Auto-Disabilities: The case of shared space environments

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Divide presentation into four parts:

The origins of an idea.

What is shared space?

Shared space – (re) producing auto-disabilities?

Beyond auto-disabling cultures.
The origins of an idea
The No. 1 Glamour Car of America

THE NEW
1946 PACKARD CLIPPER
IS SOMETHING MISSING FROM YOUR LIFE?

FILL IN THE BLANK.
The rise of auto-cultures...

In the USA, 215 million registered motor vehicles, a 11-fold increase since 1925.

In the UK, 16-fold increase in the numbers of motor vehicles, 1926 - 2006, from 1.75 million to 28 million.

One third of land use in urban areas allocated to serving motor vehicles.
Dangerous instrumentality...

Economic costs of motor vehicle collisions and pedestrian injuries, $500 billion globally in 2007 (Chakravarthy, et al., 2007).

USA, 4,654 pedestrian deaths in 2007, and 70,000 reported injuries (see, http://www.walkinginfo.org/facts/facts.cfm).

Disproportionate impact of injury and death on the most vulnerable road users, such as children and elderly people.
The spatial solution: segregation

Clarence Stein (1927) and the design of Radburn, NJ

“a radical revision of relations of houses, paths, gardens, parks, blocks, and local neighbourhoods”.
RADBURN
The Town for The Motor Age
SAFE
for CHILDREN
The reactions against…

Jane Jacobs

Promenades that go from no place to nowhere and have no promenaders. Expressways that eviscerate great cities. This is not the rebuilding of cities. It is the sacking of cities (1993: 6).
Segregated spaces were not working:

- Diminution in social interaction
- Highways – a barrier to social inclusion
- Reduction of spontaneity
- Dead and not living streets
What is Shared space?
Hans Monderman

Traffic engineer, pioneered 120 Shared Spaces in Friesland...

...getting cars to slow down...

‘to look each other in the eye, to judge body language and learn to take responsibility – to function as normal human beings’.
Shared Spaces:

A traffic engineering concept involving the removal of the traditional separation between motor vehicles and pedestrians and other road users, and the removal of traditional road priority management devices such as kerbs, lines, signs and signals.
Libertarian Paternalism

shared space…promoting health and safety through self-active and responsible actions…

Dismantling prescriptive rules and regulations.

Eradicating formal order.

Shape public space through behavioural and intuitive use.
Shared space – (re) producing auto-disabilities?
The study’s objectives

Why local authorities choose to adopt the concept of shared space.

How the concept is understood and formulated as policy.

Who the major actors or agents are in shaping the policy framework and approach.

What role(s) disabled people and their organisations play in this process.
The research design

(9 month project, June 2009 to March 2010)

Library and web search

Scoping interviews with key actors

Interviews with key actors in 10 local authorities

Case studies in 3 local authority areas.

Total of 32 interviews (with 37 people)
• Prioritisation of the mobile body or the ‘body-normal’…

• The dominance of ocular or visual culture…

• **Disembodied understandings** of the interactions between bodies, space, and movement…e.g. ‘The hypothetical blind man…’

• **Existential insecurity and ontological uncertainty**…
Disembodied understandings
Disembodied categories

Users are usually denoted and defined by fixed, essential, categories such as cyclist, pedestrian, car driver, disabled person.

Disabled people –defined through four medical, impairment-specific, categories: mobility, visual, hearing, and cognitive.

‘people with serious visual impairment are likely to want to move along and across the street in a ladder-grid pattern’ (DfT, 2011: 19).
Absence of embedded/embodied knowledge: guidance is lacking and deficient

‘there aren’t any manuals from the DfT as to how you can design a single surface treatment’

‘I would like to simplify tactile paving, make it clearer because there are seven different tactile patterns...the tactile paving makes no allowance for context. They [local authorities] read the guidance and they don’t understand it. The guidance is trying to do too much. It’s too complicated’.
Transcontextual data/experiential data

‘people are trying to import new ideas without importing the context. People are importing ideas from the Netherlands and Belgium without importing the ideas behind it’

I knew nothing about the proposed scheme…until very recently…sadly, to my knowledge the Association were never contacted or consulted about any proposal’

‘we’re a voiceless community. I’ve advocated a regular process of meetings but it just hasn’t happened’.
Aesthetics and design are prioritised – technical/process based issues dominate shared space discourse:

‘they [officers] have a vision and that’s where the question of aesthetics comes in…they know what our views are but they still come up with designs that we look at and say ‘it doesn’t work’
Existential insecurity and ontological uncertainty
A treat to bodily integrity

‘it’s bad enough with broken pavements and all the other nasty things that are going on, and now they’re threatening us with another layer of danger’

‘I wouldn’t feel safe walking along where I know there would be cars running along beside me in the same place’

‘taking away some of the things that the dogs use for their work is going to make it harder for them…’
There is a ‘believability gap’ in that the evidence to support shared space does not necessarily convince its potential users that they will be safe and free from danger and harm.

‘it doesn’t really matter whether there’s a real safety problem. The point is, if someone feels it’s unsafe and is therefore excluded from using it then we’ve failed in our job to create an inclusive street’

‘whether they think it’s unsafe or not is not the important thing. We can tell them it’s safe but they may be terrified of going anywhere near it’
Involuntary withdrawal

‘people in our own access group have said they’ll avoid areas like that because they’re just too scary for them’

‘I keep away from this area - I stay away’.

‘you can very quickly exclude people with vision impairment’

‘actually disenfranchising certain sections of the community particularly those with a sight impairment of any sort’
Beyond auto-disabling cultures
Transport design revolves around the mobile body, or body-reductive policy frames.

Seeks to create new ways to accommodate ‘auto-mobility’…

Shared space - as a form of mobility - has potential to create new forms of immobility…

Impaired bodies as the basis of ‘the model subject’…how would this change the nature of auto-mobilities?

This requires - an ethics and politics of the body in relation to mobility.