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Jurassic *technology*? Sustaining presumptions of intersubjectivity in a disruptive environment

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Abstract While the problem of intersubjectivity has motivated a great deal of sociological research, there has been little consideration of the relationship between intersubjectivity-sustaining practices and the physical environment in which these are enacted. The Museum of Jurassic Technology (MJT) is a strategic site for exploring this relationship. With its labyrinthine layout and bewildering exhibits, the MJT provides a natural "breaching experiment" in which concrete elements of the space disrupt normal competencies for sustaining presumptions of intersubjectivity. Using ethnographic data on visitor interaction, this article specifies two disruptive aspects of the physical environment and identifies four methods of repair on which visitors rely to reestablish presumptions of intersubjectivity. The analysis of spatially situated processes of intersubjective disruption and repair in an extreme case such as the MJT is a first step toward "emplacing" the intersubjectivity problem in more everyday settings.

Ever since Schutz's "sociologization" of Husserl's phenomenology, the problem of intersubjectivity has motivated much sociological research. The central question is that of how interacting subjects, with no ability to see through any eyes but their own, are able to take it for granted that they share reciprocal perspectives with one another – to operate as if it can be assumed that how one experiences the world is, more or less, how others experience it. As Schutz (1967a:316) put it: "I take it for granted, and I assume my fellow-[hu]man does the same, that I and my fellow-[hu] man would have typically the same experiences of the common world if we changed places…." Research in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis has illuminated the practices by which subjects manage this presumption of intersubjectivity "for all practical purposes" (Schutz 1967a:12), showing that its ongoing maintenance is

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fundamental to sensible interaction – both as its foundation and often its object – in everyday and professional settings.[1]

But for all of the work that has been done on the problem of intersubjectivity, almost none has focused explicitly on the relationship between intersubjectivity-sustaining practices and the physical environment in which these are enacted.[2] This is somewhat surprising, as sociology has long appreciated that social relations are embedded in concrete settings.[3] In particular, symbolic interactionists have repeatedly found that physical space channels opportunities for interaction and that interaction plays a central role in the social constitution and organization of spatiality.[4] It is thus worthwhile to "emplace" (Gieryn 2000) the intersubjectivity problem by asking: What is the relationship between those practices that sustain impressions of intersubjectivity and the physical environment in which these are enacted? As a first step toward generating some answers, this article analyzes interaction in an unusual setting – the Museum of Jurassic Technology – that brings the spatial situation of intersubjectivity-sustaining practices into high relief.

The Museum of Jurassic Technology (MJT) is a strange place. Even the simple task of finding and entering the facility can be disconcerting. Uncharacteristically for a museum, the façade is poorly marked and set inconspicuously between a flooring shop and a Thai restaurant on a working class strip in Culver City, California. Upon locating the entrance, visitors meet an imposing, grey steel door that – quite unwelcomingly – is not equipped with a handle. Turning to the right (below a glass-encased diorama containing a black marble urn with white moths suspended in the background), most visitors will notice a small, gold plaque: "The Museum of Jurassic Technology … ring buzzer once for admittance." After looking up and down the block for a minute, and sometimes pushing once or twice on the door itself, someone will tentatively press the small black button above the plaque. In a few seconds, the door will crack open and out of the blackness inside will emerge a museum staffer who will ask, mysteriously: "Would you like to sign our guest book?"[5]

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[1] On Husserl's phenomenology, see Farber 1943. For Schutz's discussion of Husserl and the "reciprocity of perspectives," see Schutz 1967a, b. Foundational works in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis include Garfinkel [1967] 1984, Sacks 1992, Sacks et al. 1974, Schegloff 1968, and Schegloff and Sacks 1973. Heritage (1984) provides a comprehensive overview of this research, while Atkinson and Heritage (1984) assemble some exemplary studies.

[2] Some recent ethnomethodological work does point in the right direction. For example, in his discussion of library search aids, Crabtree (2000) raises many important points about the social organization of space and the interactional accomplishment of spatially-situated activities. Likewise, Laurier et al.'s (2001) exploration of the practical organization of informality around tables at a café is quite interesting. (However, the former is light on data; and the latter is not framed explicitly in terms of the problem of intersubjectivity.)

[3] Sociologists as diverse as Weber ([1922] 1978:1212–1372), Marx ([1848] 1977:227–228), Wirth (1938), Lefebvre (1991), and Foucault (1977:195–228)—as well as countless others—have been attentive to the spatial dimension of social relations. As Gieryn (2000:464) points out, there exists "an enduring tradition of robust sociological studies of place that remains invisible only because it is never framed that way."

[4] See for example Goffman 1959 (Chapter 3) and 1961, Lofland 1998, Nash 1981, Smith and Bugni 2006, and Whyte 1980.

[5] Late in my fieldwork, the MJT added a small door handle in response to visitor complaints. According to museum staffers who work the front door, however, most visitors still ring the buzzer, only afterwards noticing the handle.

The interior of the museum is equally unsettling. The foyers of most museums tend to be bright and open; but as visitors pass through the MJT's steel door, they transport their constricted pupils from a world of southern California sunshine into one draped in darkness. It is while visitors are in this state of temporary blindness that the first waves of eerie sounds and wafts of indiscernible smells creep upon their senses. One visitor described the initial experience as falling through Alice's rabbit hole; another, as entering the Twilight Zone. Inside, visitors encounter a perplexing jumble of artifacts. One corner of the museum houses an extensive exhibit on seventeenth century Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher, who may be best known for his role in the metaphysical conspiracy that Umberto Eco (1989) concocts in his *Foucault's Pendulum*. In the opposite corner is an exhibit on Geoffrey Sonnabend, a theorist of memory whose very existence is doubted by researchers unaffiliated with the museum (Weschler 1995:35–37). These and many other equally bizarre exhibits are arrayed throughout a maze of dark corridors, chaotic intersections, blind corners, and dead ends.

Many have attempted to critique, "deconstruct," or otherwise illuminate the meaning and uniqueness of the MJT, but they have focused primarily on its displays and curation.[6] That is, the gaze of the analyst has been fixed on the same materials that mesmerize the museum visitor. In this article, I turn the analytical lens 180 degrees to focus on the visitors themselves. To some, the MJT is a museum of scientific history. To others, it is conceptual art. To cutting-edge curators and museologists, it is a sacred site of pilgrimage.[7] To a few, it is a pure and simple hoax.[8] I suggest that the most interesting part of this unusual institution is not what hangs on its walls, but the varied experiences – and experience-coordinating practices – of its disoriented guests.

Museums are good sites for beginning to "emplace" the intersubjectivity problem. One of their defining features is that they array physical objects in space. These objects – and the thematic exhibits into which they aggregate – are the intended foci of visitors' attentions. But, because people typically attend with (or at least among) other people, the museum experience is not simply an individual matter. Rather, visitors orient to the space and react to its contents together, through interaction. They simultaneously regard their surroundings *via* each other and each other *via* their surroundings. For this reason – and because they are bounded spaces in which interaction tends to be regular, repeated, and patterned – museums render the

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[6] The most extensive such treatment is Lawrence Weschler's critically acclaimed *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonders* (1995). See also, among many others: Biagioli 1995, Kaufman 1998, McMurtie 1997, and Roth 2002. For a virtual tour of the museum's exhibits, visit www.mjt.org.

[7] The guest book for April 2004 identifies visitors from twenty-four states and six countries, some of whom indicated that they had been anticipating the visit for as long as six years. My field notes document the visit of an East Coast art history professor who had been aware of the museum for years; and I participated in an interpretive experiment conducted by a visitor who had traveled from the Indianapolis Museum of Art (see methodological appendix).

[8] One visitor wondered whether the whole thing was a "dadaist prank."

relationship between interacting subjects and the physical space that they co-inhabit particularly amenable to observation.[9]

The Museum of Jurassic Technology is a *particularly* strategic site because, while sharing the fundamental traits of museums discussed above, it also disrupts normal competencies for sustaining presumptions of intersubjectivity. Most museums ask visitors to take their spatial "materiality" – "the arrangement of objects, the deployment of empty space around them, the kind of background against which they are made visible, [the] use of descriptive signs, the lighting conditions that illuminate them and the ways that we are encouraged to walk and pause within [the] space" – for granted (Hetherington 2002:187). The MJT, on the other hand, complicates these spatial elements – and, with them, presumptions of intersubjectivity. It does so in two ways. First, its labyrinthine layout impedes interactive possibilities, making it difficult for visitors to coordinate their activities and feel as if they have "seen the same thing." Second, the museum's bewildering exhibits – which are difficult to "read" without recourse to clear cultural models or official interpretive guidance – unsettle visitors and lead them to wonder whether they can possibly be sharing a common understanding of the place and its contents. These and other spatially rooted problems of orientation, procedure, and interpretation make it difficult for visitors to assume and act as if they are experiencing a world in common with other visitors. At the same time, the MJT renders the task of reestablishing intersubjective stability even more pressing – and so more visible – than in mundane environments. Visitors to the MJT inhabit an incredibly disturbing space with their consociates, and so feel particularly compelled to establish some sense of mutual understanding and grounds for cooperation. Visitor attempts at repair, when viewed alongside the disruptions, render apparent the spatially situated nature of some of the tacit foundations of everyday interaction.

The MJT thus operates similarly to a classic ethnomethodological tool, the "breaching experiment" (Garfinkel 1963 and [1967] 1984). Garfinkel ([1967] 1984:37–38) has described his procedure as performing operations that serve

> … to multiply the senseless features of perceived environments; to produce and sustain bewilderment, consternation, and confusion; to produce the socially structured affects of anxiety, shame, guilt, and indignation; and to produce disorganized interaction … [in order to] produce reflections through which the strangeness of an obstinately familiar world can be detected.

The MJT does all of this on its own, without the intervention of the researcher. Unlike in conventional breaching experiments, which involve the manipulation of a

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[9] While museums have been the object of sociological analysis in the past, most previous studies have neglected visitor experiences. Research in the fields of sociology and cultural studies has tended to focus either on the history and operation of the museum as a social institution (Alexander 1996, Blau 1991, DiMaggio 1991, Zolberg 1981 and 1984) or on the politics of representation involved in museum exhibition (Bennett 1995, Jenkins 1994, Lisus and Ericson 1995, Luke 2002, Macdonald 1998, Winans 1994, Zolberg 1998). Both of these currents emphasize the institutional production of the cultural object, neglecting the micro-interactional processes by which visitors achieve a sense of meaningful, shared experience of that object (exceptions include Bruder and Ucok 2000 and vom Lehn et al. 2001). Visitor studies in the field of museology *do* emphasize reception; but they have traditionally focused on the *individual* visitor's experience (Bicknell and Farmelo 1993, Bitgood and Patterson 1987, Falk and Dierking 2000, Robinson 1928, and Screven 1976) and have only begun to attend to interaction among visitors (Diamond 1986, McManus 1987).

situation by the researcher, the intersubjective disruptions at the MJT result from – and are resolved through – the physical environment. This solves a problem often confronted by ethnographers interested in ethnomethodological approaches. As Katz (2001:452, 2002:65) has noted, a standard tension between ethnography and ethnomethodology is that ethnographers are "reluctant to create absurd scenes" because of the importance of building rapport; they should thus be "delighted" to find a "naturally occurring scene" in which "subjects suddenly find their emotions revealed to them" without the researcher's active efforts. The MJT is such a scene. In the end, those same characteristics of the setting that conspire to unnerve museum visitors create unique observational opportunities for the researcher.[10]

This article is divided into two parts, each examining the relationship between one aspect of the physical environment and the problem of intersubjectivity. Part 1 focuses on the structural elements of the environment – especially the museum's labyrinthine layout – and demonstrates the importance of an ability to orient to and through space *together* for the maintenance of presumptions of intersubjectivity. Part 2 focuses on the environmental content – especially the museum's bewildering exhibits – and shows how the "readability" of those elements of the space that become the foci of subjects' coordinated interpretive attentions affect presumptions of intersubjectivity. For each part, I show how the spatial elements in question – within and with reference to which visitors interact – produce intersubjective disruptions; I then detail the various, spatially situated techniques by which visitors respond to these. In the conclusion, I address the generalizability of my findings, generated as they are by the observation of an unusual breach of normalcy rather than interaction in an everyday setting.

Part 1: Spatial structure and intersubjectivity

Many studies of space have focused on how the built environment can foster either engagement or estrangement on an interactional level (Gieryn 2000 and 2002, Lofland 1998, Sennett 1990, Whyte 1980). As Gieryn (2002:42) has noted of architecture's impact on social life, "… every design is a blueprint for human behavior and social structure, as well as a schematic for the 'thing' itself." This suggests that the structural elements of differently configured spaces can channel possibilities for joint activity and sustained interaction in different ways. Fieldwork at the MJT demonstrates that when an environment limits these possibilities, its inhabitants find it more difficult to presume the coordination of their experiences of it. This difficulty, in the end, amounts to a problematization of intersubjectivity.

Disruption 1: Labyrinthine layout disrupts interactive coordination

Most visitors come to the Museum of Jurassic Technology in small groups (of friends, relatives, or classmates), but structural elements of the space encourage the

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[10] For details on the ethnographic methodology, see the methodological appendix.

atomization of these groups.[11] The more a group fragments, the less its members are able to engage in joint activity and sustain interaction over time and through space. In the absence of this ability to orient to and through space together, it becomes difficult for visitors to presume that they are sharing a common experiential world with their consociates.

Visitors often comment that the MJT is a maze. Narrow hallways zigzag around dark corners, crisscross and fork at unmarked intersections, and dead-end unexpectedly. As founder David Wilson noted to one visiting school group, the museum is not laid out on the "IKEA model" (i.e., a circuit in which a given point is passed only once). Rather, there are multiple possible paths through the claustrophobic web of corridors.[12]

Such a labyrinthine layout leads to much confusion and creates practical navigational difficulties. Because there are no maps to guide the visit, the space is constantly unfolding in unusual ways and the visitor has no way of knowing how much more strangeness lies ahead. Visitors often find it hard to determine where they are supposed to go next; at the same time, as they trace their unique, convoluted paths through the museum, they lose track of where they have been. Many get completely turned around and end up arguing over which way leads to the exit. Ultimately, most groups fragment in the labyrinth, leaving group members largely on their own. This fragmentation happens gradually, as groups move deeper into the museum.

A few mechanisms do the initial peeling off of visitors from their groups. First, the displays themselves can be individuating. Many require reading copious amounts of text, listening to narration though handheld receivers, looking through view-finders, or watching videos in cramped spaces. Each of these devices individuates by the simple fact that it is physically difficult for more than one person to participate at once. This means that people from the same group tend to fan out to different displays. Second, visitors vary a great deal in their level of interest in (or frustration with) the exhibits, as well as in their patience for longwinded text, narration, and video. Inevitably, this means that some move through the exhibits more quickly than others. Finally, the arrangement of displays – and the traffic flow that this encourages – can foster group disintegration. What I refer to as "hub spaces" (areas in which many paths through the museum intersect) can be particularly congested, making it hard for group members to maintain themselves as a unit while moving through them. In one hub space, for example, 10 microscopes are situated around a large display case in the center of the room. Their arrangement in this often crowded space is such that when a visitor bends down to look through one, he or she blocks a

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[11] Only rarely do people visit alone. Most common are groups of two or three; less common are groups of four or five; and groups larger than five (e.g., school groups) typically subdivide during the visit.

[12] The intention of this design is unclear. When questioned by a student as to whether the layout has anything to do with the museum's motto of "Nature as Metaphor," Wilson, in classic style, responded: "Well, you're probably right. I've never thought of it that way before." He went on to explain that the layout was the result of gradual museum expansion into newly acquired space and that, given a blank slate, he probably could not have made it as labyrinthine if he had tried.

In my observations, I was attentive as to whether a dominant route through the museum emerged despite the many options provided by the floor plan. I found that it does not. Visitors improvise a wide variety of paths through the museum. In fact, members of the same group often proceed by different routes.

potential path through the room. This in effect enlists unsuspecting visitors into a gate-keeping role that directs different visitors to entirely different rooms of the museum.[13]

Once visitors get peeled off from their groups by one of these mechanisms, they have a hard time rejoining.[14] Typical museums provide ample space for waiting and regrouping. In these spaces – sometimes just transition areas or hallways, sometimes entire rooms devoted to waiting – visitors are free to engage in ongoing interaction away from the displays. But the cramped quarters of the MJT provide no such neutral zones for waiting or commiserating. Rather, the entire place is an unrelenting, overcrowded hive, alive with overlapping and incongruous activity. With nowhere to wait for their consociates, visitors are compelled to keep moving through the exhibits on their own.

Sometimes, as visitors become more and more separated from their groups, simply *finding* other consociates can be as difficult as rejoining them. The abundance of blind corners, disrupted lines of sight, general darkness, and – possibly more important – *relative* changes in lighting levels from room to room makes it difficult to see into even adjacent parts of the museum.[15] On one of my first visits, for example, I walked by the passage that leads from the west wing into the much darker and more ominous east wing. Squinting to make out the dim form of one, then two human figures as they passed in the same direction, I thought that I was seeing my reflection in a mirror and turned to see who was behind me. In fact, there was no mirror – the two figures were inside the darkened passage. The low level of visibility in the museum, coupled with a confusing layout, leads many visitors to become genuinely lost. I have watched many beeline through exhibits when trying to reestablish contact with their consociates, and have more than once been mistaken through the darkness for a member of someone's group.

In this way, structural elements of the physical environment at the MJT contribute to the atomization of visiting groups. This atomization disrupts visitors' abilities to engage in joint activity and to sustain interaction over time and space. In the absence of such coordinated activity and interaction, perspectival reciprocity can no longer be taken for granted. This disruption highlights how the practical maintenance of presumptions of intersubjectivity presupposes subjects' abilities to interact in, orient to, and move through the world together. The structural elements of an environment can either facilitate or impede these abilities.

Repair 1: Five navigational techniques for coordinating interaction

Visitors to the Museum of Jurassic Technology are not just passively moved, and their presumptions of intersubjectivity disrupted, by the physical environment in

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[13] Such congested spaces may also foster the disintegration of groups simply by making visitors feel claustrophobic and encouraging them to abandon their groups for less dense spaces. On the relationship between objective space and subjective experiences of "crowding," see Tuan 1977 (Chapter 5).

[14] This is not to say that they do not try or are never successful. Indeed, such repairs are the subject of the following sub-section of this article. The point is not that the space completely *determines* levels of coordinated interaction, but simply that it disrupts normal coordination and so requires more effort than usual on the part of participants to maintain a sense of normalcy.

[15] When asked by students in a question and answer session why the museum is kept so dark, Wilson touched his glasses and commented with a grin that it used to be even darker; as his eyesight has worsened, he guesses, the lighting has gradually been going up.

which they find themselves. As Gieryn (2002:41) has noted, buildings structure agency, but they are "never beyond the potential restructuring by human agents." Indeed, visitors to the MJT work with their consociates – actively, in and through the space – to coordinate their visits and reestablish a sense of intersubjective normalcy.

In an environment that encourages group disintegration, visitors face two related challenges: (1) sustaining ongoing interaction; and (2) ensuring that group members attend to the same displays over the course of the visit, thus "seeing the same thing." To meet these challenges, they rely on a range of navigational techniques, moving through space in ways that carve out a sphere for repeated interaction while making sure that the same objects are experienced by all group members. Specifically, visitors deploy one (or more) of five navigational techniques: tour guiding, conjoining experience, leap frogging, scouting, and flagging.

A first, though uncommon, navigational technique is "tour guiding." The MJT does not provide tours, but sometimes a group member will compensate for this lack of formal authority by assuming the role of guide.[16] In such cases, there is an asymmetrical relationship between the leader and led, with the leader taking on the responsibility of making sure that the others orient to and through the museum together.

But while tour guiding might come to mind as a common mode of museum navigation, it is rare at the MJT. School groups are the most likely to employ it, but they typically do so only for short periods of time. Teachers usually give students ample opportunity to explore on their own, during which time classes fragment into smaller groups (similar in size to other visiting groups) and employ the other techniques discussed below. Repeat visitors to the MJT, who often bring first-time visitors along with them, do not normally appoint themselves tour leaders and dominate the group experience. Rather, they give the others space and watch their reactions. Although repeat visitors may remain authority figures, their groups – like those of the students – tend to employ the other navigational techniques.

A second, more common, technique might be called "conjoining experience." In this mode of navigation, group members go from display to display together, rarely if ever separating. While, as discussed above, the MJT is particularly disruptive of this sort of close coordination, groups of two or three – especially couples, committed to sticking close – occasionally pull it off.

Couples will sometimes build physical intimacy into the experience of a display and merge perspectives (conjoining their experience) by the way they position their bodies. In one instance, a couple was examining a display that is part of the exhibit on memory theorist Geoffrey Sonnabend. This exhibit includes a series of telephone receivers that provide narration for each display. One of the displays is a large model of Iguazú Falls; the visitor can see a hologram of a bridge spanning the falls by looking through a viewfinder. It is initially unclear what the falls have to do with memory, so the phones are crucial to interpretation. Quoting from my field notes:

> They stand side by side, close, him on [her] right, bent over and looking
> through [a side] window at the display of the falls. He holds the phone in his

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[16] This might be the leader of a school group, or simply someone with unofficial authority by virtue of having visited previously.

left hand, with the receiver pointing forward, such that they can both hear. With his right hand, he points steadily to a place against the glass, his hand resting low and not really moving. They stay in this position apparently for the duration of the message. … he's doing some sort of interpretive guiding with an occasional word or two….

The couple enacts intimate bodily closeness and, by this closeness, shares two points of entry into the display: a telephone receiver and a line of sight to a point on the glass. What better way to ensure a congruity of experience than to align bodies so that they share a simultaneous perspective on the world? In this unconventional use of the telephone receiver – a device that, as noted above, often has an individuating effect on group members – the couple takes advantage of an element of the environment to establish a common perspective. This couple proceeded through the rest of the museum in the same way: sharing phone receivers, linking arms, touching heads, and whispering intimately. Every moment of time, every contextual shift, every waft of smell, every angle of vision, and every audible sound was simultaneously shared.[17]

A third navigational technique is "leap frogging." Often, groups do not coordinate as tightly as in conjoined experience; but they remain more or less in the same space viewing contiguous exhibits. Rarely at the same display, yet seldom far apart, they leap frog through the museum in a cris-cross pattern. At the moments of intersection, the visitors exchange a word, a chuckle, or just a knowing glance. In the following example, a man and a woman leap frog through a set of strange pictures hanging in series:

> A woman and man make their way, more or less together, across the pictures on the east wall. She apparently got there first and has spent more time with them. She is ahead, and he is about one [picture] behind. They do a sort of half leap frog maneuver, where they (first) are each positioned at separate pictures, then (second) the one at the furthest back moves up to join the other. They both remain there for a second [and she comments that "it's grotesque"]…, then (third) the one in the lead moves on, leaving the trailer at the previous [picture].

The moments of intersection are key because they are the times in which perspectives are purportedly synchronized and the fact of both having "seen the same thing" is recognized with a word, grunt, or eyebrow raise. In this way, leap frogging creates interactional space in the interstices. It also sidesteps problems of congestion and individuating devices by providing a way for visitors to stay "together" while actually often apart.

A fourth technique is "scouting." While some groups coordinate relatively tightly, by conjoining experience or leap frogging, the most common way of going through the museum involves more moderate coordination at the level of the exhibit. Members of the same group often do not move from display to display at the same

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[17] In this example, the visitors' way of conjoining experience is extremely intimate. In effect, it involves sharing a physical perspective by (almost) sharing a body. Conjoined experience can also be looser than this. Rather than merging bodies, some visitors go from display to display together, talking animatedly and constantly assisting each other in interpretation. Either way, the group members create a sense of shared experience by being meticulous about sharing every second of the museum, simultaneously and interactively.

pace: some read more of the text, are more thorough about noticing every visual detail, or listen to every piece of narration; others go through much more quickly. But those who view the displays more quickly do not simply finish the whole museum sooner. Rather, they make use of their free time to scout ahead in a way that contributes to the experiential coordination of the group as a whole. Scouts make short "expeditions" to preview upcoming exhibits, returning periodically to check on the progress of the others. When enough of the group has finished that it begins transitioning to the next exhibit, the scouts will return and share information about their expeditions. Scouting is thus a productive mode of "waiting" in an environment that lacks neutral spaces. It also produces asymmetrical interpretive relationships in which "interpretive activists" play a significant role in guiding the experience of others.[18]

In one instance, two visitors had spent time together evaluating an odd display in one of the front rooms and decided jointly that its "point" was the optical technology used. (In this display, the image of a convulsing man is projected onto the head of a stuffed American grey fox and synchronized with eerie howling sounds.) After viewing this display, the pair split up – one scouted ahead while the other lingered in the room. When the slower visitor began to move on to the next exhibit, his companion returned to inform him of what lay ahead. The one told the other that the upcoming exhibit was "all about projection, too." Note that the scout does not give away the *details* of the exhibit to come, but only what he perceives to be its necessary interpretive framework. The scout determines that the form of presentation is the "point" of the exhibit, foreclosing the possibility of other interpretations.[19] This example demonstrates how the scout makes use of free time (accumulated by having sped through the displays) to contribute to the shared-ness of the group's experience while keeping it cohesive on an exhibit-to-exhibit basis.

A final navigational technique is "flagging." Visitors sometimes go from exhibit to exhibit in a seemingly random order, with apparent disregard for the group. Although this mode of moving through the museum appears at first glance random, uncoordinated, and unconcerned about sharing experience, on closer inspection it becomes evident that there *is* coordination – it is just highly selective. Visitors moving through the museum in this way occasionally "flag" displays so that their consociates – in their equal flightiness – do not miss them. Visitors do not flag everything, however, but only those displays that strike them as particularly significant.

In one example, a group of two men and one woman had been going through the museum more or less on their own. The visitor that I call "Man 1" had missed the fox display from my previous example and was off in some of the back rooms. Man 2 *had* viewed the fox display and then also moved on to other rooms. At a certain

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[18] On "interpretive activists," see Stamatov 2002. It is worth noting that the slower visitors are not entirely at the mercy of the faster scouts. In some cases, a slower visitor will (verbally or nonverbally) call a scout back to share a moment with him or her. In this way, the slower visitors have a method for reigning in the scouts should they become too distant.

[19] The upcoming exhibit uses sophisticated holograms and optical illusions to explain the life and work of an historical figure, Athanasius Kircher. While the scout is confident about his interpretation, the meaning of the Kircher exhibit is neither simple nor obvious. Some see it as about the history of science, others about magnetism and theosophy, and still others about physics and geometry.

point, both returned to the front room together. They were walking briskly and with purpose toward the fox display, although not talking. Man 2 looked through the viewfinder first (apparently to show Man 1 how to do it) and then backed away to give Man 1 a turn. As Man 1 finished, Man 2 returned and they exchanged a muffled word before again going their separate ways. A few minutes later, they ran into the woman. They immediately (and jointly) brought her to see the display, repeating the same steps again. While the group's visit was atomistic in general, at the key point of a "good" display that had been missed, Man 2 brought Man 1 back across the museum and looked together with him; they then both made sure that the woman from their party attended to the same display. Whenever a new group member was introduced to the missed display, the flagger did not stand idly by – having accomplished the flagging – but actively engaged the display again (for a second, even a third, time).

Different groups coordinate their visits differently, but all employ one (or more) of these five navigational techniques.[20] These techniques work around and through elements of the physical environment to create room for interaction and to ensure that group members attend to the same displays. In this way, they help to maintain the group's coherence and to secure its members' senses of perspectival reciprocity in an environment that conspires to disrupt both. This highlights the ways in which presumptions of intersubjectivity rest on subjects' abilities to orient to and through space together. Doing so requires a space that fosters (or that at least does not disrupt) interaction and that can be navigated in a coordinated way.

Part 2: Spatial content and intersubjectivity

Just as the structural elements of a physical environment can channel interactive possibilities and have implications for intersubjectivity, the content of space is equally important. For the purposes of this discussion, I mean by "spatial content" those elements of an environment that become the foci of coordinated interpretive attentions. These could include discrete material objects, assemblages of objects, sounds, smells, or even the space as a whole (to the extent that it becomes objectified as a focus of interpretation).[21] As Bruder and Ucok (2000) have shown for art museums, the interpretation of objects is an interactive accomplishment. But interacting subjects have more trouble making sense of some objects than others. This bears on the problem of intersubjectivity because, as Crabtree (2000:1) has argued, the "readability" of spatial features enables "the achievement of an intersubjective or socially shared point of view providing for the orderly accomplishment of practical

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[20] This article does not presume to explain why different groups utilize different techniques at different times. The reasons appear to be related both to the internal dynamics of the group and to the particular space being navigated. That is, most groups seem to have a dominant *modus operandi*, but at the same time certain spaces also seem to encourage particular modes of coordination. This relationship would have to be dissected in order to predict navigational techniques for certain groups in certain spaces.

[21] "Spatial content" might be dealt with more subtly in future studies. Such an undertaking might start with Blumer's (1969:10–12) foundational (or with Harré's [2002] more recent) treatment of objects. A sociological theorization of objects is, however, beyond the scope of this article.

activities." Fieldwork at the MJT demonstrates that when the foci of coordinated interpretation are difficult to "read" or typify – and when other forms of interpretive aid are unavailable – subjects find it hard to presume that they are "on the same page" with their consociates. That is, "difficult" spatial content can disrupt the "natural attitude" (Schutz 1967a) and call presumptions of intersubjectivity into question.[22]

Disruption 2: Bewildering exhibits disrupt interpretive coordination

Part of what allows for the meaningfulness of conventional museums and their exhibits is the assumption that they reference a true world "out there."[23] Visitors who carry this assumption into the Museum of Jurassic Technology find themselves deeply bewildered by the eclectic exhibits, which are often either poly-vocal or utterly inscrutable.[24] The unusualness of the MJT's exhibits is rendered all the more difficult to manage by the ways in which the museum resists the easy application of existing "cultural models" and refuses to provide visitors with authoritative interpretive guidance. Visitors experience and manifest their bewilderment in a variety of ways. As founder David Wilson explains:

> There are some people who … come to the museum and in our introductory slide show begin to laugh, and laugh uproariously through the entire museum…. On the other end of the spectrum we have people for whom the museum is a much more solemn and serious place. We remember fondly a man … [who] spent at least three hours in the back, and when he came out he leaned his head against the wall and cried inconsolably for at least three minutes. My wife went over to him, and he said that he realized that it was a museum, but to him it was like a church (quoted in Weschler 2001).

While visitors confronting the quite "unreadable" spatial content of the MJT typically experience cognitive confusion and emotional unease, they also develop profoundly moral responses. They become anxious, frustrated, embarrassed, guilty, even indignant – many feeling "that they're being made a fool of" (author's interview with Wilson, 2005).[25] By engendering such a variety of fragmented, confused, and conflicting responses, the MJT's exhibits make it virtually impossible for visitors to assume that – or at least *how* – they are sharing a common experiential world with their consociates.

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[22] For a review of Schutz's thought on the role of typification in the maintenance of presumptions of intersubjectivity, see Heritage 1984 (51–61).

[23] History museums are assumed to depict true history; science museums are thought to represent actual scientific developments; even art museums, while the pieces themselves may not be representational, are assumed to display the work of actual artists and connect visitors to a real, external art world.

[24] Biagioli (1995:401–402) walks through a detailed description of the poly-vocality of two interesting exhibits.

[25] Perhaps the most striking evidence of this is the fact that "probably a dozen" visitors in the museum's history have "utterly obliterated" their names from the guest book when leaving the museum—effectively removing all record of their visit (author's interview with Wilson, 2005). On the morality of cognition in Garfinkel, see Heritage 1984 (Chapter 4). I thank Brandon Barry for re-sensitizing me to this crucial element of Garfinkel's work.

Although visitors experience a handful of objects at the MJT as relatively normal, most are quite perplexing. One of the more straightforward exhibits presents miniature sculptures of oddly selected personages (from John Paul II to Goofy), which are set into the eyes of needles and viewed through magnifying lenses. Most visitors simply examine the sculptures in happy amazement. Many exhibits, however, provoke sheer disbelief, spurring responses such as "is it *real*?" Believability does not usually emerge as a relevant axis of consideration at more typical museums; but visitors to the MJT confront this issue early on in their visits, upon viewing a horn that had supposedly grown out of a woman's head. Similarly, the exhibit on the "Deprong Mori of the Tripsicum Plateau" (a rare bat that can fly through walls using its powerful "electromagnetic sonar") is typically met with severe skepticism.

Many exhibits spur responses of full-blown confusion – or even fear. Upon encountering one part of the Athanasius Kircher exhibit (in which human forms spin slowly in glowing, Plexiglas globes in an otherwise darkened room) one visitor exclaimed to her companion: "*It's like you're on drugs*! The colors, the sounds, the light, the … this … [waving her hands in a sweeping motion at the array of globes]." Visitors in the "Garden of Eden on Wheels" exhibit comment to each other that the space feels "ghostly" and "funereal" with its "coffin-like" display cases, dim lights, and eerie dioramas of Airstream trailers. A room devoted to Opera singer Madalena Delani is overwhelmingly dark and unusually quiet, somehow soundproofed from the rest of the museum such that, upon entering, visitors experience the sensation of going deaf. This room – evoking both a shrine and a séance – is illuminated by a portrait of the singer, glowing a phantasmal green, and by dim lighting that occasionally turns off, startling visitors by leaving them alone with only the haunting visage. Finally, the front door buzzer is sharp and amplified in many parts of the museum such that whole rooms of visitors jump collectively when a new guest arrives, like with the sudden appearance of a ghost in a haunted house. Upon one jolting buzz, a woman, who had been sitting in the dark in a far corner of the museum, was terribly alarmed: "What the HELL was THAT?!?" Upon a second buzz about five seconds later, she continued, to her companion: "[concerned] What IS that?"[26]

The objects are bewildering on their own, but they are not viewed in isolation. Rather, museum visitors set the context for each piece by reference to earlier pieces (vom Lehn, Heath, and Hindmarsh 2001:196–198). At the MJT, characterized as it is by strange juxtapositions, this only makes matters worse. The name itself provides a first example: Jurassic *Technology*? The contrast prompted one visitor to comment that she should look up the word "Jurassic" in the dictionary, wondering, "How can there be any technology in the Jurassic era when there was no human society?" The odd juxtapositions only begin with the name, however. A replica of Noah's Ark – compelled by a small motor to oscillate as if bobbing on the floodwaters – follows immediately after a diorama depicting the natural habitat of the rare "African stink

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[26] It is interesting to compare the woman's fearful response to what it might have been in a more typical museum, where an overly loud buzzer might be assumed to be a design flaw. Curatorial "mistakes" in other museums are seen as unintended annoyances; here—as with an extremely poorly-lit display in the "Tell the Bees" exhibit—they are treated with suspicion and taken to be "creepy."

ant." In the Napoleon Library, works on Napoleon are followed by a book on the Tarot (then by Flaubert, *Origin of the Species*, and a book on gems). All this spurred one visitor to comment that "most things here seem like they're non sequiturs."

Visitors' abilities to make sense of exhibits are further disrupted by the fact that there are multiple possible paths through the museum. Without directional signposting, the sequential order in which exhibits are viewed is indeterminate – creating multiple possible contexts for each. On one plausible visit trajectory, an exhibit on memory theorist Geoffrey Sonnabend might be contemplated after a trip to a "Russian Tea Room;" on another, after an exhibit on Airstream trailers. Exhibits displayed in hub spaces are particularly troublesome because, on any given visit, they are experienced multiple times. Relative changes in lighting, sound, and smell, along with the ambiguity of the displays, ensure that these spaces will be experienced differently depending upon their position in the visit narrative. One hub space in the east wing, for instance, seems incredibly dark and ominous when one enters from the (relatively) better-lit west wing; but the same space feels rosy and welcoming when approached from the even darker and more unsettling "Tell the Bees" or Kircher exhibits. Almost as if by design, hub spaces also tend to be the most internally disordered (or the least themed). In this, they serve to re-disorient visitors before another "dip in the pool" of more internally coherent exhibits. One visitor, passing a display in a west wing hub space, chuckled, "I still don't get that one!"

Wilson expresses an optimistic take on the cumulative product, noting that every time you think you "get it" a new layer is added:

> People talk … very often about "getting it" – either you "get it" or you "don't get it" – but, I mean, that's always struck me as curious, 'cause that's like as if it's a *joke*…. But to me experiences that … are complex and that are interesting to me are not … like "oh, I get it" – and now that you've "got it" you've got it. Things that are interesting are forever unfolding in ways that: you thought it was *this*, but it's not *this*, but yet maybe it's *this*. It just keeps leading, you know? (author's interview, 2005)

But to participate in such a process, it is necessary for visitors to suspend disbelief and engage the jumble of odd exhibits. As illustrated by one recently arrived couple, sitting silently on a bench and looking confused as to where to even *start*, this is easier said than done. Another visitor sighed to a companion, late in her visit: "I need to go to a movie. I need something with a beginning, a middle, and an end after this…."

On top of this, the bewildering exhibits are arrayed throughout a disturbing space that is not just a backdrop for – but is in many respects fundamental to – the experience of the museum. At most locations within the MJT, strange sounds play off each other in disconcerting ways, with eerie howls or rolling thunder overlapped by the tinkling of chimes, the gurgling of water, or the plaintive harmonies of a boys choir. The thick air is cut through with strange currents, carrying wafts of what smells like incense, charcoal, or candles. On top of this, light levels within the general darkness of the museum change from room to room such that the transitions seem strategically orchestrated to manipulate pupil dilation. The leakage of sound, smell, and visual elements from one room to another intensifies the sense of

trepidation by a sort of haphazard sensory foreshadowing. With no way of knowing what lies ahead, there always seems to be one more darkened passageway to entice the visitor with some faintly-lit but unidentifiable shape; but, as in a haunted house, one never knows *exactly* what lies around the corner until coming face to face with it.

In this overwhelming environment, visitors often express outright fear. Indeed, the most fear-inducing rooms are also those located the furthest away from the entrance, ensuring that by the time visitors reach them they will already be thoroughly unsettled. When one visitor reached the Kircher exhibit, for example, she was saying to her companion: "My heart is pounding. I want out. How much longer do we have to be in this place?" Unlike other public places – such as conventional museums, or supermarkets for that matter – in which the design intent seems to be to *avoid* impinging on the viewing tasks of visitors (so that they may focus on the content of the displays), the MJT does just the opposite, transporting the visitor into an intense and inescapable sensory reality.

The only apparent out for visitors wishing to synchronize experience in such a setting is to make sense of it. One way in which this is often done in everyday life is through the application of pre-existing "cultural models."[27] Most spaces are set up and managed in such a way that they can be easily typified as specific kinds of places (e.g., art museums, theme parks, book stores, classrooms). Through the mutually recognized application of existing cultural models for standard types of places, interacting subjects are in most cases able to coordinate their expectations for how best to understand a place and operate within it. But the MJT resists easy typification. It holds in tension two familiar but contradictory cultural models: a "modern museum" model and (what I call) a "place of wonderment" model.[28]

On one level, the MJT suggests the applicability of a "modern museum" model. In addition to the presence of the word "museum" in the title, there is the fact that visitors enter past a staffed front desk, are encouraged to donate and sign a guest book, are presented with an introductory video, and exit through a bookstore stocked with logoed paraphernalia and adorned by a plaque honoring prominent donors. The MJT presents a series of exhibits that employ the standard array of legitimacy conferring devices – informational plaques, complex Latin terminology, and authoritative baritone narration. The "modern museum" model builds in the expectation that sense making is possible and that there is a correct interpretation of the exhibits and route through the museum. In most museums – whether devoted to science, history, or even art – rational evaluation and meaning making is taken to be the primary goal. Thus, visitors to the MJT find themselves doing something that they would not ordinarily do at a "place of wonderment" – rationally searching for meaning.

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[27] I am using the term "cultural models" to mean those socially shared cognitive schemas through whose application subjects orient, organize, and make sense of their own actions and experiences. Various literatures use a range of terms to describe roughly this same thing: "typifications" (Berger and Luckmann 1966, Schutz 1967a), "schemas" (Sewell 1992), "frames" (Snow et al. 1986), or "models" (Meyer et al. 1997).

[28] Other "places of wonderment" include funhouses (Katz 1996), haunted houses, or "Ripley's Believe it or Not." On "wonder," see Laurier 2004 and Weschler 1995.

At the same time, however, the MJT is like a funhouse in its bewildering displays and overwhelming atmosphere. In "places of wonderment," it is often difficult for visitors to weave together a coherent experience; and in fact such ambivalence is the point. Visitors are always vacillating between joy, bewilderment, fear, excitement, uncertainty, and shock – finding themselves constantly in a state of "wonder." According to the "place of wonderment" model, the point is not meaning making at all. In fact, it is often taken for granted that such places are inscrutable, or even outright contrived. Rather, the point is creating a shared memory of a wondrous experience. Thus, visitors to the MJT do things that they would not ordinarily do at a modern museum: laugh, scream, embrace, and question believability.

As soon as the "place of wonderment" model promises to become dominant and justify a skeptical stance, another element of the MJT cues the "modern museum" model yet again.[29] Visitors may not be aware of the specific cultural models that are clashing, but the question of what the MJT is a case *of* is one that dominates their confused conversations. The dissonance produced by the co-evocation of these two clashing models denies visitors a useful tool for resolving interpretive difficulties and leaves them feeling disoriented and disconnected from each other.

Another way in which visitors might try to make sense of the bewildering exhibits at the MJT is by relying on official interpretive guidance. Most museums provide their visitors with a host of friendly docents and an array of interpretive tools (e.g., descriptive plaques, brochures, and audio tour equipment). While visitors to the MJT regularly seek out such guidance, it is nowhere to be found. The interpretive texts tend to be extremely cryptic. The orientation video, with which most visitors begin, concludes with the following perplexing lines:

> … even today the Museum preserves something of the flavor of its roots in the early days of the natural history museum – a spirit which has been described as "incongruity born of the overzealous spirit in the face of unfathomable phenomena." Glory to Him, who endureth forever, and in whose hands are the keys of unlimited Pardon and unending Punishment.

Although the exhibits are – as in most museums – often accompanied by printed text, this usually provides little more assistance than the introductory video. At the "African stink ant" display, for example, the plaque that looks as if it should provide an explanation is largely blank, with only a few worn, scratched-through, white words in the corner – illegible, but apparently in Latin. Such "interpretive aids" can hardly be taken as authoritative assistance. The museum staffers are equally vague. Wilson states simply that what matters is not his own intention but what an exhibit means to the visitor. But even this degree of insight is a rare treat. Most visitors interact with museum staff only at the front desk, where the austere greeting ritual consists solely of a request to sign the guest book, a questioning as to whether this is a first visit, and an update that the movie theater is now open. When visitors manage to engage staff later in the visit, their questions elicit only cagey responses. When one visitor asked a staffer about the meaning of the museum, she smiled enigmatically and

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[29] Gieryn (2003) argues that the MJT constructs itself as a museum so well that audiences refuse to abandon the model, even when the MJT tries to undermine its own authority.

said that the visitor should look "more deeply and let it seep in; or, then again, perhaps *less* deeply."

Sources of authority at the MJT are in fact so scarce (or taken to be so untrustworthy) that visitors often wonder what is or is not an official exhibit. They debate whether works in progress are themselves exhibits. They wonder if a watch glass smashed under the lens of a microscope was broken intentionally and should be read for meaning and whether empty display cases marked "under renovation" ever actually contained a display.[30] Sometimes they ponder the significance of standard architectural features like exposed piping or hidden access doors. In one case, a visitor noted as significant the fact that a plumb line was moving rather than hanging plumb. And when a dog slipped through an open door (connecting backstage workshop with front stage museum) and ran through the Sonnabend/ Delani halls, visitors wondered what it must *mean*.

The objects on display at the MJT produce profound bewilderment in visitors who repeatedly fail in their attempts to "get it." The strange objects are not so much problematic on their own, but because of the lack of tools for making sense of them.[31] Left to fend for themselves in the absence of interpretive authorities or applicable cultural models, visitors become deeply unsettled. Without confidence in their own interpretations, they cannot assume that they are sharing a common world with their consociates. This disruption highlights how presumptions of intersubjectivity rely on the comprehensibility of the data of experience and on subjects' abilities to shape these into practically understandable realities.

Repair 2a: Providing practical interpretive assistance

One way in which visitors respond to the disruptive nature of the MJT's contents is by providing each other with practical interpretive assistance.[32] Visitors do not exchange such assistance in moments somehow disengaged from the flow of experience; rather, interpretive exchange is a naturally emergent part of exploring the space. The provision of interpretive assistance is thus *constitutive of*, rather than *external to* and *reflective upon*, the museum experience. This resonates with

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[30] Just when visitors might conclude that missing displays are intentional, they may encounter the notice stating: "Due to the large number of exhibits and the ever expanding nature of the collection, the content of the museum is continually in flux. Your return patronage is greatly appreciated."

[31] If the project of the MJT were to *explain* strange objects, rather than simply to make them available to the visitor, the museum would be considerably less disruptive. (I thank Nazgol Ghandnoosh for this point.)

[32] These interactions can be genuinely egalitarian or they can be asymmetrical. Often, one visitor will bear more of the interpretive weight while others will be more passive. Asymmetrical relationships may be constant within a given group or they may vary on an exhibit to exhibit basis. They may operate because of personality, gender, or other power dynamics specific to the group that exist prior to the museum visit, or they may develop because some visitors have past experience with the MJT or expertise on a particular topic. They may also develop if some group members (such as children) distinctly *lack* certain competencies necessary for viewing the museum "correctly" on their own. This article does not presume to determine the causes of variation in interpretive balance beyond these suggestions, but rather focuses on methods for providing interpretive assistance that are used in both egalitarian and asymmetrical interpretive relationships.

Garfinkel's ([1967] 1984:1, 31) suggestion that the "situated practices of looking-and-telling" that make everyday settings "accountable" are "an endless, ongoing, contingent accomplishment." It may be that visitors provide assistance out of an egoistic desire to demonstrate their interpretive prowess or to direct an emerging consensus; alternately, they might do it out of an altruistic desire to see others "get it." But regardless of motive, the practical activity of providing assistance renders interpretive decisions social rather than personal, contributing to the set of socially elaborated cues attesting that what has been experienced has been experienced *together* and in similar terms. It would be too optimistic to say that everyone successfully "gets it" in the end; but visitors do make heroic efforts to "get on the same page" about the materials at hand. Even if interpretive consensus is never reached, members of a group can agree that they saw the same thing. This activity is not done *despite* the MJT, but occurs in, through, and with reference to the spatial setting.

Many displays at the MJT are neither neatly bounded nor easily comprehensible. Confronted with such displays, visitors show each other what to do with their bodies and where to direct their attentions to get the full and correct picture. Sometimes this involves directing the gaze. In one instance, a woman told her companion where it was necessary to look in order to appreciate a display of microscopic mosaics. As the companion was looking through a microscope and expressing enjoyment at the magnified image, the woman prodded her: "You have to look *outside* of the microscope" (where she noted that the beautiful image "looks just like a bunch of dust"). The woman told her companion where she ought to look to get the full impact of the display, effectively redrawing the display's boundaries by suggesting that what is seen through the eyepiece must be juxtaposed with what is seen on the slide with the naked eye. Similarly, visitors often direct the auditory attentions of their companions by suggesting that they listen to the narration provided by the telephone receivers located throughout the museum. The same can even be said for olfactory attentions, as visitors note the smell of charcoal in the tea room or the puffs of madeleine-scented air produced by the Proust display.

Visitors also often direct the interpretive attentions of their companions to the formal characteristics of an exhibit or display. In one instance, the "behind the scenes" technical aspects of how a display worked were highlighted. Two men were looking at the fox display mentioned above. After instructing his companion to look through the viewfinder to get the standard perspective, the first man suggested that he check out a semi-hidden part of the display containing the optical device used to produce the "trick." They both looked together, their bodies synchronized, as the one explained how the exhibit worked. Quoting from my field notes:

> He shows him how the dual images are projected from below into the lenses, thus…"into" the stuffed [fox]. They both crane their necks to see the various parts that one is describing to the other, and the [other] affirms that it is interesting.

In this case, one visitor focused the other's attention on how the display *worked*. By extension, he was telling his companion that it was a display *about* optics.

As this last example illustrates, much of the interpretive direction at the MJT is about finding the "point" – even the gimmick – of each display. A man in one case

was instructing the woman he was with about where to look in order to get the full impact of the diorama of Iguazú Falls, both verbally and by example.

> He looked [through the viewfinder] for a moment and then stood up. … she looked next, slowly. He looked again, then moved to look through the [side] window of the display, then back to the end where the woman remained, and looked again through the viewfinder. "See this? It's a little bridge, it looks like. But see [as he moves to the side a bit], you don't see it [when looking through this other window]." She doesn't say anything, but moves to the side to look where he's motioning.

The exhibit is boiled down to the simple fact that the holographic bridge is visible through the viewfinder but not from other perspectives. To make this point, the man guides his companion to a juxtaposition of perspectives that can only be produced by looking from more than one angle. He seems to think that the juxtaposition is a crucial element of the display and that to miss it is to miss the point. Such direction ensures that both will share the summary couplet "disappearing bridge" as a descriptor for the display.

Most often, interpretive assistance is unsolicited. When one woman asks her newly arrived companion:

> "Did you see the mosaics?" He replies that, no, he hasn't. She responds: "They're incredible. They're made with butterfly wings…." He moves over to the microscopes, and she interjects: "the story is behind you." Without looking in the microscope, the man turns around and starts to read the placard.

In this example, the woman not only directs the man (proactively) to a potentially missed exhibit, but provides an evaluation of its merit and introduces what she sees as a compelling piece of factual information. (She also interrupts the man's efforts to follow her advice by telling him that he is starting in the "wrong" place.) Sometimes, however, interpretive assistance is provided in *response* to emergent interpretive difficulties. In the following example, a couple examines a series of stereoscopic radiographs that are to be viewed using special glasses:

> At some point the man hangs his glasses back up and continues looking, and they continue talking. Later, apparently noticing that he's not using the glasses and [that] he's not seeing something the way she's trying to get him to see it, she walks back to the entrance, picks up his glasses, brings them to him, and says "Put the glasses on, or else it doesn't work."

This example highlights the fact that the provision of assistance occasionally happens in response to a problem of experience sharing – in this case the woman was having difficulty getting the man to see the same thing that she saw.

Visitors' provision of practical interpretive assistance confronts the "difficulty" of the exhibits head on and uses those same exhibits to rebuild what the MJT consistently disrupts – visitors' abilities to take for granted a sense of shared experience. The act of providing assistance *itself* becomes evidence for the visitors of perspectival reciprocity, regardless of whether that assistance is actually "successful" in the objective sense of fostering visitors' arrival at shared substantive conclusions.

Repair 2b: Constructing folk theories

Another way in which visitors respond to the disruptive nature of the MJT's spatial content is by gradually piecing together folk theories that make sense of the exhibits and the place as a whole. Whereas the provision of practical interpretive assistance is normally proactive and preemptive, visitors usually do not elaborate their folk theories until all group members have had a chance to look at things for awhile on their own.

The most basic type of folk theory construction involves simply "connecting the dots" of what is given. Sometimes this proceeds according to a straightforward logic, deriving meaning by how the pieces of the puzzle fit together. In one instance, a group of four was moving through an exhibit that showcases eccentric letters about the nature of the cosmos, written to scientists at the Mount Wilson Observatory. They read the letters and deciphered penmanship together. At one point, a visitor declared that a set of photographs (of specific individuals) could not be real. His logic was that the letters were supposed to be very old, but that the photos looked recent – thus, they could not be real pictures of the senders. Later, upon deciding that the photos might be of the scientist *addressees* (who might have been more recently available to be photographed) instead of the obscure senders, he amended his position and concluded that the photos could be real after all.

Often, connecting the dots is a dialogical process. In the following example, visitors were examining a small "almond stone" (i.e., a fruit pit) on which is supposedly carved a menagerie of characters and happenings. After one woman had read aloud a nearby plaque listing all that is carved into the stone, the group members looked deeply and commented back and forth:

> "Ok, so I see this here. I think this might be a cross, but I don't see a tortured Christ…." "Wait! I think I see the face on the front!" "See that, that's his hat, and his chin!" "No wait, that thing that you think is the eye socket, it's really the ear…." They debate which way the "face" is looking, and [the woman] turns around to demonstrate to [the others] how the head is positioned. [One man] starts to move away with a quiet smile, and says something about the "power of suggestion" and [the others] agree. [The woman] tells [a second man] that she definitely sees the face and [that man] concurs…."Although, [he adds] I don't see the plains of Lombardy." And [the woman] adds "or a dog barking, or a … (lists a few other things, pointing to the text)."

In this case, the back and forth leads to an ambiguity about what is "really" there, but agreement that something is awry and that the "power of suggestion" is at work.

Given the nature of the exhibits at the MJT, however, sometimes simply connecting the dots does not provide satisfying results. In one instance, a woman had been asking a companion a series of questions about the Sonnabend narrative that he could not answer. The man went off to listen to the informational phones again and returned triumphantly to clarify the story. He explained that: Wilhelm Sonnabend met his wife at Iguazú Falls; they then moved to Chicago and had a son, Geoffrey (the memory theorist); when Geoffrey was ill, his mother took him to the falls to recuperate; there, he met Delani and came up with his theory of memory.

"You mean the falls in … *Mesopotamia*?" the woman interjected, perturbed. (Iguazú Falls is located on the border between Brazil and Argentina.) The man laughed and asked if the audio had said this in the Delani room. "Yeah – just once – but yeah, Mesopotamia," she responded. The dots, as far as the visitors were concerned, were unconnectable.

Since simply connecting the dots is not always sufficient to overcome their sense of bewilderment, visitors also introduce outside, expert, and analogous knowledge in elaborating their folk theories. Student groups often bring in outside knowledge. In one case a student, upon noticing a T-shirt of the Sonnabend exhibit in the bookstore, reminded another that they had read an article on Sonnabend and that he "never really existed – they made him up!"[33] Other visitors import outside knowledge, picked up from books or documentaries, of Noah's Ark and the Tower of Babel. In the "Tell the Bees" exhibit, many visitors provide additional information on folk remedies with which they are already familiar. Visitors with expert knowledge of science sometimes instruct their peers in the finer points of the chemical process of "sublimation" when looking at the exhibit on the topic, often being asked to report on the exhibit's truth value. Expert knowledge can provide fuel for contention when more than one group member claims interpretive supremacy – as when two visitors debated whether the stereoscopic radiographs were more akin to X-ray or MRI images – but this problem rarely arises. Finally, visitors draw on comparable moments from their personal biographies to suggest what something is "like." In one instance, a woman used analogy in response to what she believed to be her companion's disbelief in the possible "reality" of the micro-mosaics. Upon looking through the microscopes, the woman exclaimed "It's wonderful!" and asked her companion "What is it? Is it a painting?" The companion clarified that they were not paintings, but microscopic mosaics. As she looked again and exclaimed "wow," he chuckled, got up from his microscope, and added a skeptical, "*supposedly.*" In response to this introduction of skepticism, the woman related a story of visiting St. Peter's Cathedral in the Vatican. She described a huge mural that she had thought was a painting, but up close it became clear that it was a mosaic. Whereas I had taken the companion's "*supposedly*" as shorthand for a warning that "if something seems too amazing to be true at the MJT, it probably is," the woman took it to be a much more specific skepticism about whether something that looked like a painting could really be a mosaic. She attempted to resolve this dilemma, and realign perspectives with her companion, by introducing an analogous experience.

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[33] In this sense, the boundaries of the museum experience extend beyond the building walls to include awareness of outside commentary. This is one source of authority that *is* available to the MJT visitor. Wilson noted that there have been fewer "pronouncedly negative" visitor responses because "things have been written that make it seem…as if we are an acceptable place; and before it was absolutely not clear if we were acceptable or not" (author's interview, 2005). However, it is worth noting that outside knowledge of the museum is no less suspect than endogenous knowledge. One visitor approached me, thinking me to be a museum employee: "Can you tell me where, I hear that you guys have a large, hairy Bigfoot?" (There is no such display.)

Visitors sometimes rely on ideas about the museum as a whole when elaborating their folk theories. In the following exchange, a man posits the "hoaxness" of the MJT as an explanation for why a particular display does not make sense.

Woman: I don't understand (looking genuinely puzzled at Man 1). So the crystal is making that sound? Why is the light moving from the beetle to the crystal?

Man 1: (looking frustrated) I think what they're trying to say is that the beetle is making the same sound as the crystal.

Woman: Wait – the beetle is making this sound? I don't understand why they have the two here next to each other.

Man 1: (trying to walk over to Man 2 – apparently fed up by the incredible exhibit) No – they're trying to say (Man 2 taking an interest and looking amused) that that is the sound that the crystal makes if you amplify it a whole lot, and that it's more or less the same as the one that the beetle makes; that the beetle is mimicking the crystal – since they look alike. I don't believe it, but that's what they're trying to say (trying to walk away again).

Woman: Wait – crystals make sounds? (looking genuinely confused)

Man 1: (laughs) Well….

Man 2: (moving over) If there's one thing I do know about this museum it's that … everything here's not exactly (laughs, skeptically) … you can't trust the things in here – *it's a borderline hoax.*

In this case, Man 2 invokes outside rumors about the museum to help clarify an interpretively difficult situation. Visitors often raise questions about the truth value of challenging displays when explanations fall short, either in the course of explaining them to, or in response to the explanatory efforts of, others in their group. In such cases, being "on the same page" ends up meaning *not* agreement on explanation but agreement *that explanation is impossible.*

Finally, visitors also construct more grandiose theories over the course of their visits. These are often elaborated in ongoing discussions – taking place among the displays, around the exit, and after leaving the museum – about what the MJT *is*, or is trying to do. Common proposals center on the themes of rationality, religion, superstition, and art. Visitors develop their theories over time, and new exhibits spur debate and the revision of reigning theories. On my very first visit, for example, I posited to my consociates a theory that the MJT was motivated by a concern with arcane knowledge, especially that contained in Freemasonry. My theory was bolstered by the Kircher exhibit, the presence of a book on secret societies in the Napoleon Library, and the listing of what I guessed to be Hollywood Scientologists among the prominent donors. I was hard pressed, however, to defend my theory in front of the "African stink ant." In one post-visit discussion, a visitor suggested that the MJT contains "the flotsam and jetsam of history" and in the end is a museum *about museums.* He went on to describe his unfolding thought process:

At first I was just looking around, and it seemed a little strange. Then I was confused … (laughs) … then I was amused … At first I was really trying hard

> to figure out what the system was, how things were related, whether things were real or not…. It's not that I figured out the system or anything. It's just that I stopped trying to make the connections…. I realized that there *are* no connections! I started to reflect on what a museum is and what our expectations are in museums and how we figure things out….

This visitor then continued to reflect on typical museums and all of the cues that visitors rely on to make sense, explaining how his thoughts were prompted by the absence of such cues at the MJT. As this example makes clear, folk theories are not stable interpretations, but are developed over time – in and with constant reference to the environment.

The construction of folk theories is an interactive process. In addition to the provision of practical interpretive assistance, it is a principal way in which visitors respond to the disruptive spatial content of the MJT and attempt to reestablish presumptions of intersubjectivity. The elaboration of such theories requires an intense engagement with the space; otherwise, the theories would be easily discredited in favor of stronger theories. In this way, again, the environment of the MJT not only disrupts presumptions of intersubjectivity, but also provides the raw materials that visitors use to reestablish them.

Repair 2c: Enacting a presumed interpretive consensus

While providing practical interpretive assistance and elaborating folk theories are, in many ways, about helping consociates confronted with bewildering exhibits to "get it," visitors often get on the same page by acting *as if* "it" is already "gotten." They regularly do this by exchanging subtle cues in the form of micro-gestures, humor, and retrospective statements. When visitors exchange such cues, they enact a presumed interpretive concensus by proceeding as if a congruence of perspectives has already been achieved.

Visitors exchange a wide array of micro-gestures in the process of viewing exhibits at the MJT.[34] These include bodily motions or positionings, facial expressions, vocal noises, and short verbal phrases. On one level, these call attention to objects to be evaluated. A nudge, cock of the head, finger point, or throwaway remark (such as "Wow!", "What the hell?", or "That's great!") is often sufficient to serve as a request for a companion to pay attention to a particular object. But since visitors often allow their consociates ample space to view displays on their own, gestures can also mark an end to a period of individual viewing and encourage a moment of evaluative exchange. While watching a portion of a film on micro-miniature sculptures, for example, two companions sitting next to each other marked a mutual moment of disbelief and opened the door for further evaluation with their gestures. After the description of two or three miniatures, which elicited no response from the visitors, a third (a rose sculpted inside a hollowed-out human hair) apparently crossed a threshold of believability – a threshold that was reinforced by interaction. The two companions looked at each other at the same time,

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[34] On gestures, see Kendon 1997, McNeill 1985, and Schegloff 1984.

acknowledged their mutual response by shaking their heads, and then began to talk quietly. As this example demonstrates, cuing with micro-gestures can be a ritualized assertion that, for all practical purposes, all present have reached a point of understanding (or of mutual non-understanding). It acknowledges narrative closure, marking an object as "seen." The act of straightening up after bending over to examine a display, for example, can be a way of registering it as "viewed" and announcing one's availability for evaluative exchange.

All of these cues come together throughout the sequence of stages that constitute the "doing" of a display. In the following example, two men were looking at the "African stink ant" diorama. Man 1 was standing in front of the display, holding a phone receiver to his ear and listening to a series of recorded beeps.[35] He cast a glance at his passing companion, beckoning him and requesting a moment of shared experience. Man 2 approached and gave Man 1 a quizzical look, in effect asking "What is it?" without words. Man 1 responded, verbally and with confused severity, "I haven't the slightest idea." Man 2's response was to let out a compressed laugh through his lips ("ppphhhh!"). In acknowledgment of their mutual confusion, Man 1 immediately reciprocated with a similarly dismissive laugh of his own. They both then turned to the display and looked independently for a few seconds. "I'm looking at it…," Man 1 said, reasserting that the state of confusion remained definitive. Finally, with a staccato and raised inflection, Man 1 blurted, "OK then" – declaring an end to the attempt to resolve the confusion, ratifying confusion as the final and agreed upon interpretive evaluation, and signaling an end to the viewing. Both men turned away from the display at the same time following this remark. With the exchange of very few words, and in the face of a confusing display, the two men jointly identified an object for attention, reached a practically acknowledged evaluative consensus, and marked a mutually agreeable end to the shared experience.

Humor is another type of cuing that both draws attention and marks a presumption of interpretive consensus.[36] Laughing while alone in front of a display can be a way of calling others from the group and encouraging a moment of shared viewing. Collective laughter can cue a moment as noticed and provide evidence of a shared evaluation. In one example, as a group of about 15 students stood silently outside the MJT's movie theater, a strange sound got progressively louder. First, there was a slight rumble that began to sound more and more like a train. The students began to look at one another, puzzled, as it got louder and then gradually faded away. They then began to smile and laugh self-consciously at what was obviously a recorded sound. Further, humorous mimicry is often used to mark a moment of shared evaluation. At a point in which the orientation video projects the image of two gloved hands and narrates: "on the *one hand* … on the *other hand* … by providing the visitor a *hands-on* experience…," visitors often look at each other, giggle, and hold their own hands up to the screen. A dismissive chuckle is often all

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[35] My field notes from the time of this observation note that the receiver played only "a series of repeated electric beeps spaced about 2 or 3 seconds apart." On a later visit, the device appeared to have been "fixed" and was playing a narrative track.

[36] Some good sociological treatments of humor include Fine 1984, Flaherty 1984, Katz 1996, Mulkay and Gilbert 1982, Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2001, and Seckman and Couch 1989.

that is needed to mark the end of a viewing moment and signal a move to the next object.

Similarly, joking or sarcastic comments are often used to reinforce a sense of shared experience. In addition to drawing attention to the object of the statement, such comments also *assert* a shared evaluation of the situation by proceeding *as if* that evaluation is already shared. Assumptions must be shared in order for a joke to be taken as such and to make sense. For example, when one member of a group was unaccounted for and another suggested that "maybe she got sucked into the place … into the fifth dimension," the joke-teller was presuming that the others had a sort of "Twilight Zone" evaluation of the museum as a whole. The joke-hearers reinforced the shared-ness of this evaluation by their laughter. Sarcasm similarly reinforces presumptions of shared experience. When one visitor turned to another and said in a sarcastic tone, "I really like *that* one," with reference to what appeared to be an intentionally empty display case, and when the other replied with a nod and a sly grin, the two were not only speaking of a given display but reinforcing the impression that they were developing similar conclusions about the museum as a whole. The importance of humor for the group experience is made all the more evident when it falls flat. Once, a visitor was terribly enthusiastic about the odd juxtaposition of a pair of exhibits and was indicating his excitement by trying to joke about it with others in his group. When he finally drew a consociate into his stringing together of a nonsensical evaluation of the display, and followed the joke by explaining that he liked it because it was a "non sequitur," the companion simply walked off. Not reciprocating the humorous overture was a hostile move because it evidenced a lack of concern for group sharing.

Finally, visitors often make retrospective statements that presume a shared perspective on what has just been experienced.[37] These offhand references can be overt (such as "That was so hilarious!"), and such statements – and their responses – clearly establish evaluative parity. More common than such overt accounts, however, are statements that presume a shared interpretation from the start. In one example, at the conclusion of the orientation video, a mother commented to her daughter that "this is right up your alley." In another case, a man commented as leaving the Napoleon Library: "Peter, I'll have to take Peter here." His companion responded "Yeah, I think you should." Both of these comments presume not only a common knowledge of the characters of the daughter and Peter, but also a similar understanding of what has just been witnessed.

Retrospective statements can also be more subtle. In the following example, presumptions of shared experience are reinforced through mimicking a meaningful remembered moment. A group of students had just viewed a 30-min documentary film in the upstairs theater. (In this film, the narrator often begins scenes by standing up into the frame in a way that appears strange and elicits an occasional giggle.) Most of the audience left while the credits rolled, but two stayed until the very end and witnessed a final, surprise scene. When the two eventually emerged, one announced to the audience outside: "You missed the end. She [the narrator] came back!" The others were quiet and looked at the woman, confused, for a moment.

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[37] On how the "retrospective-prospective" quality of everyday discourse reinforces a sense of "common understanding," see Garfinkel ([1967] 1984:38–44, esp. 41–42).

"Like this?" a smiling student asked (bending over and putting her head down, then straightening up). "Yes! Popped right up," the woman said. The rest of the group laughed. In this case the woman's statement that "she came back" assumed that the others had also taken note of the narrator as strange. The student's mimicry pushed this point of mutuality a step further by signaling a recognition that the "she" in question was the narrator and, further, by proceeding as if it had been established that the standing up behavior was odd. The woman's response to the mimicry, and the group laughter that followed, added an element of collective closure, cementing the moment as meaningful and shared (even though the behavior of the narrator remained inexplicable).

The use of micro-gestures, humor, and retrospective statements serves to mark moments of interactive exchange as meaningful and shared. Proceeding as if an interpretive consensus has already been reached in this way is a third technique by which visitors to the MJT reestablish presumptions of intersubjectivity in the face of disruptive spatial content. Like the provision of practical interpretive assistance and the elaboration of folk theories, the enaction of a presumed interpretive consensus is accomplished with reference to concrete elements of the disruptive space being experienced.

Conclusion: "Emplacing" the problem of intersubjectivity

The Museum of Jurassic Technology is a strategic site for examining the relationship between intersubjectivity-sustaining practices and the physical environment in which these are enacted – for "emplacing" the problem of intersubjectivity. It is an extreme setting in which elements of the space disrupt presumptions of intersubjectivity, and in which intersubjective repairs draw on elements of the space. One type of disruption originates in how the space is structured: the labyrinthine layout atomizes groups, making it hard for visitors to sustain ongoing interaction and engage in joint experiences. A second type of disruption originates in the contents of the space: the bewildering exhibits – which are difficult to "read" without recourse to clear cultural models or sources of interpretive authority – unsettle visitors, leading them to question whether they are sharing a world in common with their consociates. In the face of these disruptions, visitors develop spatially situated techniques to sustain their presumptions of intersubjectivity. In response to the disruptive *layout*, visitors develop five navigational techniques by which they coordinate their interaction and make sure that all group members attend to the same objects. In response to the disruptive *exhibits*, visitors provide each other with practical interpretive assistance, elaborate folk theories, and enact a presumed interpretive consensus – all of which helps to establish a mutually recognized impression of a shared experiential world. This disruption-repair dynamic highlights the interdependence of intersubjectivity-sustaining practices and the physical environment in which they are enacted.

The MJT thus constitutes a natural "breaching experiment" in which the tacit foundations of interaction are rendered more visible to the researcher through their disruption. As with Garfinkel's breaches, however, the lesson is not in the unique rupture itself, but in what this reveals about everyday life. That an *unusual* environment can be intersubjectively disruptive implies that subjects' abilities to take

intersubjectivity for granted in *everyday* settings require some stability, organization, or typicality of those settings. The detailing of specific mechanisms by which the MJT is disruptive provides a foundation for making some preliminary suggestions about how *everyday settings* might facilitate a sense of intersubjective *normalcy*.

Part 1's analysis from the perspective of spatial structure demonstrates that *the ability to orient to and through space together is necessary for sustaining presumptions of intersubjectivity*. The ability to "orient to" space might be usefully re-specified as: (1) the ability to coordinate attentions; the ability to "orient through space together" might be usefully thought of as: (2) the ability to sustain ongoing interaction. Everyday settings tend to enable both of these abilities in interesting ways.

Coordinating attentions. In contrast with the MJT's disruption of visitors' abilities to coordinate their attentions, the physical characteristics of many everyday settings facilitate such coordination. At the MJT, part of what makes it hard for visitors to take for granted that they have "seen the same thing" is that there are so many competing parts of the scene with which they might engage and on which they might legitimately fix their attentions. Many spaces encountered in everyday life avoid this problem by orienting visitors to a single, fixed point of attention. There is no ambiguity as to where attention should be directed from a movie theater's uniform rows of seats; or from any position in the spontaneously gathered circle surrounding a street performer; or from any point along the curved stone wall of a cliff-top overlook oriented to catch the perfect sunset. In such settings, consociates can reasonably assume a degree of perspectival congruence with one another. In other cases, when a single point of interest is less obvious, signs and other markers often flag certain elements as particularly worthy of attention – thus reducing the welter of possibilities.

Sustaining ongoing interaction. In contrast with the MJT's disruption of ongoing interaction, the physical characteristics of some settings actually facilitate interactional engagement. First, while some features of the MJT (like the telephone receivers) encourage individuals to disattend from their groups, the features of other places encourage just the opposite. The distribution of chairs around restaurant tables is an obvious example of a spatial arrangement that orients bodies so as to encourage interaction rather than individuation. Second, spatial congestion can be dealt with in ways that either inhibit or encourage ongoing interaction. Recall, for instance, how the positioning of microscopes in the crowded micro-mosaic room at the MJT turns visitors into unsuspecting gatekeepers who inadvertently fragment other groups by how they engage the microscopes. More typical museums, by contrast, often assign *official* gatekeepers to their more crowded spaces. While the *formal* function of these employees is to keep spaces below maximum occupancy requirements, an unacknowledged aspect of the job is maintaining the integrity of visiting groups (which are, in most cases, ushered into controlled spaces as units).[38] Finally, just as the darkness and convoluted layout of the MJT make it difficult for groups to

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[38] This is how things work, for example, at the door to the Renaissance Room of the newly remodeled Seattle Art Museum. The same dynamic is reproduced at other points of controlled entry: to amusement park rides, airport security checkpoints, or the tram leading up to Los Angeles' Getty Center museum.

progress through the space as a unit (and for lost visitors to reconnect with their groups), everyday spaces are usually more amenable to group navigation. Super-markets, for example, provide: a simple layout that is easily navigable and clearly marked; an area at the front that is suitable for waiting or regrouping; clear lines of sight down the aisles that make it easy to find a lost group member; and recourse to helpful staff and a paging system in the event that consociates become hopelessly separated. Many public spaces – including most museums – share these characteristics, which facilitate groups' abilities to sustain ongoing interaction in everyday life.

Part 2's analysis from the perspective of spatial content demonstrates that *presumptions of intersubjectivity rely on the easy "readability" of the surroundings.* This "readability" depends on (among other things): (1) the availability of cultural models; and (2) the presence of interpretive authority. Everyday settings tend to provide at least one of these interpretive aids.

Cultural models. Cultural models of typical spatial arrangements cue expect-ations, provide tools for interpretation, and prescribe scripts for action. As discussed above, part of the reason that the content of the MJT is difficult to "read" is that the space as a whole resists typification by invoking contradictory cultural models. Most spaces encountered in everyday life, however, are much easier to typify. Amusement parks, fast food restaurants, and fitness centers, for example, all operate according to clear and distinct cultural models. So long as cues remain consistent, even relatively subtle differences between models are easily understood. For example, despite many similarities in form and function, most visitors can easily distinguish between a movie theater and an opera house; and this understanding informs their interpretive processes, their assumptions about appropriate behavior, and their expectations for the how the space will be laid out. When subjects interact in a space that is easily typified, they can draw on an obvious set of practical and interpretive resources – and take it for granted that their peers are doing the same.

Interpretive authority. In unfamiliar, strange, or confusing spaces – especially when the application of cultural models is less than straightforward – subjects often rely on official sources of interpretive authority. These sources have the power to impose (through clarification, argumentation, or fiat) a uni-vocality on an otherwise multi-vocal object or setting. While the MJT systematically denies visitors recourse to such sources of authority, most museums are brimming with them (in the form of helpful docents, audio tour equipment, maps, guidebooks, pamphlets, and descriptive signs). Most tourist-oriented sites (or other sites that present some kind of novel experience) operate similarly, providing visitors with a variety of sources of interpretive guidance. More importantly, they do so in a way that is mutually acknowledgeable, so that visitors can reasonably assume that they are on the same interpretive page with their consociates.

These preliminary observations suggest avenues for future research, which might fruitfully explore the spatially situated nature of intersubjectivity-sustaining practices in a variety of everyday settings. The present study of a disruptive environment is meant only as a first step in this direction. It is, however, an important step, as there has been thus far virtually no consideration of the relationship between intersubjec-tivity-sustaining practices and the physical environment in which these are enacted.

More generally, this article also contributes to a growing body of research on routine behavior in public places (Caesar 2000, Cahill 1994, Duneier 1999, Goffman

1963 and 1994, 1971, Laurier et al. 2001, Lofland 1998, Nash 1981, Shapira and Navon 1991) and on group outings to public places in particular (DeVault 2000, Katz 1996, Lewis 1989). Outings provide an opportunity to build a corpus of remembered, meaningful, and shared experiences with consociates. Such experiences are a resource for the future, both for overt reference and to constitute tacitly shared assumptions. This article demonstrates that when a space threatens the opportunity to accumulate and coordinate shared experiences, its visitors become unsettled. In such disruptive spaces, the need to establish common ground becomes viscerally pressing and subjects try all the harder to reestablish presumptions of intersubjectivity that they can normally take for granted. Indeed, this may be a large part of the MJT's appeal: all of the extra interactive work that the museum demands of visitors may produce, in the end, an extremely valuable shared experience precisely *because* it took so much effort to construct.

Many have tried to solve the puzzle of the Museum of Jurassic Technology by critiquing its exhibits. These efforts have provided stimulating food for thought, but they remain unsatisfying.[39] After analyzing naturally emergent interaction at the MJT, however, it begins to seem – *contra* the standard accusations of disingenuousness, irony, and obscurantism – that the institution is actually quite up front about what it is doing. It is forthcoming, in fact, from the very first display. The orientation video concludes by stating that the museum is characterized by an "incongruity born of the overzealous spirit in the face of unfathomable phenomena." That is, the "incongruity" that characterizes the museum-going experience is not "born of" the "unfathomable" objects themselves, but of the "overzealous spirit" of visitors striving to achieve intersubjective normalcy in a thoroughly disruptive environment.

Methodological appendix

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted over 15 visits to the Museum of Jurassic Technology between 2002 and 2005. On three of these visits I attended with my own group of consociates, with whom I discussed the experience after the fact. On another trip to the museum, I attended as an observer of a "Visual Thinking Strategies" experiment conducted by a visiting scholar.[40] On the other 11 visits, I attended alone. In addition to observing the visiting process, I conducted informal interviews with museum staff and two formal interviews with David Wilson. I also examined the MJT guest book, which includes visitor comments, for April 2004.

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[39] For example, Weschler (1995) concludes that the MJT is a modern day *wunderkammer* (or cabinet of curiosities, like those of seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe [see Impey and MacGregor 1985]). This is an intriguing interpretation, but one that Wilson suggests has been somewhat overplayed. While acknowledging the parallels in terms of the MJT's eclecticism, he counters that his influences come more out of the 1960s than the 1770s (author's interview, 2005).

[40] I thank Linda Duke, Director of Education at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, for soliciting my participation. On VTS, a method designed to facilitate discussion of artwork and improve interpretation, see www.vue.org.

On all visits, I wrote up detailed field notes on the model suggested by Emerson et al. (1995). These notes center on the activities of museum visitors. While the ethnographic observer of museums should not presume that all meaningful interaction takes place *within* (rather than *across*) groups (see vom Lehn et al. 2001), at the MJT I found early on that most did.[41] In my observation, then, I focused on interaction within visiting groups. On some occasions, I situated myself in specific rooms for prolonged periods of time to observe multiple groups viewing the same exhibit. On other occasions, I followed particular groups through the museum (or through parts of the museum) to observe their interactions over time. I analyzed these field notes using "analytic induction" (Katz 2001:456–458), sharpening the analysis over time through a process of hypothesis generation and testing on subsequent visits.

In addition to my own field notes, I had the opportunity to collect some data using an informal "team ethnography" approach (Erickson and Stull 1998). An early version of the present article was assigned for reading in an introductory graduate seminar. Before group discussion, the class was asked to visit the MJT and to write reaction papers. Thirteen students generously made their papers available to me. As some of these students may have read my draft article before visiting the MJT, I have used their responses cautiously; but the papers were nevertheless useful in many respects.

Finally, although this article is written as a case study, comparison played an important part in the research process. In my thinking, I have often compared the MJT to other museums and to different types of public space. I have relied on my own observations and on those of others in this respect. I made one trip to the Getty Center museum in Los Angeles and wrote up extensive comparative field notes. I drew on 10 sets of field notes generated by Harvard graduate student Ethan Fosse on the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. I relied on Jack Katz's (1996) work on funhouses to compare visitor experiences at "places of wonderment." Finally, I drew on student field notes (generated in a UCLA graduate seminar on ethnographic methods and in an undergraduate ethnography workshop) on various other types of public space, including supermarkets, restaurants, and public parks.

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[41] Visitors almost never speak to members of other groups and only rarely exchange glances, expressions, or chuckles across group lines. Typically, groups pass over displays with which non-members are engaged and return only once they have been vacated. Unlike other situations, in which surprise or curiosity are a few of the acceptable justifications for interacting across group lines ("Do you see what I see?"), something about preserving the integrity of the "secret" seems to impede cross-group exchange at the MJT. Visitors do what they can to help other members of their *own* group to "get it;" but (either like benevolently preserving the plot twist in a mystery novel or like jealously guarding a hard earned secret) they distinctly avoid any exchanges that might modify the interpretive trajectories of other groups.

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