGen's evolution, from amusement park spectacle to weapons to pharmaceuticals, mirrors the historical trajectory of bio-capitalism.

Additionally, this progression underscores what Haraway cautions us in *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan _Meets_OncoMouse* (1997) – biotechnologically engineered creatures (such as the OncoMouse) do not exist independently but are part of an extensive Daedalian network of corporate interests, patenting rights, and capitalistic profit. As such, there exists no "multicultural, democratic, biotechnological commons" (Haraway, 1997, p. 87) for the existence of the dinosaurs amid InGen's increasing corporatization of biology when it comes to patenting practices in corporate bioengineering. The films thus critique not science per se but capitalism's capacity to transform science into exploitation.

Moreover, the dinosaurs are not accurate reconstructions made to exist independently, but laboratory inventions. As revealed in *Jurassic World: Rebirth* (Edwards, 2025), although most of them have escaped the park, they cannot adapt to present climatic conditions. Many perish, with only a handful of species surviving in equatorial regions where the climate approximates their Mesozoic habitats. Further, it would not be remiss to suggest that current ecological issues, such as lack of a stable, viable food source, would make the long-term existence of such dinosaurs in nature onerous. This aligns with what Jason W. Moore calls "capitalocene" (2016, p. 1)– an epoch wherein socioeconomic systems such as capitalism, colonialism, and "cheap nature" (2016, p.7) have led to disastrous transformation of ecological systems. "Capitalocene signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature-as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology" (Moore, 2016, p. 6).

The D-Rex and Real-World Counterparts

In defining the cyborg, Haraway famously suggests:

> The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state capitalism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential. (Haraway, 1997, p. 458)

This "unfaithfulness" becomes pronounced in the failed projects revealed in *Jurassic World: Rebirth* (Edwards, 2025), particularly the D-Rex (*Distortus Rex*). As the opening segment of the film reveals, the D-Rex emerged from repeated, unsuccessful experiments on Ile Saint-Hubert to engineer the perfect T-Rex (*Tyrannosaurus Rex*). The creature labeled "D-REX V.23.111" (Edwards, 2025) is only one in a long series of failed attempts - at least twenty-six - towards the T-Rex. Like the equally unstable Mutadon, the D-Rex which was deemed unfit for exhibition at the main park and therefore, abandoned, serves as a grotesque reminder of the corporation's failed ambitions. These malformed and unusable experimental creatures exemplify Haraway's (1997, p. 458) insight, that is to say that they are unfaithful not only to their evolutionary ancestry but also to the capitalist fons et origo that sought to monetize them. Therefore, in refusing to be a stabile or marketable (like the rest of the park dinosaurs), they become cyborg-like figures typifying excess, exposing the limits of corporate entities like InGen. The D-Rex, then, is both a product of capitalist hubris and a rupture within it. It is a malformed creature that resists commodification and exposes the instability of life when reduced to experiment and profit.

In the real world, such mutated animals have shown concerning behaviour and health risks. Called transgenic animals, these creatures are ones "whose genome has been changed to carry genes from another species or to use techniques for animal genome editing for specific traits" (Shakweer et al, 2023, para 1). Specific genetic materials are externally injected into these animals through a multitude of techniques finessed by advances in biotechnology, for an array of pharmaceutical, environmental, and production needs. However, like all profit-oriented corporate phenomenons, these genetic alterations have consistently proven to be less than perfect. For instance, according to Muir and Howard (2002, para 1), transgenic fish not only have a shorter life span than their natural-born counterparts but they act as invasive species in nature and therefore pose a threat to ecological stability. In the same vein, Carter et al (2002, para 1) in one study followed ten transgenic piglets from birth to maturity, only to report that half of the piglets during the course of the study had to be either euthanized due to health conditions or passed away on their own, therefore indicating a fifty percent mortality rate. Even in the most celebrated of cases such as Dolly – the first fully cloned sheep, "148 out of 156

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implanted embryos failed to survive" (Bartlett, 1998, para 2), suggesting that despite corporate marketing, bioengineering animals remains an unpredictable and problematic phenomenon.

Slow Violence in the New Dinosaur Age

In the vein of most blockbuster popcorn cinema, the prima facie narrative of the *Jurassic World* (Trevorrow, 2015) seems to offer a spectacle of macroscale environmental collapse – erupting volcanoes, disintegrating theme parks, rampaging animals breaking free. However, it also dramatizes the slower, quieter, and long-term violence of such disruptions. The unconscious introduction of genetically engineered dinosaurs into the world can be inferred to also result in insidious off-screen ecological disruptions. This embodies what Rob Nixon (2011) in his seminal work *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* calls "slow violence":

> […] a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. (Nixon, 2011, p. 2)

Additionally, Nixon suggests that "it is those people lacking resources who are the principal casual ties of slow violence. Their unseen poverty is compounded by the invisibility of the slow violence that permeates so many of their lives" (2011, p. 4). When assessed as an invasive species, the dinosaurs seem to embody catastrophic agents that affect the vulnerable – the farmer's crop is devastated by free roaming herbivores (that require unprecedented amounts of flora), the fisherman is at standing danger from marine dinosaurs such as the Spinosaurus, and the Mosasaurous disrupt fragile oceanic food chains. Thus, unlike the makers, buyers and investors of InGen, it is the rural and the working poor of the world who must face the everyday consequences of dinosaurs disrupting land, water, and food systems. Further, the franchise insists that the consequences of extinction are not evenly experienced. The elite are privileged enough to buy dinosaurs and escape ecological collapse, while the poorer communities cannot.

When seen as a metaphor for invasive species, the large-scale results of this have been succinctly summed up by The Global Invasive Species Programme and Rangi:

> Apart from their threat to biodiversity and ecosystem services, invasive species have a significant socio-economic impact. They reduce yields from agriculture, forestry and fisheries, decrease water availability, cause costly land degradation, block transport routes and contribute to the spread of disease. They also reduce the effectiveness of development investments by, for example, choking irrigation canals, fouling industrial pipelines and threatening hydroelectric schemes. Invasive species therefore contribute to social instability and economic hardship, placing constraints on sustainable development, economic growth, poverty alleviation and food security. (n.d., p.6)

Representational Obstacles

In view of the contemporary extolation of spectacular representations of ecological disasters, Nixon (2011) suggests that slow violence and its delineation often go unnoticed:

> Politically and emotionally, different kinds of disaster possess unequal heft. Falling bodies, burning towers, exploding heads, avalanches, volcanoes, and tsunamies have a visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power that tales of slow violence, unfolding over years, decades, even centuries, cannot match....In an age when the media venerate the spectacular, when public policy is shaped primarily around perceived immediate need, a central question is strategic and representational: how can we convert into image

and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making[...]. (2011, p.3)

In the *Jurassic World* (Trevorrow, 2015) films, social media functions as a mechanism of the crisis of visibility. As the first film shows, the theme park itself operates like a live-streamed ecosystem where aerial drones record the movements of not just the dinosaurs (or assets, as they are referred to as by park management) but also the visitors. The films' mise-en-scène, consisting of surveillance rooms filled with larger than life screens, holographic displays, and thermal imaging, is emblematic of what Jennifer Gabrys calls "programmed environments" (2016, p. 196) where increasing digital monitoring "inform how environments are sensed and managed" (Gabrys, 2016, p. 3).

In both our world and that of *Jurassic Word* (Trevorrow, 2015), the representation of ecological violence becomes inverted. As part of the marketing campaign for the films, Universal Studies officially introduced a website called Dinotracker.com on May 10, 2022, featuring the fictitious footage and images of dinosaurs around the world supposedly captured by humans on their phones. The spectacle of dinosaur attacks, vehicles being overturned in traffic, attacks on cities, etc., is endlessly replayed and shared, while the slower processes of extinction, exploitation, and climate imbalance are effaced. The *Jurassic World* films thus offer a double critique- they depend on spectacle to communicate directly with the audience. Yet, they simultaneously expose how it is the very spectacle that blinds the world to systemic ecological harm.

Current De-Extinction Projects and Ethical Concerns

On October 1st, 2024, Colossal Laboratories and Biosciences made the bold claim that they had "successfully restored a once-eradicated species through the science of de-extinction" (Colossal), with the species being dire wolves. Dr. Beth Shapiro helmed this by suturing extracted dire wolf DNA with that of grey wolf to create a hybrid. Public promotions for this breakthrough included pictures of writer George R. R. Martin holding one of these wolf pups (Snider, 2025), dire wolves play an integral part in the *A Song of Fire and Ice* series written by Martin and its televised adaptation – *The Game of Thrones* (Benioff et al., 2011). While this is a feat of science itself, it has left much to be said about the popularization and commodification of bioengineering. Further, it has garnered much criticism from scientists globally, who have suggested that these are not dire wolves but essentially grey wolves with some dire wolf-like features.

Experiments such as these come in a long line of similar capitalistic ambitious ventures – Revive and Restore with the Great Auk (Novak, 2020), Colossal Laboratories and Biosciences with the Wooly Mammoth, Thylacine, Moa (Moa, 2025), and Dodo, Rewilding Europe with the Auroch, and the Steppe Bison (CABI News, 2016) etc. These projects have run into significant problems. Essentially, for de-extinct species to be revived, scientists rely on three methods, namely "back-breeding, cloning and genetic engineering" (Shapiro, para 2), which are as complicated processes as they are capital-consuming, particularly cloning and genetic engineering. Revival is also a long-term ethical process because "by resurrecting an animal species, we become responsible for taking care of it. If we don't, history would just repeat itself and the animal would die off again, resulting in wasted time and resources" (Bouchard, 2017, para 3). Additionally, ecological integration also remains uncertain, for it stands to reason that reintroducing mammoths could disrupt fragile tundra ecosystems, while resurrected pigeons might outcompete existing species for food resources.

Here again Haraway's (1997) cyborg framework is illuminating. The resurrected mammoth or pigeon would not be innocent, as it would be entangled with corporate funding, patents, and spectacle. Haraway notes that,

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> The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense […]. (1997, p. 458)

In the context of bioengineering, the resurrected animals are never organic wholes; they are commodified amalgamations of multiple parts of pre-existing creatures that bear the marks of Anthropocene capitalism.

Further, critics like Stewart Brand (2014) suggest that reviving extinct animals in the Anthropocene would severely affect endangered species for it would defeat the entire point of conservation sciences: "We protect them [endangered animals] to learn the science to protect them better. We protect them to undo the harm that humans have done" (Brand, 2014, para 2). Thus, the Anthropocene context is crucial: these experiments occur against a backdrop of mass extinction already driven by human activity. Attempting to play the role of God by resurrecting the dead risks being distracted from the urgent task of protecting the living and takes away from the fundamental human understanding that extinction is forever. In turn, this would invite further disregard for and exploitation of endangered species and protected ecosystems. Therefore, a common consensus suggests that "such investigations, however, should be conducted under the mantle of preserving modern biodiversity rather than conjuring extinct species from the grave" (*Scientific American,* 2013, para 5).

The parallels between InGen's dinosaurs and real-world de-extinction underscore the prescience of the *Jurassic World* franchise. Both reveal how the Anthropocene is characterized not only by environmental destruction but by technological attempts to reverse or outpace it - often reproducing the same exploitative logics that caused the crisis in the first place.

Conclusion

The *Jurassic World* franchise, in conspicuous conclusion, shows that twenty-first century's proclivity for bioengineering dynamism cannot be separated from the economic logic of late-stage capitalism. Thus, in the Anthropocene, where all forms of technological advancement and scientific innovations are justified as requisite solutions to existing and newly emerging medical crises, *Jurassic World* exposes how such seemingly innocuous innovations are deeply entangled with corporate greed, exploitation, and irreversible ecological damage, and contribute heavily to financial inequality.

When taken together, the hybrids, InGen's corporate expansion, and the ecological failures of laboratory resurrection, the *Jurassic World* franchises serve as paramount meditation on the future of biocapitalism in the Anthropocene. By foregrounding the resurrected dinosaurs as allegories of the Haraway's cyborg, the films dramatize the dangers of collapsing boundaries between life, machine, and more importantly capital, when undertaken without ethical responsibilities. Thus, when viewed within the broader framework of ecological studies and long-term, sustainable scientific advancements, the franchise underscores the futility of technological triumph divorced from ecological culpability and ethical concerns.

Simultaneously, the franchise appears to be a part of a much longer cultural tradition of narratives that question humanity's desire to transcend natural limits. In this sense, it carries forth the lineage inaugurated by Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Shelley's novel, which appeared at the dawn of the industrial age was a warning against the consequences of scientific ambition divorced from moral responsibility. Victor Frankenstein's endeavour to create life through science and electricity was not only a metaphor for the scientific advancements of the age but also a critique of the Enlightenment's attempts at mastery over nature. Two centuries later, *Jurassic World* updates that warning for the biotechnology age.

Ultimately, *Jurassic World* offers a distinctly coeval parable of the Promethean impulse that has haunted Western modernity for decades. In its hybrid dinosaurs, failed experiments, and devastated landscapes, the franchise mirrors our own age of less-than-stellar practices of genetic modification, data capitalism, and ecological exhaustion. The question is no longer merely "Can we create life?" but "What kind of world are we creating by doing so?"

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Bio-note

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