

**“THE CARPET FELT FIVE INCHES THICK!”: A SOCIO-SPATIAL
ANALYSIS OF THE JUDGE ROTENBERG CENTER**

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Abstract

Referencing Foucault, Goffman, and the lived experiences and testimony of survivors of the Judge Rotenberg Center (JRC), Canton Massachusetts, read alongside the writing of geographers, architects and sociologists exploring the design and space of theme parks and institutions, my research will explore the ways in which institutions and theme parks utilize similar methods to control the experience of those within in their manipulation of space, as a means to (re)direct bodies. My MRP seeks to examine the juxtaposition between the abusive practices and the bizarre Disney-esque design of the space of the JRC, which bears many of the hallmarks of the theme park. Referencing the history and functions of the theme park, I read alongside the history and functions of institutions for those labelled with autism and intellectual disabilities through the case study of the JRC, I draw upon Sara Ahmed (2006) to ask what it means to be oriented (spatially, psychically, bodily, and temporally) in institutional spaces. In particular, I use Ahmed's (2006) *Queer Phenomenology* to explore the ways in which autistic bodies are (re)(dis)oriented by the fantastical space of the JRC.

Contents

Introduction.....	4
Methodology.....	8
Layout of the Judge Rotenberg Center	11
A note on terminology	14
Brief history of the JRC	16
Literature Review.....	18
Historical Context.....	28
The Institution.....	29
The Theme Park.....	37
Themes.....	44
The JRC as a themed and immersive space	45
Becoming oriented in the Emerald City.....	52
“[W]alking in my senses were bombarded”: Disorientation in the JRC.....	56
Conclusion	64
Figures	75

Introduction

Reflecting on her first visit to the Judge Rotenberg Centre, former student Jennifer Msumba recalls: “Walking in, my senses were bombarded with loud colors, odd sculptures, Dr. Seuss-style furniture, and the Coca-Cola song creepily playing repeatedly in the stairwell” (Msumba, 2014). Journalist Rachel Gonnerman (2007) likened entering the JRC to “stepping into a carnival fun house” and describes the lavish décor inside the building, including “two brushed-aluminum dogs, each nearly 5 feet tall and sporting a purple neon collar” guarding the front entrance, “giant silver stars dangl[ing] from the lobby ceiling”, and the garishly painted furniture and walls. Another journalist, Ed Pilkington (2011) describes the Centre in similar terms, remarking upon being bombarded by a “riot of bright colours and surreal designs”.

The JRC is a residential program located in Canton, Massachusetts which professes to provide education and behavioral “treatment” to neurodivergent children, youth, and some adults, targeting those who are autistic, diagnosed with intellectual disabilities, and those with loosely defined “conduct, behavioral, emotional, and psychiatric problems” (JRC, n.d.). The abusive practices advocated by the JRC’s founder, Matthew Israel, which include the use of electric skin shock, seclusion, restraint, and food deprivation, have been subject to numerous human rights investigations, including several reports by Disability Rights International (DRI), two United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteurs on Torture, and various Children’s Aid Societies and departments of education (Mental Disability Rights International (MDRI), 2010; Neumeier, 2012; Davies, 2014). The extreme “treatment” inflicted upon the children, youth, and adults who live at the JRC

has resulted in the deaths of at least three youth – Danny Aswad, Vincent Milletich, and Linda Cornelison, and additional accounts of injuries and emotional trauma (MDRI, 2010; Neumeier, 2012; Davies, 2014).

In 2002, an 18 year old autistic student named Andre McCollins made headlines when he was tied to a restraint board and shocked thirty-one times for refusing to take off his jacket when he arrived at school that morning. He suffered third degree burns and severe emotional trauma as a result of this incident specifically, and his overall experience at the JRC more generally (Gonnerman, 2007; MDRI, 2010; Neumeier, 2012; Davies, 2014). The dichotomy between the lavish, Disney-esque design of the JRC building, contrasted with the testimony of former students, journalists, and activists about the abuses that have occurred within this colourful, carnival-like space, will be explored in this paper. The JRC presents itself to parents, visitors, and the public as a beautiful, fun, and “non-institutional” program for children, youth, and adults who are considered by some to be the most difficult to serve: those with intellectual disabilities, autism, and psychiatric disabilities who have been rejected from other programs and schools.

The JRC describes itself as a program of “last resort” for children and young people labelled as challenging, emphasizing its distinctness from institutional spaces in which disabled people have historically experienced violence and trauma. This distinction is made largely based upon the JRC’s rewards area (what it terms its “unparalleled reward system”) (JRC, n.d.) and its “beautifully decorated residences and school building” (JRC, n.d.). At the same time, the JRC is the only program in North America that uses electric skin shocks, applied through a device called a Graduated Electronic Decelerator

(GED). The use of electric shocks on these students has been deemed torture by two separate UN Special Rapporteurs on Torture; Manfred Nowak in 2011 and Juan Mendez in 2013 (MDRI, 2010; Neumeier, 2012; Davies, 2014; Pilkington, 2018). The manipulation of space and the careful design of reward areas within the school building and the use of electric skin shock and other painful punishments are, I will argue, intricately bound together.

While the use of electric skin shock at the JRC has been the subject of controversy and efforts to prevent its use, the simulated “rewards area has received less scrutiny from those writing about the JRC, other than brief notes about how unsettling it is or how strange the juxtaposition between the use of torture and the lavish décor appears. In addition to the use of physical punishments (called aversives) to normalize student behavior, the Center is distinctive in its use of a large, simulated “reward” area modeled on the Yellow Brick Road and the Emerald City from the Wizard of Oz. Students work their way down the Yellow Brick Road, literally a re-creation of the one from Frank L. Baum’s classic children’s book, by displaying “appropriate behavior” and earning privileges culminating in their entrance to the Emerald City, an area of the Center painted green and bathed in artificial emerald light, where students can access various rewards including trips to an indoor cinema, the use of a ball pit or an arcade, and access to an internet café furnished as a “Tiki bar” complete with synthetic palm trees (JRC, n.d.). The juxtaposition of this indoor amusement park with practices of extreme violence and inhumane treatment is a recurring theme which I will tease apart in what follows.

From the brief descriptions of the building provided above, I hope to give the reader a sense of the role of spectacle in the design of the environment; one that is created to awe visitors. It is also deceptive; parents and other visitors are reassured that the JRC is not institutional and that the treatment program is as “fun” as a trip to a Disney theme park might be. (An affiliated institution run by the JRC’s founder, Matthew Israel’s wife called Tobinworld, which uses a similar behavioral approach juxtaposed with Disney-like architecture and “rewards areas”, was described by a student’s mother thusly: “next to Disney World, Tobinworld is the happiest place on Earth” (Stanley19802, 2010). In response to the Tobinworld preview video posted on Youtube, Stanley19802 (2010), a former student, stated “Ha, at Disneyland I didn't have two adults sitting on me suffocating me to death”.) A former student of the JRC, Rob Santana, who has also experienced incarceration in the prison system, describes the JRC as “worse than jail” and “the worst place on earth” (Gonnerman, 2007).

This dichotomy in the way the JRC presents itself, juxtaposed with the use of extreme physical and psychological violence towards students, functions to disorient and confuse inmates in what is, I will argue, borrowing from Sara Ahmed (2006), an attempt to (re)orient inmates towards normative ways of relating to the world and to their environment. The fact that the JRC adopts methods that have long been used to control visitors in other themed spaces such as amusement parks – including the use of theming, shock, and decontextualization, is of interest in thinking about how the JRC presents itself as “fun” and “rewarding” while concealing the more sinister aspects of its programming, and is used as a way of justifying abusive methods.

I hope that it is clear that my intention is not to suggest the spaces of the theme park and the JRC are equivalent in the way individuals are subject to control, but, rather that I am attempting to explore how and why the JRC utilizes staples of theme park design. This will require an understanding of the history of institutional spaces created in the past to “contain” and “manage” people labelled with autism and intellectual disabilities, as well as an understanding of the design of spectacular spaces such as Disney theme parks. My research is grounded in the theories of Goffman on the total institution, Foucault on discipline, docile bodies and space, Ahmed on orientation, and, most importantly, accounts from the survivors of the JRC themselves. Goffman (1961) points out that institutional spaces are ones in which “cooperativeness is obtained from persons who often have cause to be uncooperative” (p 52). Foucault’s (1977) work on docile bodies has assisted me in my exploration of how people who have every reason and right to be “uncooperative” are rendered docile in part by the physical layout of the spaces they are placed in. In the case of the JRC, I examine, in particular, how the space is further and further subdivided through the use of partitioning, which will be explored in greater depth in what follows.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study applying a Foucauldian framework supplemented with Sara Ahmed’s (2006) work on orientation, Goffman’s (1961) writing on the total institution, and the work of historians, geographers, and sociologists writing about the design of theme parks, and, importantly, the psychological effects of their physical design. I will be using the JRC as an example of these theories in action. This research is text-based and

is, foremost, a case study of a North American institution, and draws from multiple sources including academic papers, books, newspaper articles and interviews, blog posts and other testimony (i.e. Youtube videos, interviews, proceedings from legal hearings) by survivors of the JRC and allies, a report by Disability Rights International, and the website and YouTube channel for the JRC. I also rely heavily upon a series of photographs taken of the JRC by photographer Rick Friedman. These photos have been especially useful, along with eye-witness accounts, in allowing me to get a “feel” for the space of the JRC and are used herein to provide the reader with detailed descriptions of various aspects of the layout and design of the JRC.

Foucault’s theories about power, docile bodies, and, in particular his discussion of the spatiality and temporality of institutional spaces serve as the backbone to the research. As discussed above, I also utilize the work of geographers and others who write critically about modern and historical iterations of themed spaces. Important to this research is assembling and critiquing the literature relevant to institutional spaces and theme parks so as to apply it to the specific example of the JRC. I used content analysis to analyze the information by looking for themes and patterns, and, in particular, similarities in the spatiality of places of entertainment (i.e. the theme park) and spaces of confinement.

The self-contained nature of the JRC also provides a secluded and highly controlled environment in which the evidence of abuse can continue unchecked. Thus, I also draw upon the lived experiences of those at the JRC who have communicated on social media and other online platforms. Many of these valuable accounts are drawn from autistic advocate Lydia Brown’s (2018) JRC Living Archive and Repository project. With an

environment that is so impermeable to non-staff members, it has been difficult to get an accurate account of the way the JRC functions. In this area, the voices of survivors have been invaluable. The JRC has also granted permission for a number of journalists to enter the center and document their experiences (see Gonnerman, 2007; Pilkington, 2018) usually under the guise of being sympathetic to the JRC's approach. I draw upon these accounts in my analysis.

Fairly late into the research, I discovered a website created by Matthew Israel that provides a virtual walkthrough/floorplan of the JRC building; this became very important to the paper. From his detailed description of the offices, foyers, stairwells, and classrooms, I was able to draw a rough and inexact map of the space. While not necessarily accurate in terms of distance, direction, and the ordering of rooms, this map provided me with a sense of the space; I found that this exercise contributed greatly to my thinking about the layout. Please see Figure 1 for my rough diagram of the space as described by Israel. This image is not to be used as floorplan per se, as it was impossible to map out the space in that way, but it does allow readers to conceptualize the space and to see visually the way one theme flows into another and the reemergence of certain themes throughout the space. The photographs Israel (2001) provides to accompany his written description of the space were equally informative and these, coupled with my rough diagram, have allowed me to more clearly see themes and ways that space was used to manipulate and (re)orient inmates. Throughout the paper I describe and make reference to both this floorplan and to Rick Friedman's photographs of the JRC. I often begin a section with an image description which I use to move into discussing a particular

theme or topic. The use of images and diagrams was important to my own understanding of the space of the JRC and of the processes by which power operates in and through the space, and the people within it, to direct and orient the disabled bodies and minds contained within its walls (Foucault, 1977; Ahmed, 2006). Moreover, I include these images as a way to provoke what Woodman and Wiebe (2019) term the “affective impact” of images which have the potential to elicit a visceral response in the viewer (personal communication).

As an autistic person who has been placed in segregated spaces for disabled people (i.e. the special education classroom, the psychiatric inpatient unit), the spatiality of such places is of particular interest to me. I hope that these experiences will assist me in thinking critically about space and power. I also acknowledge my level of privilege as a white, middle class university student, and my awareness that I have not been subjected to the same level of constant surveillance, control, and containment as the people about whom I am writing. I hope that my identity as an autistic person who has experienced institutional environments will give me insight into what I write about, and will also help me to remain cognizant of the ethical implications of writing about experiences of violence while being comfortably removed from them.

Layout of the Judge Rotenberg Center

This paper is primarily concerned with the space of the “rewards” area of the JRC although some attention is given to other spaces within the Center. I provide the reader with a rough floorplan (see Figure 1) of the main JRC building as a way to both structure my writing and to give the reader a better sense of the overall layout of the space of the

JRC. I think it is important to note that it is unwise to take one aspect of the JRC's environment and to analyze this in isolation from other aspects of that environment and so, while I cannot address all features of the physical layout of the JRC, I would like to provide the reader with a better sense of its main building. From this, I hope the reader is able to understand that the rewards area of the JRC is one aspect of a carefully designed space which is also dependent upon the infusion of narrative structure by those who designed the space, the Center's staff, the inmates, and our larger societal understandings of disability. As discussed by Lukas (2016), the themed space does not exist outside our perception of it, nor is it possible to examine it without an understanding of the mechanisms of power that fuel its production and functioning.

The website of former director Matthew Israel, "EffectiveTreatment.org", describes in great detail and with accompanying photographs, the layout of the main school building of the JRC. Upon entering the JRC, the entrance of which is guarded by two large dog statues, the visitor first sees the reception area which is emblazoned with large Mickey Mouse posters, figures, and two large stuffed Mickey and Minnie Mouse toys (see Figure 2). From the reception area the visitor enters the main hallway – one wall is covered in student portraits, another in large "music and movement" clocks. An animatronic pianist sits at a player piano under the student photographs, and before the entrance to the classrooms stand two statues of policemen (see Figure 3). This hallway, leading to the director's office, is lined with bowls of artificial candies (see Figure 4). This office itself is modern, its walls hung with art, the desk has a bowl of (real) M&M candies on it and a life-size model of a golden retriever sits by the door. Turning the

corner, the visitor sees another hallway lined with a large number of Mickey Mouse themed prints with staff offices along it. This hallway leads to another, the “Neon Hallway” which is lined with many neon lit signs. This hallway leads to the Big Rewards Store (BRS) where students can access the arcade, air hockey, ball pit, movie theatre, and merry-go-round (see Figure 5).

Further into the building we move along the Yellow Brick Road (which culminates in the BRS and the Emerald City) (see Figure 6). At the end of the Yellow Brick Road is the student exercise room (access to which is earned) and a variety of stores, a hair salon, snack bar, and a “Tiki” internet café (see Figure 7). After this hallway, a number of classrooms for the “higher functioning” students and a small library is accessed. Next, the “Monitor Room” provides staff with video surveillance of the entire building including student residences (see Figure 8). Here staff communicate via headsets with their front-line peers regarding meting out punishments and rewards to the students. Adjacent to the Monitor Room are the nursing office, and the Contract Store (so named because students earn access to desired items and experiences by fulfilling the requirements outlined in behavior contracts).

Next comes the stairwell to the lower level which Israel describes thusly: “The stairwell to the lower level has a Coca Cola theme with nostalgic Coke ads, sparkling rope lights and two metal dog sculptures at the bottom. The foyer of the lower level features modern aluminum furniture, a wall of artistic clocks, a waterfall with fantastic animal sculptures and a bubbling tree fountain with a sculpture dog known as the Golden Reliever” (Israel, 2002). The “Golden Reliever” is a statue of a golden retriever urinating

on a palm tree. From this foyer, are classrooms for the “lower functioning” students and new admissions, a 1950s themed lunch room, and a “work activities room” for adult students. Israel ends his virtual school tour with this statement: “It should be evident from these photographs that we have gone to extraordinary lengths to create a warm, happy, colorful décor in our buildings. A walk through our building is a uniquely interesting experience in itself--something like a cross between a beautiful museum, miniature theme park, interesting store and lovely home. We deliberately made our school so attractive an environment that our students would actually like to come to school!” (Israel, 2002). The rest of this paper will address the use of the themed space and the juxtaposition of themed elements paired with physical punishment.

A note on terminology

In this paper I use predominantly identity first language. The reader will note that I use the terms autistic, disabled, and neurodivergent. As an autistic person myself, this is the terminology I am most comfortable with because it acknowledges that autism and other forms of neurodivergence are an essential aspect of identity and that they cannot be separated from an individual in the way that person first language attempts (Brown, 2011; Sinclair, 2013; Ladau, 2014; Leibowitz, 2015). It also acknowledges the history of the social model of disability which differentiates between impairment and disability, with impairment being the physical, sensory, or mental difference, which in and of itself is often not a source of disability, and disability which arises from physical, social, and attitudinal barriers even while acknowledging that this model is incomplete and often does not reflect the messy reality of disability and of disabled lives (Crow, 1996). When

referring to intellectual disability, at times I use the phrase “labelled with” preceding intellectual disability to acknowledge the contested history of this term and the preferences of some who have attracted this label (People First, 2017). Utilizing the language used by self-advocates I also use person first language when discussing intellectual disability (Leibowitz, 2015; People First, 2017).

I will briefly provide the reader with an overview of the distinction between the theme park – which is discussed herein– and the amusement park. The reader will notice that I use the term theme park almost exclusively in this paper. According to King and O’Boyle (2011) the two words are often used interchangeably but actually refer to distinct places. According to King and Boyle (2011), the theme park refers to a “social network designed as a four-dimensional symbolic landscape” which functions by arousing in guests the feelings evoked by imaginary or historical places and times (pp 6). While the amusement park is centered around “immediate physical gratification”, the theme park is much more focused on the creation of geographical storyboards that move visitors from scene to scene (as in the Disney parks) rather than ride to ride (as is more characteristic of places like amusement parks) (King & O’Boyle, 2011).

As has been noted by many scholars writing about the layout of the Disney parks, they were initially designed by filmmakers (what Disney called “Imagineers”) rather than architects and the focus is always on plot, characters, and the use of space and architecture as a way to tell a narrative and to envelope visitors in a story (Fjellman, 1992; King & O’Boyle, 2011; Lukas, 2016). Because of this important difference in function and design between the theme park and the amusement park, the reader will

notice that I rely on the term theme park and do not use the two terms interchangeably, though the reader will notice that some of the individuals I quote do.

Brief history of the JRC

Before discussing specific strategies employed by the JRC to, in Ahmed's words, "reorient" autistic and otherwise neurodivergent people, I will provide a brief overview of the history of the Judge Rotenberg Centre. A program that was later to become the JRC, called the Behavioral Research Institute (BRI) was founded in 1971 by Matthew Israel, a student of B.F. Skinner's, who was interested in the use of behavioral therapies (primarily Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) and, particularly, in the use of painful aversive stimuli to discourage behavior considered to be challenging to manage (i.e. self-stimulatory behavior¹, aggression, self-injurious behavior, and other behavioral differences) (Davies, 2014; MDRI, 2010; Neumeier, 2012). The BRI operated two locations, one in California and one in Rhode Island for autistic students and those identified as having intellectual disabilities. Widespread abuse of students was reported in both locations, including documentation of the use of punishments including skin pinching (in the case of a 12 year old boy named Christopher Hirsch, the bottoms of his feet had been pinched so hard and so constantly that the skin had been completely removed), a 'white noise helmet' that triggered a seizure resulting in the death of an autistic student named Vincent Milletich, as well as the deprivation of food, and electric

¹ This term is generally unpopular among autistic people who prefer to use the term "stimming" to describe repetitive behaviors that are engaged in to regulate the individual's sensory system or to communicate emotion. Stimming is one of the distinguishing features of autism and is part of the DSMIV criteria.

skin shocks delivered by an earlier prototype of the GED currently in use at the JRC (Davies, 2014; MDRI, 2010; Neumeier, 2012).

An investigation conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation found the treatment of students “inhumane beyond all reason” and a violation of “universal standards of human decency” (Davies, 2014, para. 5; MDRI, 2010; Neumeier, 2012). The JRC uses a strict behavioral program known as Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) which uses operant conditioning, inspired by the founder, Matthew Israel’s mentor B F Skinner (JRC, Home, n.d.). In 1996, the BRI was renamed the JRC and relocated to Canton, Massachusetts (Neumeier, 2012; Davies, 2014). Allegations of abuse and violations of human rights continue to be raised and organizations including DRI, the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN), and ADAPT have launched several investigations into abuse at the Center as well as publishing reports outlining human rights violations. Of particular concern is the continued use of electric skin shocks.

Recently, in March 2018, a group of fifty ADAPT and ASAN protestors held a sit-in outside the home of Scott Gottlieb, commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), to protest the continued use of electric shock on JRC students, and, in particular, the FDA’s lack of action to ban the continued use of the GED (ADAPT, 2018). The JRC takes Skinner’s behaviourism, a theory based on human learning when exposed to reward and punishment, to extreme levels with its harsh treatment of “undesirable” behaviors, ranging from aggression, self-injury, and stealing, to such innocuous “offences” as “staring at others”, “covering ears”, and “blowing nose without a tissue” (Neumeier, 2012; Davies, 2014; JRC, Positive Programming at the JRC, 2014), through the loss of

“privileges” such as meals and outings, and/or through electric skin shocks deployed through a device called a Graduated Electronic Decelerator (GED) which students wear as a backpack, in addition to the use of restraint, and seclusion. This brief history of the JRC is provided to give readers a sense of the violence enacted at the JRC as grounded in a history of violence towards disabled people and of the JRC, specifically, as a site of violence since its inception.

Literature Review

While there is no existing literature specifically examining the theme park and the institution as connected phenomena, there is a body of work on the geography of the theme park and the institution, which will assist me in understanding the spatiality of the JRC as it plays out on the bodies and minds of inmates. What my research attempts to address draws on the work of Foucault and Goffman (1961), in that it looks closely at the physical space of the JRC and then attempts to understand how power operates through space, as well as the violent effects of this unbridled power as it plays out on the bodies and minds of inmates.

While disability studies often looks at inaccessible environments and problematizes the concept that, as Titchkosky (2011), states “things just weren’t built with people with disabilities in mind”, this paper takes a different approach, not unknown in disability studies² but perhaps underexplored. Here I am examining an environment that *is* designed with the disabled body in mind – that of the JRC and historical iterations of the institution

² See the work of Licia Carlson, Chris Chapman, and Chris Philo among others

- with the intention that these spaces will have a curative effect on the body/mind of the neurodivergent person. Such spaces are designed in such a way that the disabled body is broken down and reoriented towards one that more closely resembles the neurotypical, normative body using the processes of discipline and docility described by Foucault.

As explained by Hamraie (2013), Dyck (2010), and Gleeson (1998), the design of the built environment is a material-discursive phenomenon producing both the physical environment (the design of a space) as well as symbolic meaning. As explained by Aimi Hamraie (2013), feminist Karen Barad (2007) understands material discursive phenomena as practices that produce the built environment (i.e. the institution) as well as “communicating meaning about what kinds of material and social relations should be possible” (pp 148). The design of spaces is never value-neutral, and the built environment both reflects and (re)creates broader social understandings and assumptions about “who will (and should) inhabit the world” (Hamraie, 2013).

Feminist social geographer, Isabel Dyck, described what she understands as a “socio-spatial model of disability” as one which accounts for the importance of the built environment in revealing issues of access, exclusion, and oppression towards disabled citizens (Hamraie, 2013). My major research paper explores what Dyck (2010) has described as the “socio-spatial model of disability” and I am indebted to the work of Isabel Dyck and Brendan Gleeson for their pioneering work critically engaging with the built environment as integral to an understanding of disability and the exclusion and oppression faced by disabled people, in part through the creation of spaces which separate disabled people from their homes, families, and communities. With this work in

mind, I will reflect upon the history of both the theme park and the institution for those labelled as having intellectual disabilities in the context of Foucault's work on discipline, power, and institutional space.

I focus in particular on Foucault's (1973/1974) description of an "ideal" institution for people labelled as mad as being a simulated, spectacular space whose appearance was key to its "curative power", and his concept of discipline as creating "medically useful spaces" and rendering the bodies of inmates "docile" (p 140). Both Goffman (1961) and Foucault (1973/1974) describe essential elements of the institution including their preoccupation with barriers to social interaction with the outside world, enclosure, as well as space that is regulated by norms unique to that space.

It is interesting to note the overlap between the characteristics that Goffman (1961) argues define a total institution and what Foucault notes as being key to disciplinary power and the ordering of the theme park: specifically that all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority, that each phase of the member's daily activity is carried out in the immediate company of a large group of others, all of whom are treated alike and required to do the same thing together, and, thirdly, that all phases of the day's activities are tightly scheduled, with one activity leading at a prearranged time into the next (Goffman, 1961, p 6). Alexander Moore (1980) describes Disney parks as "bundle[d] space[s] with entry checkpoints, fully separated from daily life" mimicking almost directly Irving Goffman's (1961) description of the defining characteristics of a total institution, a point which provides a link between the space of the JRC and that of the theme park.

We can note that while this obviously applies to spaces used to contain otherness such as the JRC, these features also characterize themed spaces such as Disney parks where all activities are conducted in the same space (i.e. restaurants, snack bars, hotels, and bathrooms are all onsite; there is no need to leave the park to meet basic needs). Goffman (1961) also points out that people in institutional spaces are moved in blocks as a form of surveillance because “misconduct stands out in relief against the visible, constantly examined compliance of others” (p 7). Again, this is another feature of both theme parks and institutions like the JRC. Goffman (1961) states that “...in total institutions...territories of the self are violated; the boundary that the individual places between his being and the environment is invaded” (pp 52). This research seeks to examine, through the case study of the JRC, how the design of the physical and psychic space of an institution (the JRC, Disneyland) is designed specifically to invade and break down the individual; to render the inmate or guest docile, as Foucault would argue.

For Foucault (1977), the docile body is achieved through discipline which involves the dissociation of power from the body; discipline renders relationships characterized by it as ones of subjugation (pp 138). Foucault (1984) argues that discipline is an instrument of power through which space, time, and daily activities of life are organized and controlled. Disciplinary power, which Foucault understands as structuring contemporary society, differs from what he calls “sovereign” power, which characterized the middle ages, in that it is exercised more subtly and insidiously, not through brute force but rather through the management of space, time, and activity. Disciplinary power,

nonetheless, can have violent effects and its point of application, is always the body (both the individual body and the social body) (Routledge, 2016).³

According to Foucault (1977), there are four integral techniques of discipline that include: enclosure, partitioning, the creation of functional or “medically useful” spaces, and rank. Foucault (1977) states: “Discipline sometimes requires enclosure, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself” (pp 141). As has been demonstrated by Goffman (1961) and others, the space of the total institution, a category the JRC falls under, is a space of enclosure, cut off from the outside world. Students at the JRC are separated from their homes, families, and the community surrounding the Center. Moreover, the self-sustaining nature of the JRC makes leaving the JRC premises (including the group home residences) largely unnecessary. For example, the JRC has its own medical staff, dentist, cooks, and many of the “rewards” earned by students can be met within the main building (the indoor cinema, shops, arcade, café). In this way, we can see how the technique of enclosure is used by the JRC in managing the environment (and through this, the bodies of inmates).

³ Foucault (1984) understands discipline as enacted upon the body across two registers, the anatomical and the technological and/or political. The body is made an object across both these registers wherein power is always enacted through and upon the body (halifax, personal communication). The creation of the institution as a curative space historically, and the contemporary example of the JRC’s program as attempting to change the body of the autistic individual into one that more closely resembles a non-autistic/non-disabled body, are examples of how disciplinary power is enacted. My paper explores the second register in greater depth than the first, though the processes are interdependent and together play an essential role in the production of the docile body (halifax, 2018, personal communication).

Second, Foucault (1977) argues that partitioning is essential to the function of sites of discipline: “But the principle of ‘enclosure’ is neither constant, nor indispensable, nor sufficient in disciplinary machinery. This machinery works space in a much more flexible and detailed way. It does this first of all on the principle of elementary location or *partitioning*. Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual” (pp 143). As has already been discussed, we can understand the way the JRC is arranged with different floors for new students and those deemed to be “low functioning” or “autistic-like” and those deemed to be “high functioning” or “cognitively typical” as an example of this technique in action. Interestingly, even the rewards area is divided into spaces for “high” and “low” functioning students with a Teen Lounge and basketball court for those classified as “cognitively typical” and a ball pit and a merry-go-round for those labelled as autistic or with intellectual disabilities (JRC, “Our Students”, n.d.).

Thirdly, Foucault (1977) describes how discipline is employed in disciplinary institutions to create sites that are functional or medically useful. By this he is referring to spaces that “correspond not only to the need to supervise, to break dangerous communications, but also to create a useful space...The arrangements of fiscal and economic supervision preceded the techniques of medical observation: placing inmates under lock and key, recording their use; a little later, a system was worked out to verify the real number of patients, their identity, the units to which they belonged; then one began to regulate their comings and goings; they were forced to remain in their wards...Gradually, an administrative and political space was articulated upon a therapeutic space; it tended to individualize bodies, diseases, symptoms, lives and deaths;

it constituted a real table of juxtaposed and carefully distinct singularities” (pp 143 – 144).

Of relevance to this technique is the JRC’s Monitor Room from which video surveillance of students and staff occurs and is analyzed twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. The room is staffed by “monitors” whose job it is to relay commands to staff through walkie-talkies instructing them on when to reward or punish students for displaying appropriate or inappropriate behaviours (see Figure 8). In an enactment of Foucault’s (1977) concept of the panopticon, this monitoring room functions to establish what Foucault (1977) calls “presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to acculturate its qualities or merits” (pp 143).

Finally, Foucault identifies “rank” as important to disciplinary institutional spaces. This has been addressed herein already and essentially involves “the place one occupies in a classification” (Foucault, 1977, pp 145). In the case of the JRC, and historical iterations of the institution from which the JRC draws its structure, this is often determined by gender, age, and, perhaps most importantly, label (Trent, 1994; Carlson, 2010). In the JRC, male and female students attend classes together but do not live in the same residences. Students are grouped based on two factors: their newness to the program and their classification as either “high” or “low” functioning and as “cognitively typical” or as “autistic-like” (JRC, n.d.).

Alongside the work of Foucault, Goffman, and sociologists and geographers writing about the space of the institution and the amusement park, I draw upon Ahmed's more recent work on space and orientation. Ahmed's (2006) term (re)orientation has powerful implications for understanding the use and effect of institutional environments and the ways that (neurodivergent) bodies/minds are oriented, specifically in institutional environments. Ahmed (2006) makes the argument that the body gets directed in some ways more than others and that some bodies get (re)directed more than others; the space of the JRC and its effects on the body/minds of inmates is an example of how disabled bodies/minds are (re)directed through supposedly "therapeutic" programs that aim to direct them towards more normative pathways of development. Ahmed (2006) reflects on "how bodies arrive and how they get directed in this way or that way as a condition of arrival, which in turn is about how the "in place" gets placed" (pp 10). I will reflect on what this might mean for the disabled body/mind as placed, categorized and as (re)(dis)oriented in institutional space and how we can also see this exemplified in other kinds of spaces that (dis)(re)orient the "normal body" (i.e. Disney parks). I wonder about how "normal" and "deviant" bodies are constantly subject to (re)(dis)orientation toward and away from one another through the management and creation of spaces used to control and confine.

Ahmed (2006) describes her approach to understanding orientation to space, to others, and to time as a gradual process of "bringing what is "behind" to the front" and in so doing, creating a "new angle...in the "what" that appears" (pp 4). Here, Ahmed (2006) is discussing her proposition for what she terms a "queer phenomenology" which I feel

has relevance to my own understanding of the phenomenon that is the Judge Rotenberg Centre in particular, and of institutional spaces more generally. Through my own engagement with different artifacts of the JRC, including photographs, articles, survivor testimony, and a detailed written description of the building published by Israel (2002), I was able to get a felt sense of the space although unable to visit it myself (one of the most obvious drawbacks of this research).

Through the act of drawing out a tentative floorplan of the JRC building (using descriptions and photos supplied by Israel), I was, as Ahmed (2006) describes, able to interpret the Center from a new angle, an angle that shaped my thinking about the use of themed elements within the institutional space. Through this research I hope to be able to bring forward what has been relegated to the back. This can apply to many aspects of a project like this, including the testimony of institutional survivors, abuses suffered, or the historical context of institutional spaces, but my paper is particularly interested in bringing our attention to spaces of containment – through the case study of the JRC – and, more, specifically to the built environment (the spatiality) of a particularly unusual contemporary institution.

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed (2006) explores, in part, how bodies become oriented. She discusses this in relation to gender, race, and sexuality but her arguments can be extended to include disability as a site of embodiment and orientation. Ahmed (2006) asks: what does it mean to be oriented? How do the spaces we inhabit impress upon our bodies? While it is beyond the scope of this paper to give a full account of phenomenology, which is the philosophical orientation Ahmed is in conversation with,

her reflections are nonetheless important to my thinking about the space of the JRC so I hope the reader will forgive my lack of familiarity with this particular branch of philosophy and permit me to discuss aspects of Ahmed's (2006) argument that seem particularly useful to my understanding of the JRC and its use of many of the hallmarks of the themed environment.

In response to Ahmed I attempt to give an account of a space which seeks to violently (dis)orient and (re)orient neurodivergent bodies. This will be addressed in greater detail in the following. Moreover, I attempt to understand how disabled (particularly autistic or otherwise neurodivergent) bodies are directed towards certain forms of being (i.e. performing normativity, mimicking the non-autistic body). Ahmed (2006) uses the example of migration; in her words: "reflecting on migration helps us to explore how bodies arrive and how they get directed in this way or in that way as a condition of arrival, which in turn is about how the "in place" gets placed" (pp 10). Questions of place and of placement, and of how some bodies are subject to certain kinds of direction that bodies that are able to pass as normative are not, are central to the history of institutions and to their continued emergence in different forms (Goffman, 1961; Foucault, 1977; Trent; 1994; Carlson, 2010). I will explore this below in my brief overview of the North American institution for those labelled with intellectual disabilities.

Moreover, I ask how "normal" and "deviant" bodies are constantly subject to (re)(dis)orientation toward and away from one another through the management and creation of space. This paper is particularly concerned with the seemingly disconnected

sites of the theme park (designed for the enjoyment of “normal” bodies, i.e. Disney’s heteronormative, nondisabled family) and the space of the institution both historically and in the case of the JRC, which is a site that aims to (re)direct the “deviant” autistic body towards “normative” ways of relating. Carlson (2010) quotes Foucault, whose work she draws upon to inform her own analysis of the institution and of the construction of the category of intellectual disability: “I think we should talk of an asylum tautology, in the sense that, through the asylum apparatus itself, the doctor is given a number of instruments whose basic function is to impose reality, to intensify it, and add to it the supplement of power that will enable the doctor to get a grip on madness and reduce it, and therefore, to direct and govern it” (pp 100). In what follows I attempt to unravel the tautology governing the space of the JRC.

Historical Context

As has been noted by Hacking (2002) and others, an understanding of historical ontology is essential in coming to know how the conditions that have led to the creation of theme parks continue to operate and, perhaps, migrate into other spaces as well (as I argue is the case with the JRC). Thus, knowledge of the history of the phenomenon that is the theme park and the institution is essential to understanding their complementary functions. This also allows for an exploration of how past conditions have contributed to the emergence of the theme park and how current social, political, and economic conditions continue to support the existence and expansion of the theme park, and of what has been termed “Disneyfication” more generally. I begin with a brief historical overview of the construction of intellectual disability as a category and the institution as a

reaction to the creation of intellectual disability as a social problem in need of containment.

The Institution

Because the JRC is located in America I will focus on the American context, drawing upon the work of James Trent and Licia Carlson as well as the work of Ben-Moshe, Chapman, and Carey. The institutionalization of disabled people in North America began fairly early, influenced by the confinement of disabled people in England and France, as Ben-Moshe, Chapman and Carey (2014) point out. As in France and England, the almshouse, general hospitals, and jails were used to confine various populations including disabled people, orphans, widows, and the ill together in the same place. All these populations were considered to be dependent, unproductive, and/or dangerous, and so were contained similarly (Ben-Moshe et al, 2014). Later, the differential classification of intellectual disability led to the creation of special spaces designed to contain those with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities.

These spaces were designed with the assumption that given the right conditions, disabled and deviant individuals could be trained to adhere to normative social, intellectual, and behavioural standards (Trent, 1994, Carlson, 2010; Ben-Moshe et al, 2014). As Ben-Moshe et al (2014) argue, the outlook that characterized this early period of institutional spaces for the disabled was one of optimism and faith that in special environments emphasizing moral, intellectual, and social norms, “any person was now capable of achieving normalcy”, at least in theory (pp 6). This new belief in the achievability of normalcy for all was a development that heralded renewed attempts to

eliminate neurodivergence, but the focus of this effort was now on modifying individuals and their behavior.

Trent (1994) argues that, while the ways those diagnosed with intellectual disability have been controlled (under the guise of “help and treatment”) has changed over time (i.e. treatment methods have shifted from institutions to group homes), the ways that non-disabled people regard those with intellectual disability has not fundamentally changed. As my paper will illustrate, the difference between an institution like the notorious Willowbrook⁴ and the Judge Rotenberg Center is perhaps not as great as some might contend. While we tend to think that today we are more “aware” and knowledgeable about autism and intellectual disability, there is still a push to create spaces that segregate, control, and attempt to normalize neurodivergence. Trent (1994) cites Seguin, a doctor and teacher who worked in France and later in the United States with those we would now understand as having intellectual disability or as being autistic, as trumpeting the potential of those labelled as having intellectual disabilities to “improve or be cured up to a certain point” even while total cure was not possible. The JRC, too, utilizes this same logic, claiming that every autistic person can demonstrate improvement through their strict behavioral treatment program.

⁴ Willowbrook was an institution for children, youth, and adults labelled with intellectual disabilities. An expose on the terrible conditions of those incarcerated within was published in 1966 by Burton Blat and Fred Kaplan entitled *Christmas in Purgatory: A Photographic Essay on Mental Retardation*. This report detailed the conditions of North American institutions, including those at Willowbrook, and provided photographic evidence of the abuses that were witnessed by the authors. This expose led to public outcry and the eventual closure of Willowbrook State School in 1987.

Trent (1994) traces the history of the creation of intellectual disability as a category, and the treatment of those labelled with intellectual disability in the United States, similar to Ahmed's exploration of sexual orientation. Ahmed (2006) notes that the emergence of the concept of sexual orientation relies on the creation of a binary between the homosexual and the heterosexual. This relationship is not one of equivalence, however, because the queer body is the one labeled as having an orientation whereas the heterosexual body is considered to be the neutral "default" position. Thus the creation of the category or term sexual orientation corresponds to the "production of "the homosexual" as a type of person who "deviates from what is neutral" (Ahmed, 2006, pp 69). This is mirrored in the history of the creation of the label intellectual disability which only functions as a category when we conceptualize neurodivergent individuals as a deviation from the neutral, non-disabled, neurotypical body/mind.

Trent (1994) notes the role that Seguin played in both the creation of different ways of categorizing intellectual disability into "levels" (i.e. from those who needed the least support to those needing the most) and also in the creation of institutions and special schools for children, youth, and adults labelled with intellectual disability and what we would today classify as autism. Trent (1994) traces the way intellectual disability was created as a category that "justified the need for special schools" because the home and the community were deemed incapable of properly educating and caring for the child with intellectual disabilities and they were also burdened by the disabled child both socially (stigma) and economically (loss of productivity).

Moreover, the creation of early American training schools established the institutional superintendents and doctors as experts in the needs and care of neurodivergent children and cemented the necessity for such places based on their “special knowledge and expertise” (Trent, 1994, pp 26 – 27). In the mid-1800s, the goal of education for children labelled with intellectual disabilities was productivity; the focus was training the child to be able to contribute to the family and community. It was felt that this could only be achieved in a specialized, segregated setting away from the family and the child’s community because parents were accused either of neglecting the needs of the child or overindulging the child, both of which contributed to the development of the “idle” and “degenerate” (and thus burdensome) “idiot” whose lack of not only the ability to be productive but also moral sensibility, thus contributed potentially to crime.

Trent (1994) notes that the shift in the function of such special training schools from educational to custodial began almost immediately in practice but not in the rhetoric of these institutions which continued to attest that their teaching methods resulted in graduates who were able to return to their families and communities as “viable”, contributing members (even when this did not occur in practice. Many of those deemed “able” were kept in institutions as unacknowledged and unpaid laborers (Trent, 1994; Halifax, personal communication). However, by the 1870s this rhetoric of improvement and reintegration began to give way to one that acknowledged that some children would not be able to be returned to their communities and would become “custodial cases” (Trent, 1994, pp 29). Also in the mid-1800s, Trent (1994) notes that the initial special training school for so-called “feeble-minded” children began to borrow not only from

educational models but also from institutional techniques modelled after those employed by lunatic asylums (pp 36). Like the asylum, these special schools became supervised and staffed by doctors and based upon medical paradigms which cemented intellectual disability as a medical category.

Following Trent, Carlson (2010) traces a rough timeline of what she describes as the “institutional era” that is a helpful anchor point in the history of the institution and the different shapes it has taken over time. According to Carlson (2010) in the period between 1850 and 1880 the goals of the institution were concerned with cure and community reintegration. This was a period characterized by optimism and faith in the institutional environment as an agent of cure and normalization. Beginning in 1880 and continuing through 1900 the goals of institutions shifted towards custodialism with the emphasis moving away from eventual community reintegration towards the construction of intellectually disabled people as requiring shelter from society. This period then gave way to the reconstruction of intellectual disability as a “menace” so the emphasis of the institutional environment shifted yet again towards protecting society from its disabled members (Carlson, 2010, pp 23). This shift occurred roughly between 1900 and 1920. As this rough timeline demonstrates, intellectual disability was (and continues to be) a contested category in the global North that is constantly subject to changing rhetoric and reconstruction, a point that will be important to bear in mind throughout this paper.

Intricately tied up with this belief in the power of the physical and social environment of the institution in producing more normative outcomes, is the division of individuals under the broad category of intellectual disability which was further broken down into

subtypes. In the institutional setting, Carlson (2010), drawing upon Foucault's concept of discipline and how the body of the inmate is made docile in institutional settings, describes a more detailed approach to categorizing individuals which was achieved through the classification of inmates as either "static" or "dynamic". Static cases were those considered unproductive and incapable of work while dynamic cases were those believed to have the potential to become productive inmates. Carlson (2010) makes the important point that both static and dynamic cases served to justify the need for institutions; in the instance of dynamic cases the institution was cast as the agent that allowed the individual to develop into a productive member of society and in the example of those individuals labelled as static the institution was still constructed as essential, a place where these non-productive individuals could be "housed" to protect their families and communities from stigma and purported economic hardship.

Directly connected to the classification of inmates as static or dynamic was the separation of individuals based on this process of categorization. Carlson (2010) discusses the development of the cottage system also called the colony plan that used architectural means and the design of the institutional space to separate the static and dynamic cases. Of this Carlson (2010) writes: "In the new design, we find the concretization of the classificatory system in architectural form. Trent explains that with the colony plan, individuals were divided based upon their "ability to perform tasks" that were necessary for the institution to function (e.g. farm work, construction, sewing, and cooking). Eventually most institutions adopted this approach, and the architecture of the

institutions mirrored the dual classification of custodial (static) and educable (dynamic) cases, so the high-grade and low-grade cases were housed separately” (pp 42).

The JRC, rooted in this institutional history, uses a system similar to the cottage system in both residences and classrooms. Students are separated based on diagnosis and are educated and housed apart from those with different labels. Like early iterations of the institution, the JRC uses a binary classification system labelling students as either high or low functioning (and, increasingly as “cognitively typical” or “autistic and autistic-like”) (JRC, “Our Students”, n.d.). This arrangement in itself is worth noting because the JRC is designed in such a way that the “high functioning” students (those who in previous centuries would have been known as “dynamic” inmates (Carlson, 2010) attend classes on the ground floor of the school while the “low functioning” students (those Carlson (2010) identifies as “static” inmates) are kept in the basement of the school building.

Foucault has written extensively about the use of institutional spaces (i.e. the prison, the asylum). In a lecture he gave at the College de France in 1973, Foucault makes reference to a fantastical “ideal institution” described by a psychiatric pioneer named Francois-Emmanuel Fodere: “I would like these homes to be built in sacred forests, in steep and isolated spots, in the midst of great disorder...Also, before the newcomer arrives at his destination, it would be a good idea if he were to be brought down by machines, be taken through ever new and amazing places, and if the officials of these places were to wear distinctive costumes. The romantic is suitable here, and I have often said to myself that we could make use of those old castles built over caverns that pass

through a hill and open out onto a pleasant little valley...Phantasmagoria and other resources of physics, music, water, flashes of lightening, thunder, etcetera would be used in turn and, very likely, not without some success on the common man” (Fodere as quoted by Foucault, pp 1 – 2).

As described above, Fodere’s ideal asylum is situated in a romantic setting and is designed to amaze inmates with visual and sound effects – what he terms phantasmagoria - specifically through the use of artificially induced flashes of lightning, crashes of thunder, and music (Foucault, 1973/4, pp 1). Fodere’s fantastical view of the “ideal” asylum environment is clearly a sentiment that the JRC exemplifies. Additionally, Pinel, founder of moral therapy, stated: “One should not be greatly surprised at the great importance I attach to maintaining calm and order in a home for the insane, and to the physical and moral qualities that such supervision requires, since this is one of the fundamental bases of the treatment....(Foucault, 2003, pp 2). Similarly, Carlson (2010), referencing the work of Seguin, states: “The entire campaign to build institutions was predicated on the belief that the environment mattered and could change the face of idiocy” (Carlson, 2010, pp 35). This quote is particularly relevant to the JRC in as much as the built environment of the institution is used, very blatantly, to control and (re)direct the behavior of those within (both students and staff alike), and whose goal is very much in line with Seguin’s – that is, it aims to “change the face of autism”, or perhaps more specifically, to change the body of the autistic person (with its excesses and lacks) into one that more accurately mimics that of the neurotypical.

As shall be demonstrated, this attempt to “change the face of autism” is largely achieved (or at least attempted) through power dynamics that are played out through and within the built environment of the JRC. Philo (1989) further reinforces these observations by stating that the treatment of those incarcerated in asylums is largely dependent on the architectural arrangements of the building (pp 270). This control of the environment, in turn, is a way that the bodies of inmates can be “made docile” as Foucault argues. Carlson (2010) points out that “the institution performed multiple functions: pedagogical, medical, therapeutic, custodial, and professional; it became the organizing principle amid an array of definitions, theories, categories, and proposed treatments” (pp 27). This important observation has been an important guiding principle in my research and is one that I have returned to from time to time throughout the process of writing this paper. In what follows I hope the reader understands that I am attempting to explore one small aspect of the JRC environment and, moreover, that any attempt to understand even an aspect of the varied and contested functions of an institutional space is, by its nature, always incomplete and as knowledge is always partial and situated (Harraway, 1988)

The Theme Park

Cross and Walton (2005) note that the opening of the first Disney theme park in 1955 heralded a new age of the amusement park. Disney abhorred what he saw as the “dirt and danger” of places like Coney Island and traveling carnivals (Fjellman, 1992; Cross & Walton, 2005). Disney’s preoccupation with efficiency, predictability, order, and control made his parks different from their predecessors – county fairs, carnivals, and

places like Coney Island or Luna Park (Fjellman, 1992; Cross & Walton, 2005). As others have noted, Disney theme parks were concerned chiefly with creating a narrative environment within which to immerse visitors; rides and other attractions were introduced to expand that narrative (Fjellman, 1992; Gottdiener, 2001; Lukas, 2016). The amusement parks which were dominant prior to the introduction of Disneyland offered the visitor an experience that was not nearly as concerned with order and presented visitors – predominately young people – with an assortment of high thrill rides and attractions with an element of risk largely absent from the Disney parks (Fjellman, 1992; Cross & Walton, 2005).

Disney's vision for his theme parks was that they were to be a family experience with controlled and sanitized fun. His concept rejected what he termed the "tawdry rides and hostile employees" that characterized Coney Island and similar places (Cross & Walton, 2005, pp 168). He also objected to the population that Coney Island and its ilk catered to – young people looking for excitement and (managed) risk. Instead, Disney wanted to create a park designed for middle class families to enjoy together that offered managed fun and upheld wholesome, clean, family values (Cross & Walton, 2005). So while it is undeniable that the Disney parks emerged from the carnivals, amusement parks, and freak shows that characterized the post Second World War period, the newly designed theme park was also a reaction against some of the values that characterized such places (i.e. danger, risk, the "exotic", strangeness, the uncanny) embracing instead what Disney came to call "good clean fun" (Fjellman, 1992; Cross & Walton, 2005).

The controlled, sanitized elements that came to characterize the theme park (of which the Disney parks are an early example) and the way this meticulous control over the space of the park are also methods by which guest behavior is managed and contained have implications for the space of the JRC and offer an interesting parallel from which we can explore the ways space can be a tool used to manage, contain, and control the behavior of those within it. As we have already seen in the brief history of the North American institution, space is of the utmost importance in the “treatment” of disability both historically and currently.

Rachel Gonnerman, in a 2007 interview with Israel, then the director of the JRC, writes that when questioned about his vision for the JRC, Israel stated that when designing the space of the JRC he conceptualized that changing people’s behaviors would help them to live better, more “normal” lives. According to Gonnerman (2007) Israel made particular mention of the importance of controlling the whole environment in order to change behavior. Gonnerman (2007) cites Israel as stating: “The notion was that you needed to have the whole environment under control. With a school like this, we have an awful lot. Not the whole environment, but an awful lot”. From her time at the school Gonnerman (2007) observed that Israel exerted an extreme level of control over the environment of the JRC, controlling “nearly every aspect of the facility”. This preoccupation with order and environmental control echoes Disney’s vision of the perfect park – free from disorder and risk.

Related to this preoccupation with order, the Disney parks share an approach to entertainment and guest experience that is distinct from that of traditional amusement

parks or carnivals that are characterized by a seemingly random assortment of rides, coasters, and attractions, through Disney's reliance on the use of themes. The Disney parks rely on theming to organize the space and the visitor experience – in Disney parks this is achieved in part through the division of different areas of the park into “lands” (i.e. Wild West, EPCOT, etc.). These themes are communicated to guests through architecture, music, costumed characters, themed rides, food, and merchandise that all adhere to a particular area's “theme” (Bryman, 1995). Distractions from the theme are minimized and discouraged (Disney was often recorded as being distressed by spotting staff out of costume or observing costumed characters from one “land” entering a different one) in order to offer guests an immersive atmosphere (Bryman, 1995).

In this way, the Disney Parks – and similar themed spaces such as restaurants, shopping malls, and museums – are examples of spaces that are both themed and immersive in nature. Lukas (2016) has written extensively about themed and immersive spaces. He argues that we can understand most spaces as both having a theme⁵ (i.e. a kitchen might be “themed” around food and family) and as being immersive (i.e. all spaces we enter involve our entire sensory system; touch, taste, smell, sight, hearing, proprioception, etc.). Yet according to Lukas certain spaces have essential features that distinguish them as themed and immersive spaces in the sense that I am arguing characterizes both theme parks and the JRC. These distinguishing features include the

⁵ Themed spaces are not a new phenomenon and can be traced throughout history. Several interesting early examples include the Palace of Versailles in France, The Imperial Summer Palace in China active during the Manchu Dynasty, and King Ludwig II of Bavaria's fantastical castle designed to recreate scenes from Wagner's operas, Neuschwanstein (King and O'Boyle, 2011).

function of the space and the “added value of the theme or narrative told through and beyond the functioning of the space” (Lukas, 2016). So while we might be able to understand all human spaces as inherently themed and immersive, the type of space I am discussing in this paper is unique in that it bombards those exposed to it with “unique, evocative, and extraordinary symbols” (Lukas, 2016).

I follow Lukas’ (2016) definition of the themed and the immersive space and apply these characteristics to the space of the JRC to establish the space as both themed and immersive in nature. While we might be able to identify numerous functions of the institution – historically these have included education, reform, containment – we must also consider the unique use of symbols in the space of the JRC such as of the Yellow Brick Road reward system, which will be discussed in greater depth later in this paper. It is not difficult to concede that the use the Wizard of Oz theme certainly exemplifies the overt, obvious introduction of and reliance on a narrative to structure both the space of the JRC and the experience of those confined within⁶.

Speaking of historical and current themed spaces, King and O’Boyle (2011) write that “[e]ach was something more important and arresting (than a mechanical ride) – the attempt to construct a total alternate universe, an enclosed environment physically

⁶ Hamraie (2013) discusses the architectural theory of *parti*, which explores the ways in which buildings or built spaces make arguments and convey meaning. *Parti*, then, according to architectural theory, functions as a sort of grammar of architecture (Hamraie, 2013). In this way, Hamraie (2013) and others argue that buildings and other built environments (i.e. theme parks) communicate meaning and understandings about various phenomena, including disability.

separate and therefore psychologically autonomous from the outside world” (King & O’Boyle, 2011, pp 8). Echoing the way Goffman (1961) describes the institutional environment (i.e. as enclosed and autonomous from the outside world), King and O’Boyle (2011) note that these features are also important to themed and immersive spaces, particularly the theme park. Gottdiener (2001) observes that since the 1950s, which the reader will recall is the period in which Disneyland was conceived and opened to the public, there has been an increasing emphasis on the use of themed spaces in North America. Themed spaces now extend beyond the theme park and into more everyday sites like restaurants (the Rainforest Café, the Hard Rock Café), shopping malls, airports and dental offices. Gottdiener (2001) points out that themed environments rely on the use of “overarching symbolic motifs that define an entire space” (pp 3). Because of the increased prevalence of the use of theming by architects in the design of spaces, our daily lives are increasingly occurring within a “material environment that is dependent on and organized around overarching motifs” (pp 3).

Of relevance to my analysis of the themed environment of the JRC, Gottdiener (2001) explains that themed spaces involve two aspects 1) that they are socially constructed, and are built environments, and 2) that meaning is conveyed to users of the space through symbolic motifs (pp 5). Importantly Gottdiener (2001) asserts that themed environments do not automatically provoke desire and pleasure in their users even when that may be the intent. As has been described in some detail already, the entire JRC building contains different themes; in the reception area and the first meeting room and hallway, the visitor is bombarded with Mickey Mouse stuffed animals, photographs,

paintings, and portraits. Continuing this theme, there is also “The Mickey Mouse Conference Room” on this level of the building (see Figure 9).

In an article about the JRC, Gonnerman (2007) describes this: “Ten years ago, Israel hung up a Mickey Mouse poster in the main hall, and he noticed that it made people smile—so he bought every Mickey Mouse poster he could find. He hung them in the corridors and even papered the walls of what became known as the Mickey Mouse Conference Room”. Similar to Disney’s goals, the JRC attempts to evoke a sense of happiness and nostalgia in students and visitors using aspects of the built environment. Much like Disney parks, which are organized with a central square leading towards the castle which visitors are drawn towards, passing through the other attractions as they approach it, the JRC is designed with a sequence. First, visitors are immersed in the theme of Mickey Mouse. They then approach the area of the Yellow Brick Road Rewards Street leading them towards the Emerald City/Big Rewards Store (the area of the reward program with a ball pit, arcade, and merry-go-round, among other features).

Gottdiener (2001) distinguishes between production and consumption in themed environments. He conceptualizes both as social processes; production is a process of creation often involving a group of individuals brought together within an organized, institutional context and consumption is the way users use or interpret the space and attach meanings to it. Of particular importance to Foucault’s observations of the asylum environment on patient behavior and to Ahmed’s discussion of orientation, Gottdiener (2001) states: “Consumption of a themed environment refers to the experience of individuals within a themed milieu, including the assumption of a particular orientation to

space, based on the personal or group interpretation of its symbolic content. Built forms have the power to alter human behavior through meaning, and this response is also part of what I mean by the process of consumption in space” (pp 5). In what follows, I address the experience of the themed environment on inmate experience and the role of orientation towards the space of the JRC.

Themes

This brief review of the literature and of the history of both the institution and the theme park suggests that while explicit connections between institutional space and spaces designed for entertainment have not been made, my contention that both phenomena are helpful to examine together is supported by Foucault and Ahmed who both argue that it can be important to examine seemingly disconnected phenomena as part of a connected pattern. In this instance, I am arguing that the functions and histories of spaces that contain and control bodies through their design are tied together. Being aware that these spaces can be understood together, or parallel to one another, even while noting the ways in which such spaces diverge, is helpful when attempting to understand extreme cases like that of the JRC, not as isolated and bizarre instances, but as one example of the way spaces used to contain and control “deviant” bodies rely on similar principles as those designed to entertain. Essentially my research applies the theories of Foucault, Ahmed, and others to a contemporary situation that has wider implications for segregated spaces for disabled people more broadly but also for other themed spaces that are frequented by non-disabled people as well (i.e. theme parks).

The themes I identified in the course of this research include the JRC as a themed space, the way the inmate becomes “oriented” (as Ahmed would argue) to the strange space of the JRC and the violent effects of this process of (re)orientation, as well as the way disorientation is used in an attempt to render the autistic body docile. As I hope will become apparent in what follows, these themes are interdependent and it is difficult to understand one without also considering the others. I begin by discussing the JRC as a themed space because the use of theming underpins the other elements that I address subsequently. I draw more heavily upon the concepts that I introduced in the literature review, especially those proposed by Foucault and Ahmed, in my attempt to deconstruct and analyze the space of the JRC.

The JRC as a themed and immersive space

I begin this section, in which I examine the JRC as a themed space as described by Gottdeiner, Lukas, Rahn and others, with a description of an image of the entrance to the Emerald City rewards area of the JRC taken by Freidman. The colour photograph shows then-director Matthew Israel wearing a grey suit and tie with balding grey hair standing at the entrance to the Emerald City. His arms are open in a gesture of welcome and there is a slight smile on his face. Behind him is an encased figure of the Wonderful Wizard of Oz. Standing on either side of this green glitter encased wizard are the Cowardly Lion and the Scarecrow, both waving as if to welcome the visitor. In the foreground is a figure of Glinda the Good Witch. To the left of the Lion is a green glittery sign reading “Emerald City” and to the left of the Scarecrow is half of a green and glittery sign above the indoor cinema. All these animatronic figures are standing on

yellow tiles which represent the end of the Yellow Brick Road; the transition from the yellow of the road to the glittering green of the Emerald city is stark (see Figure 10) (Friedman, 2013). I provide this description to draw the reader's attention to several of the themed aspects of the space of this area of the JRC and, moreover, to give the reader a sense of the magnitude and pervasiveness of the use of theming to the structure and function of the JRC's program.

King and O'Boyle (2011) discuss the role of theming in Disney parks and in other themed environments such as museums or restaurants. They argue that theming offers those exposed to it a distorted version of reality; one that is a "tightly edited, stylized, and focused version of reality, shaped to advance a specific narrative" (pp 12). A key aspect of theming in Disney parks, and, as I will demonstrate below, in the example of the JRC, is the layout of the physical space of the building. In the Disney parks, this is known as "architecture with a plot" (Dunlop, 1996; Marling, 1997). For example, in Disney parks there is an overt narrative quality to the park layout mimicking Disney films which, according to King and O'Boyle (2011) cues visitors how to move through the space "correctly". For example, the Disney parks introduce guests to a sort of "title page" in the form of the town square from which guests can see the castle in the distance. From this town square guests are drawn to the castle and so move through the square towards it down Main Street, and are drawn into the hub of the park where they can access rides, food, and other attractions.

King and O'Boyle (2011) state that “[e]voking behavior cues through theming calls for a careful choice of theme”. At this point, I would like to discuss the use of theming at the JRC. The obvious overarching theme at the JRC is that of the Wizard of Oz, with the rewards area set up around different parts of the Oz narrative – starting with the Yellow Brick Road and ending in the Emerald City which is populated by animatronic characters. As in the Disney theme parks, but on a much smaller scale, we see in the JRC this sort of “architecture with a plot” which functions in part to cue visitors towards certain behaviours (i.e. taking a left or right, walking further into the park, etc.). In the JRC, students work their way, both physically and metaphorically, down the Yellow Brick Road to earn privileges and access to less restricted, more “fun” areas of the building. Like the Disney parks, with the title page of the town square leading towards the Sleeping Beauty Castle, the JRC has students moving towards the Emerald City at the center of the building. Rahn (2011) and Bukatman (1991) discuss the importance of narrative context to the success of the Disney theme parks. The same narrative context that Rahn and Bukatman refer to can be seen enacted in the design of the JRC which, as has been established, is a themed space that mimics many of the characteristics of a theme park.

One of the most troubling aspects of the JRC’s reward program is that it functions by inserting inmates into an already active narrative (that of the Wizard of Oz). Much like a theme park, which typically features one or more narratives that structure the space, the JRC has selected a theme, the story of Dorothy and her band of misfits as they travel down the Yellow Brick Road, defeat the Wicked Witch of the West, and uncover the

fraud of the pseudo “wizard”, and return home. It is an oddly chosen narrative⁷ for the inmates at the JRC who seldom return home once they enter this facility.

The creation of a space based around this narrative of progression, defeat, and return acts as a form of control of the patient’s own understanding of their “story” and their place within the JRC. The metaphor of the Yellow Brick Road leading to the Emerald City seems to indicate that inmates must engage in a cyclical journey of learning to demonstrate normative behavior, receiving rewards for this accomplishment, and then attempting to “earn” their way out of the Center and back into their home communities. Sadly, for many students, particularly those who are autistic or who have intellectual disabilities, returning home is not an option while the Center remains in operation. Thus inmates continually move up and down the Yellow Brick Road year after year with no hope (in many instances) of ever leaving.

When exploring how the act of inserting inmates into an already active and pre-designed narrative is violent, disorienting, and dehumanizing, we can consider Carosso’s (2000) statement that: “no destination is too far in [an amusement park] because it nullifies the spatiality of the outside while making its own reality the only reality

⁷ Other authors, including, notably, Littlefield in 1964, have explored the symbolism in *The Wizard of Oz* series. Interpretations have ranged from political analogy, psychoanalytic developmental phases, a psychedelic experience, and queer narrative. While this rich history was not explored in this paper, I would like to acknowledge these contributions. It is doubtful that Israel read these accounts before designing the JRC but there exists a rich history of analysis that would undoubtedly reveal much about the way the JRC operates and the peculiar choice in the theme of the Wizard of Oz for the rewards area. Fairly simplistically, my paper explores the use of the Oz narrative of a circular narrative of progression and return wherein the Yellow Brick Road and the Emerald City are used as props in the service of imposing a normative developmental schema (trajectory?) upon neurodiverse inmates.

available” (p 73). Moreover, such spaces “leave us suspended in a new reality we can experience but the wider implications of which are yet to be fully understood” (Carosso, 2000, p 73). For the JRC students suspended in the narrative of the Wizard of Oz, we must consider the temporal, spatial, psychological and social consequences of being subject to this experience. The themed space of the JRC facilitates the other methods used to (re)orient the bodies and minds of inmates as I will discuss below. If we understand the spectacularized, Disneyfied space of the JRC as imposing a narrative upon inmates – one contingent upon the symbolism of the Wizard of Oz combined with a rigid behavioral approach to intervention and the use of physical and psychological violence, we can conceptualize some of the intended effects of the space on the children, youth, and adults who are confined there, including the shock and disorientation bred of being inserted into an already active narrative that places the inmate into a totally alien system.

Lukas (2016) explains theming as a “a materialized and mobilized form of storytelling and as an overall form it becomes a text that is transferred from the world of theme parks to the world of themed spaces” (pp 213 – 214). This is precisely the argument I am suggesting can be made to explore the space of the JRC wherein we see theming as a “text” capable of moving from one environment to the next. In this way, elements that characterize the theme park (i.e. animatronics, Mickey Mouse, arcades, the Yellow Brick Road) are (re)used in the context of the institutional space. This may be to “sanitize” a space that is associated with violence, stigma, and the deviant body, much as Disney sought to create a “clean, family-friendly” park that was distinct from what he considered the filth, sex, and risks of the precursors to the Disney parks such as Coney

Island and the Luna Parks (Fjellman, 1991; Cross & Walton, 2005). Without a doubt, the use of theming in the design of the JRC is multilayered and complex, always connected to the history of both the institution and the themed space.

Of particular interest to me is Lukas's (2016) discussion of theming as being perceived as "extra-political" and "as if all that matters is the theming itself and as if the theming is somehow extra-political, extra-cultural. This helps illustrate the ways in which theming has expanded to include any and all spaces that people encounter in their daily lives" (pp 214). A former student, Anna K (2015), describes her tour of the building and her first meeting with JRC staff which occurred in the Mickey Mouse Conference Room: "she showed us one classroom and the Big Reward Store... we didn't get to see anything else... and then after she gave us a quick tour of JRC... she takes me and my mom back to the Mickey Mouse Conference Room and talks to me... she asked me what I think about coming there...the reason they called it that was because they had a lot of different Mickey Mouse toys there... they were all over... I think they decorate the rooms like that to make the rooms look attractive to parents..." (Alteir, 2015).

Lukas's (2016) point that themed spaces are often seen as "extra-political" can also be seen in the case of the JRC, which is frequently seen by parents and visitors as so visually appealing that it can be difficult to recognize (or even imagine?) the extreme violence that occurs side-by-side Mickey Mouse themed conference rooms, indoor ball pits, and figures of Dorothy and Toto. The mother of Andre McCollins, for example, is described as being "dazzled by the décor" the first time she visited the JRC. Gonnerman (2012) writes that Cheryl McCollins felt that there was "nothing institutional about this

place; the carpet felt five inches thick. “I thought the place was beautiful,” she recalls. “I thought these people really took pride in what they did.” She loved that residents lived in lavishly decorated houses—not dorms. The boys wore button-down shirts and dress pants. And there were surveillance cameras everywhere; she couldn’t imagine a better way to ensure that Andre wouldn’t be victimized again”. Cheryl McCollin’s initial impression of the JRC, that it was non-institutional, beautiful, and safe, reflects Lukas’s (2016) contention that themed spaces are often seen as extra-political and as outside of controversy or acts of violence.

One of the ways this sense of a themed space as existing outside one’s ordinary conceptions of danger, risk, and the political is through the careful maintenance of what Bukatman (1991) terms narrative kinesism. By this, he is, in essence, referring to the use of theming to explore the way narratives can be violently imposed on the bodies of oppressed people, and the role that theming plays in the psychogeography of the theme park, and, by extension, I suggest, the space of the JRC. In what appears to be in part an attempt to distinguish itself from historical iterations of the institution, that typically appear to be highly medicalized, the JRC boasts that it is “colorful, attractive...non-institutional” (JRC, *Our Residences*, n.d.). It further claims that the school building is “beautifully decorated...with colorful prints, sculptures, and other decorations so that attending school will be a pleasant, desirable experience for its students” (JRC, *Our School*, n.d.). However lavishly decorated the JRC campus may be, and despite the obvious attempts of JRC staff to differentiate it from an institution, the fact that

promoters go to such frenetic lengths to convince the public of its “non-institutional” status is telling.

This section has demonstrated both the historical precedent of the themed and immersive institutional space through Fodere’s description of his vision of the ideal asylum environment, and also offers an introduction to aspects of the JRC’s building that mark it as both themed and immersive including its use of narrative structure. In the next section I will address what Ahmed (2006) terms orientation and the role this plays in the space of the JRC.

Becoming oriented in the Emerald City

Ahmed (2006), speaking of racialized bodies, writes that “bodies that do not extend the whiteness of...spaces...are “stopped”, which produces, we could say, disorienting effects” (pp 24). Disorientation is an essential aspect of the space of the JRC but prior to exploring disorientation in more depth below, I would like first to engage with Ahmed’s concept of the racialized body as being subject to being “stopped” and how this is achieved through the processes of (re)orientation. While Ahmed (2006) is here speaking about racialized and queer bodies, we can extend this to the autistic/neurodivergent body as well. It is also important to note that, although it exceeds the purpose of this brief paper, the population of the JRC is disproportionately composed of racialized groups including Black and Hispanic children and young people⁸. While the

⁸ According to Cascades Islwyn (2015) as cited in Lydia Brown’s (2018) Living Repository and Archive on the JRC’s Abuses, 45.3% of students are Black and another 28.1% are Hispanic.

JRC is run (currently) by a white woman many of the staff are members of racialized communities themselves. It is important to acknowledge the racism as well as the ableism inherent to the functioning of the JRC, though a more detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, I hope readers will understand the importance of an analysis that takes into account the intersectional identities of both those interned at JRC and of staff members. In many ways, the frontline staff is also in the grip of this oppressive environment; turnover is high, the pay is low, and staff are constantly enmeshed in a system of surveillance themselves.

Discussing bodies deemed to be other, Ahmed (2006) explains how these non-normative bodies are subject to a constant process of direction and redirection towards pre-given “lines”. Deviant bodies are thus subject to both “stoppage” and to “direction” - which may better be described as redirection as bodies are prevented from continuing along the path they are naturally inclined to take. In the instance of the autistic or otherwise neurodivergent body, we might think of this path as a developmental trajectory that diverges from a typical one. Thus, ways of being that are natural to autistic people (i.e. stimming) are flagged as inappropriate and the autistic body is prevented from engaging in these natural expressions. This stoppage is in itself violent but, not only are behaviors deemed to be non-normative punished, there is also an attempt to teach the autistic person to engage in more “normative” ways of moving, thinking, and relating to others and to their environment.

This process is what Ahmed (2006) refers to as “becoming straight”. Here Ahmed is speaking of the queer body but her argument easily extends to the autistic body: “I

explore how bodies become straight by “lining up” with lines that are already given” (pp 23). As an example of Ahmed’s (2006) observation of the ways the queer body is made to “become straight” by being directed towards normative lines of development and expression, we can look to an example of a JRC “behavior chart” taken from the center’s website. The sample chart lists behaviors targeted for electric skin shock or other punishment, behaviours which include saying “What?” when asked a question by staff, dropping to the floor, covering ears, leaving seat without permission, swearing, saying no, refusing to follow directions, refusing to take a bath, stopping work, fidgeting, blowing nose without a tissue, staring at others, and “inappropriate sitting” (JRC, n.d., Positive Programming at JRC).

Survivor Jennifer Msumba reports: “JRC says it only uses the GED for dangerous behaviors. But in reality, it is used most for completely harmless behaviors. Some *actual* behaviors I was shocked for were: covering my eyes with my hands, covering (pressurizing) my ears, tic-like body movements, wrapping my foot around the leg of my chair, not answering staff within 5 seconds, saying the word “no”, shaking my head, tightening my fingers for more than 2 seconds, waving my hands in front of my face, 5 verbal behaviors in an hour (talk to self, repeating, crying, bizarre speech, nagging), tensing up, getting out of my seat without permission, not following directions, and attempt to remove restraints. Those are just a *few*” (ASAN, 2014). From these two examples, one of which is publically available on the JRC’s website, we can see the way autistic bodies are stopped – through violent punishment – at the JRC.

Writing on the subject of discipline Foucault (1977) writes: “A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (pp 136). This mirrors Ahmed’s (2006) description of the non-normative body as being subject to being both stopped and redirected. Foucault (1977) explains the way processes of stoppage and redirection are utilized in an attempt to make unruly bodies comply, to make them “docile”. Foucault (1977) explains this process as one in which the disruptive body is changed and “improved”, something Ahmed (2006) echoes when she describes how queer bodies are made straight. Similarly, in the case of the JRC, autistic bodies are straightened, flattened so that they more closely resemble the neurotypical body. Moreover, Foucault (1977) and Carlson (2010) have made the important observation that when it comes to “improving” the autistic, mad, or otherwise disabled body the environment is an essential aspect of the “treatment”. Foucault (1977) elaborates stating that the deviant/disruptive body is improved by first being “broken down” and then being “rearranged”. Foucault (1977) sees this as being achieved through discipline which he conceptualizes as “a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, and its behavior” (pp 138).

This process of stopping the deviant body and redirecting it along more normative lines is only one aspect of the program of reorientation however and it is equally important to consider another aspect of the JRC’s programming. This is its self-proclaimed “unparalleled reward program” (JRC, n.d.) a large part of which is based around the Yellow Brick Road reward program whereby students work their way along an artificial yellow brick pathway, which culminates in their entrance to the Emerald City

rewards area. Students need to demonstrate normative behaviors to earn access to “rewards” such as the use of the playground, field trips, use of the fitness room and basketball court, and trips into the community and home (often accompanied by JRC staff).

Through the JRC’s program of rewarding normative behavior (following commands, completing schoolwork, being compliant) and punishing both natural autistic behavior and distress responses, the JRC reorients the autistic body towards normativity and attempts to render it docile (Foucault, 1977). To use Ahmed’s (2006) words, the JRC attempts to “straighten” autistic bodies alongside normative lines of development. Ahmed (2006) states: “Rather, in moving this way, rather than that, and moving in this way again and again, the surfaces of bodies *in turn* acquire their space. Bodies are “directed” and they take the shape of this direction” (pp 16). This reflection on space and how bodies take the shape of the ways in which they are directed has important implications for the JRC’s “treatment” program and the use of the space to impose narrative and meaning upon inmates, which I will discuss in greater depth in the following section.

“[W]alking in my senses were bombarded”: Disorientation in the JRC

Writing about the experience of disorientation Ahmed (2006) states: “In simple terms, disorientation involves becoming an object...By implication, we learn that disorientation is unevenly distributed: some bodies more than others have their involvement in the world called into crisis. This shows us how the world itself is more “involved” in some bodies than in others, as it takes such bodies as the contours of ordinary experience. It is

not just that bodies are directed in specific ways, but that the world is shaped by the directions taken by some bodies more than others.” (pp 159). Building upon Ahmed’s assertion that some bodies are subject to experiences that are disorienting more than other bodies and applying this argument to the case of the JRC, it is evident that neurodivergent children and youth are made “objects” through processes of stoppage, (re)direction, and intentional disorientation to which the disabled body, like the racialized or the queer body, is disproportionately subject.

Ahmed (2006) continues, stating that “[d]isorientation can be a bodily feeling of losing one’s place, and an effect of the loss of place: it can be a violent feeling, and a feeling that is affected by violence, or shaped by violence directed toward the body” (pp 160). In the example of the JRC, the autistic and neurodivergent students are, in effect, experiencing a “loss of place” (their homes and communities) and also are subject to a violent, confusing new place where they are separated from their families and communities and are subject to painful and intrusive methods of control and normalization (i.e. restraints, skin shocks, loss of food and privileges, loss of autonomy). Moreover, there is a sense of a loss of place as a human being, as articulated by survivor Jennifer Msumba who writes: “JRC treats its clients like they are not people with feelings or emotions... We are *people*. JRC treated us as sub-human, as an exception to the rule” (Msumba, 2014). Here Msumba (2014) poignantly articulates the feeling of losing one’s place in the human order, of being displaced both physically and psychologically. Being rendered “sub-human” is itself disorienting and being abused for reactions to this disorientation (i.e. aggression, self-harm), as well as for ways of moving and relating that

are natural autistic ways of being, is a violent experience that fuels a continuous cycle of reorientation through disorientation and disorientation through reorientation. The autistic body is (re)oriented towards normative ways of moving and relating and when students protest they are disoriented through the sudden infliction of physical pain. This is reflected in Ahmed's (2006) contention that disorientation can be a feeling that results from violence directed towards the non-normative body.

One of the ways that the JRC functions to "stop", and in so doing, to disorient, the autistic body is through the use of electric skin shocks (GED). This has been discussed above but I would now like to provide the reader with two descriptions of photographs that capture this particularly poignantly. The first shows a young man in the foreground wearing a school uniform and sitting cross-legged on the yellow tiles of the Yellow Brick Road. A knapsack is strapped across his chest and waist, holding the GED device. He is also wearing black and red gloves on both hands, presumably to prevent him from biting himself. One gloved hand reaches out to pet a small turtle. His gaze is directed anxiously towards a mounted animatronic figure of the Wicked Witch. To the right is a pink, glittering room filled with what appear to be small artificial white trees. Behind him are a line of shop fronts each with a different colored awning, an artificial potted plant, and a large old-fashioned streetlight (see Figure 11) (Friedman, 2013). The second photograph shows a JRC staff member presenting only her torso and thighs. She is wearing a black apron with a large pocket in front which holds pens and data tracking sheets. Also attached to the black apron are a set of keys and three large plastic devices. The two that are visible contain the smiling pictures of two Black students. These are the activation

devices which the staff member uses to administer a 2 second electric skin shock to the student whose photograph is on the device. The staff member's hand is resting on the back of the chair on which a student is seated (see Figure 12) (Friedman, 2013).

Coupled with the extreme indoor theme park-like area setting is the use of physical and psychological violence as depicted clearly in the second photograph which shows a staff member holding the activators necessary to shock students who display behaviors deemed inappropriate. The first photograph also demonstrates the mutual dependence of these two elements that characterize the JRC, spectacle and violence, through the depiction of the seated young man fitted with the GED backpack carrying the electrodes that are affixed to his arms, legs, and torso and which can deliver a skin shock at any time should his behaviour deviate from the norms outlined in his behaviour contract. Moreover, this photograph captures the sense of unease created in inmates by the themed environment itself as the young man appears to be looking anxiously at a robotic figure of the Wicked Witch poised over him.

In addition to using the shocks to disorient inmates, the JRC uses its themed environment as a tool to disorient (and through this process to reorient) those incarcerated within. Fjellman (1992) refers "decontextualization" in the geography of the theme park. While Fjellman (1992) is discussing the implications of decontextualization for the theme park, this concept can also be applied to an understanding of the JRC. It can be understood as a method of control using, as its springboard, two things Foucault (1984) has identified as being of utmost importance: time and space. Briefly, decontextualization refers to situations where meaning is divorced from its context resulting in a sense of

spatial and/or temporal disorientation (Fjellman, 1992). Fjellman (1992) describes places such as Disney parks as “epicenter(s)” of decontextualization wherein “cuteness is injected, conflict removed” (p 31). Geography, too, is scrambled; for example Disney’s EPCOT centre sets geographically distant countries side-by-side. Different time periods, too, represented through themed areas, exist separate from, but beside, one another (i.e. Tomorrowland and the Wild West).

This temporal and spatial discombobulation creates a sense of disorientation and bewilderment in visitors, thus making them easier to direct and manage. In the example of the JRC, inmates are trapped within a fantastical space designed to appear “fun” and to be “rewarding” to clients who earn access (through displaying normative behaviours) to the Emerald City reward area. This creates both a sense of dislocation from the outside world, as the rewards area functions as a sort of small-scale mall, making trips outside the institution unnecessary, while also creating a sense of unreality for inmates who are caught up in a Disney-like world of animatronic figures and amusement park-esque attractions that is totally divorced from the reality outside the walls of the institution.

Carosso (2000) argues that a key feature of theme parks is their “peculiar and placeless dissociation” from their surroundings; as Foucault (1973) points out, institutional spaces, too, are characterized by spatial displacement wherein the inmate is rendered incapable of mapping their own topography within the space (i.e. in such spaces the outside is never visible compounding a sense of dislocation and dissociation). Such spaces “wall people off from the outside” and actively work to present guests/inmates with spaces that are, at once, spaceless and timeless. For Carosso (2000), “no destination

is too far in heterotopia because it nullifies the spatiality of the outside while making its own reality the only reality available” (p 73). Moreover, such spaces “leave us suspended in a new reality (temporal, spatial, and social) we can experience but the wider implications of which are yet to be fully understood” (p 73).

Lukas (2016) quotes a Disney architect about the goal of the themed space for the guest’s experience, and ultimately, behavior: “...we overwhelm them...they forget tomorrow and they forget yesterday” (pp 235). Lukas (2016) goes on to describe this further in a way that is applicable also to the themed space of the JRC by arguing that theming functions in part by creating a “new temporal and spatial order” (pp 235). Moreover, this evokes in guests (or inmates) a disorienting effect on their ability to accurately gauge the passage of time and their place within the themed space. In such spaces time is suspended (for guests, today and tomorrow are suspended and the only thing that matters while immersed in the themed space is the present).

The suspension of time and the (dis)(re)orientation as a result of theming which the guest experiences allows for “any space to become like a theme park” (Lukas, 2016, pp 214). Lukas’s (2016) above contention is part of the argument I am attempting to make here – not that the JRC is equivalent to a Disney theme park, but that certain temporal and spatial strategies employed in theme parks are also used by those who created the space of the JRC in an effort to (re)(dis)orient inmates and to modify their behavior towards more neurotypical ways of being in the world and that, moreover, this in itself is an act of violence. One of the desired effects of the manipulation of temporal and spatial aspects of the themed experience is the control of visitor/inmate behaviour. Dunlop

(1996) explains this further arguing that coupled with spatial and temporal manipulation, Disney parks are places where experience is “heightened by the manipulation of size and shape and color and sound” (pp 25). This particular aspect of environmental and sensory control through overwhelming the senses is described in detail by both former students of the JRC and those who have been permitted entry into the space, as was noted by survivor Msumba (2014) and journalists Gonnerman (2007) and Pilkington (2007) in the introduction of this paper.

Dunlap (1996) continues to explain that one aspect of Disney parks’ control of guest behavior is through the maintenance of a highly groomed, immaculately clean environment. This is achieved through highly successful attempts to evoke a sense of “visual harmony and psychological order” within the space of the parks. This includes overt acts of behavioral control such as banning shirtless or shoeless visitors as well as the prohibition of littering which are expressed to visitors through signage but also through more covert methods of behavioural control. Dunlop argues that it is this highly controlled environment and not simply the fantastical design of the space that sets Disneyland apart from other amusement parks like Coney Island or Six Flags. Dunlap writes: “[e]verything about the park, including the behavior of the ‘guests’, is engineered to promote a spirit of optimism, a belief in progressive improvement toward perfection” (pp 41).

A particularly telling uploaded image taken from the JRC website (Yukio Strachan 2012) is described by Strachan (2012) thusly: “[at the] end of the Yellow Brick Road the Wizard of Oz movie is projected on the wall and plays in a continuous loop as

the Wicked Witch looks on from her niche on the left”. This is an apt description of the image which I have selected to focus on in particular because it reveals not only the themed nature of the JRC but also because it captures the cyclical, timeless nature of the JRC’s programming. Even upon reaching the “end of the Yellow Brick Road” and entering the Emerald City by displaying normative behaviours and refraining from aggression, noncompliance, and self-injury, students emerge from the Emerald City only to be subjected once again to an endless cycle of regaining entry into the rewards area. Every display of natural, neurodivergent ways of being in the world (stimming, asking questions, challenging authority figures, reacting strongly to staff control, etc.) result in a loss of privileges that require the child or young adult to begin again down the Yellow Brick Road.

Ahmed (2006) argues that “disorientation occurs when we fail to sink into the ground, which means that the “ground” itself is disturbed, which also disturbs what gathers “on” the ground” (pp 160). Similarly to Lukas, Ahmed (2006) here makes the point that we cannot fail to acknowledge that the spaces we occupy are never impartial and that the spaces in which marginalized groups (i.e. queer, disabled, racialized people) are forcibly contained, can be frightening and violent sites of trauma where it is impossible to feel grounded or to take up space. This, in turn, results in a disturbance of “what gathers on the ground”; in the case of the uneven power relationships between the JRC director, staff, child and youth inmates, the families of those interned there and the wider communities surrounding the site. This disturbance can be felt not just at the site itself but also in other states and countries where protests are held to shut the JRC down...the

“disturbance” described by Ahmed could, I argue, refer to Foucault’s description of power relations and can be seen to be both localized and more broadly felt.

Conclusion

Ahmed (2006) writes: “The point is not whether we experience disorientation (for we will, and we do), but how such experiences can impact on the orientation of bodies and spaces, which is after all about how things are “directed” and how they are shaped by the lines they follow. The point is what we do with such moments of disorientation, as well as what such moments can do – whether they can offer us hope of new directions, and whether new directions are reason enough for hope” (pp 158). In cases like that of the JRC, where experiences are characterized by extreme violence, exclusion, and control, I think we can ask ourselves what the experience of hearing about such abuse does to (dis)(re)orient us – are we moved to fight for sites of violence to be dismantled, for justice? Are we moved (or perhaps are we oriented) towards working towards greater access in our communities? Are we oriented towards meaningful allyship to elevate the voices of those marginalized groups at the center of the nexus of violence? If so, and we have seen that knowledge about the abuses at the JRC has inspired great activism within the disability community, notably the work of ADAPT and ASAN to stop the shocks and to shut the JRC down, is this, as Ahmed asks “reason enough for hope”?

There is certainly reason to feel pride in the work of autistic and disabled activists who have been fighting against the JRC, and places and practices like it that abuse, exploit, and attempt to make disabled bodies “docile”. But hope, for me, would require

seeing action taken at wider systemic levels. Recently, for example, the FDA released a memo stating that they planned to ban the use of electric skin shock. The memo, however, was vague and gave no details about how or when this was to be implemented (FDA, 2018). Time and again the JRC has received publicity, public outrage, and then – outside the activism of the disability community – no tangible efforts on the part of government (or even larger public outcry and demands from nondisabled groups and communities) leading to the closure of the center and of others like it (i.e. Tobinworld, private ABA centers and schools, day programs, etc.) are made.

One of the ways that this reticence towards action is seen is through what Ben-Moshe et al (2014) describe as the emergence of narratives that perpetuate the (false) belief that contemporary services and programs for disabled people are not “real institutionalization”. This reliance by parents and medical professionals on narratives that compare contemporary programs for disabled people to past “real institutionalization” is incredibly dangerous because it does not acknowledge ongoing institutionalization, often emerging in new forms (i.e. the group home, day programs, sheltered workshops, specialized residential schools and “treatment centers”). The JRC is an example of this dangerous rhetoric which is made plain by parent testimonials provided on the JRC website which claim that the JRC’s treatment program has “saved” their child (who is often an adult) from a lifetime of institutionalization. I quote from two particularly poignant examples of this rhetoric now:

Anonymous parent #1: "If it were not for JRC, my daughter would either be dead, or wasting away in a straight jacket in some urine soaked back ward of a state institution." (JRC, n.d.)

Anonymous parent #2: "If it hadn't been for JRC, Lian would probably be in a psychiatric hospital drooling in a corner somewhere." (JRC, n.d.)

Neither parents sees the JRC, a residential program where neurodivergent people of all ages live, as a "real institution". This belief that the JRC is not institutional is, in large part, supported by the design of the space which Israel often describes on the school's website as "beautiful" and "non-institutional" (JRC, n.d.). Of relevance is Blatt's (1974) description of the institutions, including Willowbrook which he visited in the 1960s: "It does not require too imaginative a mind or too sensitive a proboscis to realize that one has stumbled into a dung hill, regardless of how it is camouflaged. It is quite irrelevant how well the rest of an institution's program is being fulfilled if one is concerned about that part of it which is terrifying. No amount of rationalization can mitigate that which, to many of us, is cruel and inhuman treatment" (Blatt,1974). This account, published 45 years ago, poignantly captures the sentiments felt by those fighting to close the JRC while also bluntly making plain the fragility of the arguments used to rationalize its continued existence by parents and administrators.

While the JRC presents itself as a non-institutional treatment "option" for "difficult to serve" individuals, suggesting that the programming is "fun" or enjoyable to inmates, the fact that it continues to use violence (both physical and psychological) to control students reveals the truth; the JRC, like Willowbrook and many other institutions for disabled

people that precede it, is a cleverly camouflaged and terrifying “dung hill”. Moreover, the use of staples of the theme park to render students docile, when they have every reason and right to protest the abuses they are subject to, is deeply troubling and is reflective of the increasing prevalence of themed and “Disneyfied” spaces in our culture, extending even into modern iterations of the institution.

Ben-Moshe et al (2014) make the compelling argument that we do not in fact live in a “post-institutional era” as has been claimed by other historians following the mass closures of state run institutions for disabled people in the 1970s, but rather that we live in an era where the institution has permeated our treatment of disabled persons in seemingly innocuous ways. We now live in an era of what Ben-Moshe et al (2014) term “different now-normative institutionalization”. Ben-Moshe et al (2014) argue, and I feel that the JRC exemplifies this contention, that the closure of larger state run institutions for those with intellectual disabilities or a label of autism is not reflective of a societal trend towards greater inclusion, access, and freedom for all disabled persons, and particularly for those who are neurodivergent. Rather, the ways we create institutions, often in smaller, cheerfully decorated environments including group homes, day centers, special education classrooms and schools, residential “treatment” programs, and ABA centers for children, has shifted. This has not led to de-institutionalization for neurodivergent people but rather new forms of institutionalization which often appear under the guise of these specialized programs that continue to remove neurodivergent people from their families and communities while advocating that disabled people can be

remediated and their neurodivergence eliminated or lessened through these new “non-institutional” centers, classrooms, “homes”, and programs.

Looking again at Ahmed’s (2006) question about whether disorientation might be cause for hope, I return to my previous point about what we might be able to do with the disorientation we feel as we learn about the JRC and listen to the testimony of activists and survivors. How does this knowledge change us (if it does) and how might we then (re)orient ourselves towards approaches that seek inclusion, justice, and new ways of conceptualizing neurodivergence that reject the pathology paradigm currently in use? In the words of an anonymous autistic survivor: “they still need to be held accountable for all of it. Because it went on for a very long time, and I suffered greatly because of it. People NEED to know these things happened...I lived this. These things happened. These things were done to me and I witnessed them done to many others” (xxx, 2013). The question remains – will we listen to the testimony of institutional survivors, examine the history of practices used to segregate and abuse autistic and otherwise neurodivergent people, and use this knowledge to fight for justice alongside disabled people?

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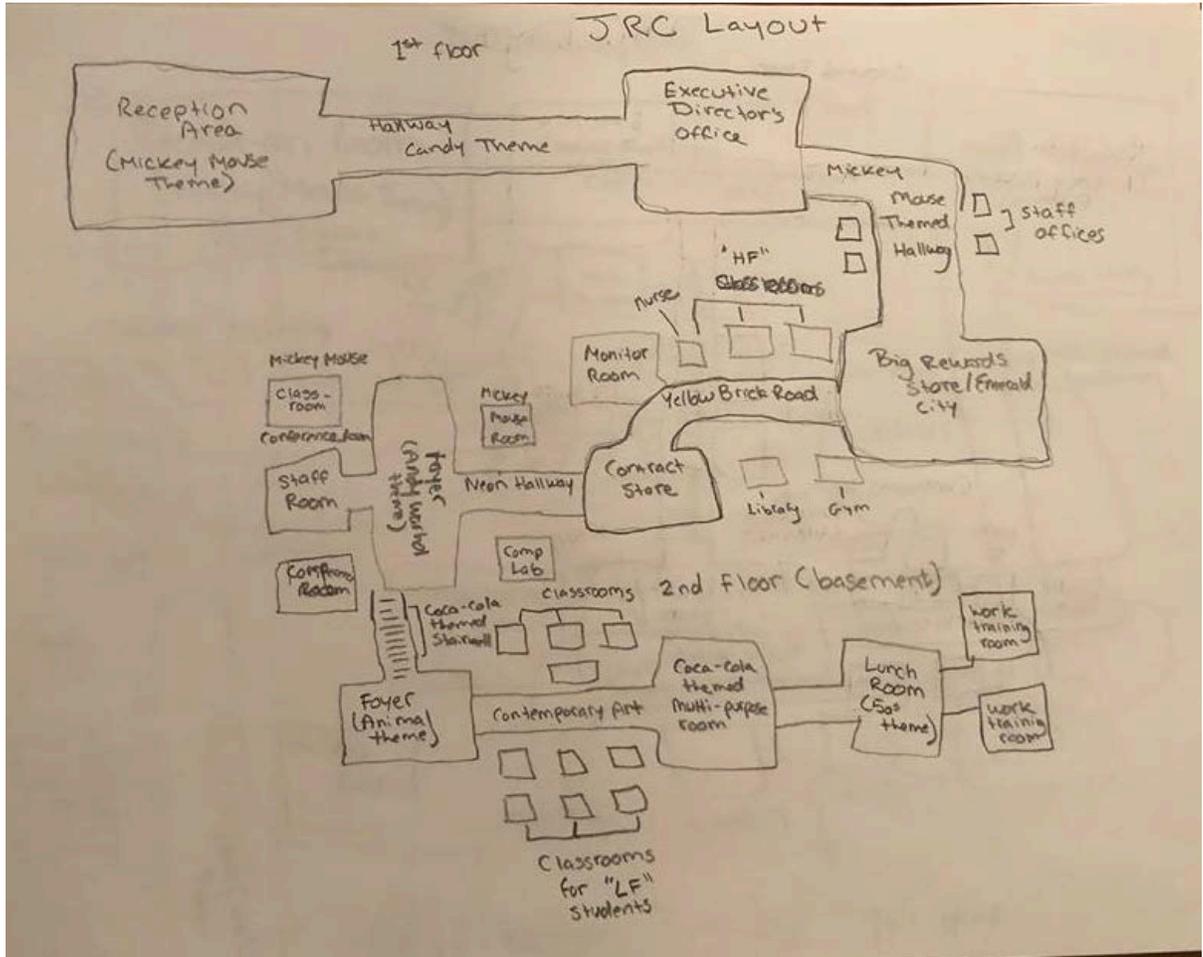
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Figures
#1



A rough sketch of the JRC's floorplan as described by Israel

Figure 2



The reception area at the JRC (Israel, 2002).

Figure 3



Two animatronic police officers stand in front of the entrance to the classrooms (Israel, 2002).

Figure 4



Plastic candies in the hallway at the JRC (Israel, 2002)

Figure 5



Ball pit in the Emerald City Reward Area (Freidman, 2013).

Figure 6



The Yellow Brick Road “Rewards Street” at the JRC (Friedman, 2013)

Figure 7



“Tiki” internet café at the JRC (notice the student is wearing the GED device in her fanny pack) (Friedman, 2013).

Figure 8



The Monitor Room at the JRC (Friedman, 2013).

Figure 9



The Mickey Mouse conference room (Israel, 2002)

Figure 10



Matthew Israel at the entrance to the Emerald City Rewards Area (Friedman,2013).

Figure 11



A student sits on the Yellow Brick Road at the JRC (Friedman, 2013).

Figure 12



GED activators on a staff member's belt at the JRC (Friedman, 2013)

Figure 13



The Wizard of Oz is played on a loop at the end of the Yellow Brick Road at the JRC (Strachan, 2012).