introduction

With its reliance on transport, out of reach cash machines, uneven pavements, steps into public buildings, and general clutter of permanent and temporary obstacles the built environment, which is the scene of my study, restricts the access and mobility of the disabled. In this chapter I look at the social model of disability, which has parallels with the Lefebvreian model of space, and how this view questions our cultural values embedded within and manifest through space.

With 9.8 million disabled people in the UK (Disability Rights Commission), representing one in seven of the population and set to increase as the population becomes more elderly, there is a pressing economic as well as moral case to fully engage these people in society. If the aim is to create an environment with access for all society's members then the disabled with their impaired movement and/or perception will provide a good test of the physical environment (Goldsmith, 2000, p3)[1]. Furthermore the sociology of disablement provides 'a testing ground for the adequacy of theoretical perspectives that claim to account for the experience of all a society's members' (Abberley p136).

the social model of disability

The traditional, or medical, model of disability which locates the problem within the individual and as stemming from functional limitations has proved inadequate to describe the reality of experience or to articulate the aspirations of disabled people. Instead the social model, created by disabled people themselves in the 1970s sees the problem as society's failure to provide appropriate services and ensure that needs are met. In doing so it makes the distinction between impairment, which is the restriction of the

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[1] Lee Harker qualifies this statement (8.2) by pointing out that disabled people often develop body strength and techniques that would not be options for, say the elderly. He also observes that the specific requirements of individuals are often contradictory (e.g. his own discomfort caused by tactile paving).

3.2 Disability

individual, and disability which is imposed on the impaired by society. A person may have impaired movement but it is externally imposed restrictions that deny access to certain areas and exclude from full participation in society and the labour market. The point of this social model is 'not to deal with the personal restrictions of impairment nor with the associated pain but to break down the social barriers of disability' (Oliver p37). In doing so it shifts the emphasis from the individual to the 'structural and cultural forces that shape their lives' (Barnes et al p 8) recognising, as Lefebvre (Oliver p10), that such structures are social productions not absolutes.

full participation of the disabled in society
Society then not only creates physical environments that are excluding but educational, social and political structures from which the disabled are denied full participation. The image of a society of equal opportunities does not reflect the reality experienced by the economically deprived, many women, members of ethnic groups and the disabled who are often excluded from political representation and power at all levels in society. The current focus on education and work based[2] programmes is aimed at overcoming these exclusions. However moving disabled people into the world of work and helping them to lead a *normal* life rather than radically reshaping the world to take account of differences reflects society's desire to normalise the individual. In medical terms this has meant a focus on helping the lame to walk or the visually impaired to see fully even at the expense of painful and degrading intervention. Stories of heroic battles of individuals seeking to succeed in the world and *overcome* their disability (impairment) only serve to reinforce the notion that the normal world is the only one with legitimacy and must be the goal of all.

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[2] The idea of citizenship promoted by both the political right and left in Europe is only fully offered to those in paid work with the ability to spend or contribute and thus excludes many of the groups it seeks to engage. From the perspective of the right citizens exercise their rights through economic choice whilst the centre left emphasises the obligations of the state and the contribution of the individual to the collective wellbeing. As suggested by Foucault the assumptions and structures of power often mean that 'social exclusion is related to exclusion from the world of work' (Abberley p126).

the need for change in society

The social model of disability, however, suggests that in order to achieve a just society rather than seeking to make impairment normal we should make it irrelevant. This calls for a remodelling not just of our physical environment and social and political structures but of the cultural values they reflect. For example the cultural value assigned to walking (Oliver p97) goes far beyond its function. References to walking pervade our culture and walking *tall and straight* is associated with pride and dignity which is denied, by implication, to those that are unable to do so. People with mental impairments are often ignored because of their inability to communicate in standard ways and society's failure to question its norms, habits and symbols means that, consciously and unconsciously, it discriminates against disabled people. Inclusion and assimilation has led to a denial of difference which, in turn, serves to reinforces the dominance of the mainstream *normal* activity and fails to challenge the 'socio-institutional structures which (re)produce ablist values and structures' (Imrie 1996, p144). Discrimination is perceived as the main way in which disabled people are treated unjustly but the stereotyping of individuals and groups[3], the averted gaze and the placing of people with disabilities into special institutions amounts to oppression embedded within the actions, practices and structures our society.

the disabling structure of the built environment

By the lack of provision of access, appropriate toilets or signage and by the reliance of urban and rural communities on inaccessible or denied public and private transport the built environment actively discriminated against disabled people. The disabled are segregated spatially and socially not just in special institutions and sheltered housing but are often economically disadvantaged and marginalised by their lack of power and representation within decision

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[3] Lee Harker related to me (8.2) several instances of discrimination by stereotyping which he clearly found hurtful.

3.2 Disability

*the difficult environment that both
Brian and Lee are forced to negotiate.*

*Marc Quinn's white marble statue of
Alison Lapper, an artist disabled due
to Thalidomide, eight months preg-
nant will sit on the 'fourth plinth' in
Trafalgar Square from Spring 2005.*

making socio-political structures. Such separation has led to the world of people with physical and mental impairments as being characterised as private rather than public and thus hidden in nature (Imrie 1996, p15). Where it becomes public the environment proclaims difference with disabled stickers in cars, emphatic marking of disabled parking spaces, segregated *ring for assistance* doorways, specific signage, ramps and railings.

Such disabling and marginalising spaces are embedded in the cultural values that shape our environment and buildings. Our representations of space, in Lefebvre's terms, project the dominant values which, in our society, are those of the able-bodied. As Richard Sennett explains in Flesh and Stone the body, and more particularly the perfect and idealised body which is so much a feature of our culture (Harker 8.2), shapes both the fabric of our culture and the form and conduct of its institutions. The stones of our cities are laid with bodily bi-lateral symmetry ordered round centres, fed by arteries and supported by limbs. Our customs, institutions and their built form are based on idealised bodily interactions, formalised gestures and notions of the healthy well being of the upright individual. Formal geometry, the straight line and the right angle are given pre-eminence with straight and right implying moral rectitude. This makes Marc Quinn's sculpture for the *fourth plinth* in Trafalgar Square all the more poignant for it is at once a challenge to our perceptions of the individual and to the form and symbolism of the symmetrical and ordered space in which it is to sit.

3.2 Disability

The Vitruvian man of the Romans is depicted by da Vinci as conforming to the square, circle and golden mean uniting the body with ideas of perfection of form. Harvey's early C17th understanding of the flow and circulation of blood is reflected in the flow of capital in Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations and Enlightenment models of ordered civic spaces manifest in the wide streets and evenly laid paving stones of Haussman's Paris and the broad tree lined avenues of Washington. Concepts of the body pervade both buildings and urban planning which, whether designed within the classical context or not, seek to reflect functions, relationships and proportions of the well formed human body. These ideas of universal and perfect form are associated with concepts of harmony and unity and to modernist architecture ideas of standardisation and norms[4].
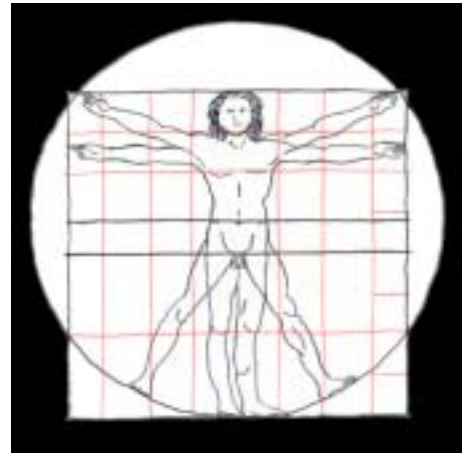
da Vinci's idealised man fits into the square and circle with the Golden Mean passing through his navel

The search for standards underlies the modernist preoccupation with function which, they believed, could be expressed in universal form (Imrie 1996, p 81). Thus objects are elevated to symbols of ideal form echoing the laws of natural selection that tend (as they saw it) to purity and standardisation. This perfect form, decontextualised from people's actual experience of bodies, is universal, neutral and transparent supported by scientific knowledge and embodied in the machine aesthetic. Although Le Corbusier's Modulor and Dreyfuss's ergonomic studies in The Measure of Man published in 1960 put the human body at the centre of design they are based upon the usefulness of standard measures and universal products. The belief, held almost without question in the modern, industrialised world, in a perfect form which unites production with economy is at odds with the daily lives of most individuals and particularly with the idea of providing for a diverse society.

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[4] This route from Classical to Modern side-steps a millennium of medieval thought, history and building. Sennett whilst showing that the twisting streets related to the un-centralised medieval economy taking 'precedence over planning and symbolism' (1994 p191) suggests that many of the classical views of the body pervade medieval thought. Nevertheless as in the Stones of Venice (Ruskin) and Alexander (1977) this idea of individual expression and vernacular, organic, growth is seen by many to provide a model for a plural and diverse environment.

As outlined in chapter 3.1 such standardised form gave rise to the mono functional and unambiguous spaces and zoned areas of urban planning that are being rejected today. It led to prioritising form above use and aesthetics, rather than actual function, becoming the main preoccupation of architecture. Understood through drawings and disseminated through photographs devoid of people such building fails to appreciate how entering a building 'violates the precisely ordered geometry' (Tschumi p123) and that aesthetics based on the visual take little account of other sensations.

plural and diverse space

Concepts of pure form and universal harmony are no longer recognised and far from leading to purity of form natural selection can only function within diversity (Kelly p491). What selection occurs is relevant only to yesterday's environment. The post-modern recognition of complexity, contradiction and difference within science and society enabled the creation of spaces which had the potential to counter the dehumanising effects of modern architecture and planning. But Venturi's call (p21) for a neo-vernacular resulted in borrowing of form and symbols rather than a genuine attempt to recreate them in the image of diversity. The idea that the vocabulary already existed (Jencks) meant that it continued to represent the views of the dominant able-bodied structures. However within these ideas are embodied the great potential of the plural and diverse to produce spaces that celebrate the vitality of other cultures and values. If society is not simply to reflect the current ethos of equal opportunities but is to build a real sense of full public involvement and participation it needs to be 'restructured around (bodily) difference as something to be celebrated' (Imrie 1996 p166).

In the following chapter I consider how these ideas relate to current legislation and the models of practice that they suggest.

the rigid form of Wren's St Paul's and Fosters Millennium Bridge is disturbed by activity and time