

The Millennium Square Leeds: Civic Space, Public Arts and Social Facilitation

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It is almost 20 years since Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff (1983) acknowledged that: the processes through which a person defines him or herself in a society are not restricted to making distinctions between oneself and significant others, but extend with no less importance to objects and things, and the very spaces and places in which they are found.

The same could be said of such as the city, in which identifiable spaces are both defined by, and also define, aspects of city identity. Bordered or marked spaces such as the city square or plaza with their ethnographic histories, traditions, and particular characteristics have a special and distinctive role in this process. In many cases such city squares become signs for the city itself, where such as Red Square, Tiananmen Square and St Mark's Square by their histories and uses colour our perceptions of the very cities in which they are located. But even less well known and modest city squares and plazas have important roles in embodying and representing local histories, cultural meanings and facilitating social behaviour. The plaza, for example, is a highly defined setting for everyday urban life where rich narratives of social, cultural and economic exchange embody dynamic and evolving representations of the sociopolitical nature of urban life. As Torre (1996:285) emphasises in her study of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, 'public space is produced through public discourse, and its representation is not the exclusive territory of architecture, but is the product on the inextricable relationship between social action and physical space.' Within this process such public spaces are also often contested and contradictory spaces, a process identified by Setha Low in her seminal work entitled *On the Plaza*, and subtitled *the politics of public space and culture*. Low (2000) in her extensive study of two plazas in San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica, provides a rich methodology for uncovering the cultural and political significance of such public space.

Low recognises that such urban spaces are not neutral, but are sites of competing and conflicting ideologies located within a spatialized culture, that is, physically, historically and conceptually defined by social relations and social practice. For Low, (200:127) there is not only the social production of space, i.e. all those factors, social, economic, ideological, and technological that result 'or seeks to result in the physical creation of the material setting', but also the social construction of space by which she means 'the phenomenological and symbolic experience of space as mediated by social processes such as exchange, conflict and control'. This social construction of space she sees as the actual transformation of space through peoples' 'social exchanges, memories, images and daily use of the material setting into scenes and actions which convey meanings.' Both the origins and development of the actual materiality, design and architecture of the plaza, and its meanings as mediated through the symbolic life of its users and participants, are social processes. Thus Low looks at both the history of the production and design of the plaza, and the phenomenological narratives and symbolic expressions of its users.

Her methodology in researching the two Costa Rican plazas she has studied over 25 years, Parque Central, and the Plaza de la Cultura, encompasses a range of approaches in order to uncover their social production and their social construction. Her book, underpinned by appropriate theories that highlight the social and spatial boundaries of culture, class and gender and the politics of public space, thus looks not only at the architectural origins of the Spanish American plaza and the ethnohistorical meanings embodied in its physical urban location and spatial material form, but also at the symbolic transformations of such, as mediated by the rhythms of everyday life and expressed in literature, biography, art, and by both formal and informal modes of expressive culture. Thus her methodology involves not only materialist history and quantitative processes such as statistical studies of usage and the mapping of human movement, but also qualitative knowledge gained through participant observation, non-verbal behaviour, metaphor, and the phenomenological experience of place as manifest in everyday conversation and action. Drawing upon this theoretically grounded and multidisciplinary study, she argues that urban public space reflects the cultural order, not through a one to one correspondence between spatial arrangements and meaning, but through a complex culture-making process in which 'cultural representations are produced, manipulated, and understood by designers, politicians, users and commentators within changing and dynamic historical, economic and sociopolitical contexts.' (Low 2000:50).

Low's work is timely in reminding us of the value of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches in studying urban spaces that are socially and politically complex and multilayered, and which require a range of methodologies for their evaluation. I also will draw upon Low's work as my own precursory study on Millennium Square, a newly constructed public space within the city of Leeds, is further developed.

The city of Leeds is 320 kilometres north of London, and with a population of 725,000 is the third biggest city in the United Kingdom. Covering an area of 562 square kilometres, it is also the largest urban area outside London that is locally governed by a single elected local government authority, the Leeds City Council. Although it does have areas of social deprivation, Leeds has been successful in resisting economic recession, and with one of the lowest unemployment rates in the United Kingdom it has a 'dynamic and thriving local economy that has coped with the decline of traditional manufacturing industries by embracing new sectors and turning itself into a national leader in the provision of financial services' (Smales and Burgess :1999).

The development and urban design history of Leeds is complex in which socio-economic and political factors all played their part. Without here going into a detailed history of Leeds, what is important is that from about the 1960s Leeds was faced within its city centre region with a number of urban design problems. These included a city centre area, which separated from domestic housing, virtually closed down after 6.00 in the evening, a city centre dominated by roads for cars and traffic with little pedestrian or recreational space, large and neglected civic or public sector buildings erected as part of the civic authorities 19th century use of monumentalism and grandeur

to stimulate a sense of civic pride, and also large disused factories and warehouses, neglected and run down as production moved away from the city centre areas.

A potential solution to these problems emerged during the 1990s when Leeds began to have aspirations to become a major European city, and in so doing reconstructed itself as a 24 hour city with a growth of heritage, tourism, entertainment and leisure opportunities, bars and restaurants -particularly for the younger consumer. It is within this context that an urban design planning process conceived and promoted the idea of new urban spaces that were to try to revitalise the city centre and to reposition Leeds economically and culturally as a European city.

At the same time, the UK national lottery established a new source of funds to mark the beginning of the new Millennium, and thus in November 1996 a bid was made by the city to the new Millennium Commission for a major new development entitled *Pride in the City*, (The Leeds Initiative :1996). [Footnote / endnote 1] The proposal was to create three new public squares, and also six new gateway areas to mark leading routes into the city. Utilising urban design, public art and involving wherever possible local community participation, the scheme aimed to 'add a new dimension to city life and civic pride' and 'a new quality to the public realm.' *Pride in the City* aimed to provide 'a stronger sense of place, and a greater sense of space,' while within these general aims the economic subtexts were clearly identified as the proposal spelt out what it saw as the impact and benefits for Leeds as it argued that:

Major enhancements to the centre of Leeds will further strengthen it as a shopping, business and leisure attraction for all citizens and for visitors. Moreover they will contribute to the economy of Leeds and the surrounding region since the city is an important element in the regional infrastructure. The growth of tourism in Leeds and the region is likely to receive particular support. Finally the national and international identity of Leeds will gain from the high quality images to be created in '*Pride in the City*'. (:18)

One of the proposed squares lay in front of the Leeds Civic Hall, which completed in 1933, houses the official departments of the Leeds City Council, providing the council debating chamber, the Mayor's offices, reception rooms and offices for much of the bureaucracy of local government. The area also contained formally designed sunken gardens, which in 1983 was named as Mandela Gardens, symbolic of a political radical stance displayed by the controlling Labour Party city council, and which also marked several links that the city had in actively supporting the anti-apartheid movement. The area in front of the Civic Hall had not changed for 63 years and was surrounded by buildings, some like the Leeds General Infirmary hospital in the public sector, others such as The Electric Press,



The area in front of the Leeds Civic Hall showing the original Mandela Gardens and the site that was to be occupied by the new Millennium Square .

a former factory, while others were Edwardian and Victorian civic buildings in need of a new lease of life. The Pride in the City proposal was to develop this site as a new major square to create 'a genuine, large scale civic square for the people of Leeds, a place for civic events and gatherings, a proper setting for the architecture and a central focus for a cohesive civic quarter.' The proposal also contained plans for a large underground car park, a design feature that was to have a significant influence on the final development of Millennium Square.

Although *Pride in The City*, as a whole scheme, was turned down as such, the lottery's Millennium Commission suggested it be resubmitted as a single proposal for this one square. Thus a new bid, for Millennium Square, as it was now called, was submitted in August 1997 and was successful in being awarded a major grant of just over half the 11.9 million pounds towards a total cost of the project, the rest to be provided by the Leeds City Council, (*The Leeds Initiative* :1997).

The new Millennium Square retained the ambitions of the original proposal, but in the bidding process and with the advice and recommendations of the Millennium Commission itself, two themes gained importance and prominence. The first was that the new square should not only enhance the setting of some of the monumental and once grand buildings around its perimeter, but should stimulate major economic regeneration of the area. The second was that it should have an emphasis in providing a performance space and capability for a mix and range of events, including entertainment, civic celebration, civic ceremonies and community life. In a sense both social production, (the nature of its material aspect, its design and consequences for the physical presence of the buildings and environment), and social construction, (the provision of events and activities that could have lived cultural meanings for its users), were to emerge as major themes.

While Millennium Square is still not yet fully completed, with further development to take place around its perimeter buildings, the square and its gardens were officially opened by Nelson Mandela on the 30th April 2001. While at first sight its appearance is perhaps rather empty and austere, it is its potential as a major space for events and performances and for what it might become as a socially transformed experience, that will determine its success or otherwise.

Images, symbols and art experiences have an essential role in forming a sense of place and space, and while the intention is for Millennium Square to become an active venue for art activities and expressive experiences, such were also incorporated into its building and development. A Leeds based arts organisation, Pavilion, worked with the Leeds City Council to provide a series of activities and works as the site was developing. Pavilion instigated a programme entitled







Construction Sights, in which the physical unfolding of the square also became a transformative expressive event. [Footnote /endnote 2] One of their activities was to transform the building site screens into a patterned polka-dot facade that contained a series of spy holes and porthole windows for viewers to gaze into the building site as it developed (hence the pun construction sights / sites). [visual 7] While such spy holes are common around building sites to allow the public to watch the building work in progress,

Pavilion used commissioned work by Deborah Baker, a photographer who worked with the commissioned architect Pierre d'Avoine, to present giant video stills of passers by filmed in Leeds City Centre. These images, not only had an aesthetic intensity, but set up all kinds of polemic contrasts between such as work and leisure, industry and art, object and body, and the inanimate and the living, thus raising issues within the semantic space between such entities. By symbolically peopling Millennium Square as it was being built, the work raised questions about the relationship of the square to the general Leeds public. These giant images of living people going about their daily business in the city, laid claim to the public nature of the space and were potent reminders that its materiality needed to be transformed into a public human experience.

Pavilion also presented a series of video and electronic digital images projected against one of the adjacent Victorian factory buildings, using a disused industrial past as a site for new emerging technology and forms of expression. While a visual spectacle, the event made claims for Millennium Square to embrace experiment, new media and to also become a living experience capable of mediating and transforming its physical presence.

An oral history project, also run by Pavilion, involved the recording of memories and conversations by workers from the old disused factories and warehouses around the perimeter of the square, highlighting and archiving past lives



Building site screen erected while the building of Millennium Square was in progress. (Photograph -Pavillon).





Views through porthole of Deborah Baker's photographic installation. (Photograph - Pavilion)



and struggles embedded in work and materialist production. These recordings will serve as reminders of the industrial origins of the square's setting before it becomes transformed into a site of consumption, with the old buildings regenerated into such as new commercial bars, cafes, and restaurants. The records are contained on CD discs and websites and involved local schools, but it might be appropriate if listening booths could be in placed permanently within Millennium Square itself, to give contemporary access to its past.

In this respect Low draws attention to the work of Malcolm Quantrill (1987) and his book, *The Environmental Memory*, in reminding us that 'the examination of the built environment provides insights into meanings and values, and processes that might not be uncovered through other observations and offers mechanisms for exploring social and political forces of the past.' Designed landscapes such as plazas, she states, '*are a living history of local cultural meanings and intentions retained through a mnemonic process of environmental memory encoded in space.*'

Permanent art works are also to be featured in the square, and already in place is a cocoon steel framework structure surrounding the events control tower, conceived by the well known British sculpture Richard Wilson. The control tower contains electronic equipment for state-of-the-art light and laser shows, but it also is a watch tower with surveillance equipment, hence a mechanism of authority and social control like Bentham's all pervasive Panopticon. Perhaps the Wilson piece can be read as attempts by art to contain and hold in check the surveillance apparatus of the local civic power, reclaiming the square



Sculpture by Richard Wilson

for the freedom of imagination and the human spirit? Another large standing piece is a sculpture of two hands by a senior established British artist, Leeds born sculptor Kenneth Armytage. The piece echoes an Egyptian style, but it is not out of place within the garden design, which is more Mediterranean than English rose. The presence of public art within the square is a significant development for the city of Leeds, whose relationship with contemporary public art has in the past been problematic. (Footnote/endnote 3).

However, it is its potential as a performance arena that is important in considering how Millennium Square might be socially constructed and used. To this end there are five main features to its performing capacity:

- Firstly, a portable stage construction that can be erected as required for major events.
- Secondly, a digital electronic capability, providing sophisticated sound systems, light and laser performances, and digital projection facilities (soon to be augmented by a state of the art digital plasma screen).
- Thirdly, a unique underground logistic area, whereby original plans for an underground car park have been reformatted into underground dressing rooms, production rooms and recreation rooms to house the performers and the production facilities (including storing the portable stage). There is direct access to and from the surface, and to the stage when erected, by way of bunker-like entrances and a lift tower. At the far end from the stage area there are underground toilets that can be used for events involving thousands of people.
- Fourthly, its performance capacity and the logistics for such have been incorporated into its design with a gentle sloping surface that falls towards the stage area, and screening and gateway fittings that can erect temporary fences and entrances for small or large scale events. Part of these logistics are the moveable trees in planting boxes on discreet wheels that can be moved around the square to flexibly allow for different spatial configurations. Overall, the square has an events area of 300 square metres and a total project area of 450 square



Sculpture by Kenneth Armytage



The portable stage at Millennium Square with a test display of laser lights. (Photograph - Leeds City Council)



metres, if some of the perimeter building spaces are included. With the stage erected, temporary seating can provide for a seated audience of 2,500, and for a standing concert an audience of between 3 to 6,500 can be achieved, depending on how the temporary fences and gates are arranged.

- Fifthly, Millennium Square is managed by a young management team of the City Council, whose brief includes the commissioning of arts groups and performers, for example during the Summer Festival Rhythms of The City, which the City Council sponsors and organises. This management team is rapidly gaining expertise and imagination in the use of creative performance groups within an urban setting. (footnote / endnote 4)

There is thus a logistic, designed and material capacity for Millennium Square to be transformed from a socially produced physical space to a socially constructed transformative experience through art, celebration, events, ceremonies and so on. However, there are important issues to be considered, particularly if we question whose experiences and whose events. For example, what are the processes and mechanisms that will enable Millennium Square to be truly a

View of Millennium Square showing moveable trees and temporary tenting.



Temporary seating for a Millennium Square music concert. (Photograph - Leeds City Council)

democratic site of social construction, rather than a controlled expression of the ruling civic hegemony? Inevitably Millennium Square as a venue will be contested, as various social groups and interests lay claim to its social construction. The needs of commercial business to use the square as a promotional and advertising venue are inevitably different to those of local arts groups who require a central city space for performance. The attitudes and requirements of those who have purchased a prestige apartment in the regenerated buildings overlooking the square will be different to the young nightclubbers who will be seeking entertainment within adjacent bars and clubs.

The range of events and activities held on Millennium Square in its first seven months appear to have been quite diverse in nature, from large scale national concerts of both classical and pop music on BBC radio and television, to small local events involving local voluntary or community organisations. The events have not all been arts orientated, for example some have involved sport, commercial and private sector use for advertising and business gatherings and some have been public and voluntary sector events, including those of charity organisations. Some events have involved the use of a stage and all the technical logistics on offer, some only involve access to and use of the square. Examples of the range of events and performances include:

- A Palm Sunday procession, (religious event)
- St Patrick's Day March and events (ethnic minority event)
- Abba Tribute Band Live Concert (an event promoted and run by a commercial entertainment company)
- A Breakthrough Breast Cancer roadshow (charity health event)
- A Disability Festival Day (disability groups event)
- A Sikh Festival (ethnic minority event)
- Peugeot in The City, a motor trade car promotion and advertising event (private commercial trade sector event)
- A small jazz event used for fund-raising by a local women's arts group (community arts event)
- Battle of Britain Memorial Day (ceremonial event)
- Children's beach football and volley ball competition sponsored by Nike (commercial youth sports event)
- Athletes hospitality for the British Transplant Games (charity sports event)
- Open air film and video screenings as part of the Leeds Film Festival (arts event) and an open air theatre drama presentation (arts event).

Most notable in their organisation and popularity were perhaps, the Nelson Mandela opening of the square which featured African performing arts groups, a BBC televised concert featuring opera and popular classics, the installation of a temporary ice rink, which will be a regular Winter event, a performance by a French group of street theatrical innovators and performers, *Plasticiens Volants*, that told the story of Leeds through giant puppets, an inflatable Owl (Symbol of the Leeds Civic Hall), mime and pageantry, and a fireworks event by *L'Avalot*, a performance group from Spain, which as part of a Summer Street festival sponsored by the City Council, featured a parade of dinosaurs all breathing fire and fireworks.



Nelson Mandela officially opens Millennium Square and new Mandela gardens. (Photograph -Leeds City Council)



Temporary ice rink in Millennium Square. (Photograph -Leeds City Council)



Giant inflatable owl, part of performance by Plasticiens Volants in Millennium Square (Photograph Guzelian Ltd)



Scene from performance by Plasticiens Volants in Millennium Square (Photograph Guzelian Ltd)



Beginning of Street theatre performance / fireworks by L'Avalot, on the way to Millennium Square.



Such a wide range of events and a diversity of scale is part of the management policy of the square, and while they directly promote a few official events sponsored by the Council, (News Year Eve, The Temporary Ice Rink, the summer street musical festival Rhythms in the City, and one or two large concerts in association with the BBC), the management team act as a facilitator and will work with voluntary organisations, commercial music promoters, the private sector and the general public to provide facilities and back up services where required. If used for commercial or trading gain there is a fee for the use of the square, but otherwise payment is usually only required for technical logistics, facilities and expertise which can be hired from the council. In the first seven months of the year of its opening there were 100 event days of which 25% were directly organised or commissioned by the Millennium Square management team, 25% were voluntary and public sector organised events for which there was no fee for use of space, and 50% were commercial, trade or private sector events, paying fees for use of the square as well as for the services and facilities. While there does not seem to be a written policy of what kind of events can or cannot take place, anything breaching public health and safety, the Council's equal opportunities policy, or local public nuisance or trading laws, would not be accepted. The terms and conditions agreement for official sanctioned use of the square is detailed, but mainly refers to technical and logistic factors, music copyright, health and safety and so on.



Promotional private sector event for car promotion in Millennium Square.

Unofficially it seems that anyone can spontaneously use the square for an arts performance or event, although such could be prevented if considered a threat to the environment and fabric, the health and safety of others and so on. For example, students from the nearby Universities and colleges could gather unannounced for spontaneous arts events, and the square has already been used for political protest by way of a demonstration against the closing of care homes by the Council itself. It is likely it will become the focus of other political gatherings of one sort or the other.

Such an open usage policy is to be welcomed if Millennium Square is to become a genuine socially transformed democratic space. However there are inevitably potential areas of conflict and it could be argued that the 50% use by commercial and private business is already too big a proportion for a public space. There is already argument and difference between those who want a space to relax in, to sit or promenade and who feel that the garden is not secluded or colourful enough, that the square is continually being disrupted by the putting up of fences, gates, tents, marquees and the stage itself, which it is argued, disrupt the peace and spatial continuity of the square. There is environmental conflict, as the setting up of events often involve bringing

traffic onto the square that mark the surface, creating a scruffy dirty appearance. (footnote/ endnote 5) There is also an ongoing dispute between skateboarders with other users and the Council's Management. There are those who see the freedom to skateboard as a legitimate and important use of the square, and others who find BMX, roller blade and skateboarding a hazard, nuisance, damaging to the environment and an intimidation. The council itself is uncompromising and has gained a legal injunction to try and stop the Skateboarders. The resolution or containment of such conflicts will be have an important influence on how the square develops democratically and some issues may require imaginative compromise.

That the square should become contested territory is not surprising, as its dual purpose to provide a public city space and also to regenerate the local environment contains the potential for conflict. As a site for commercial consumption, with its inevitable postmodern emphasis on style, fashion and surface meanings, and given the needs of economic gentrification which such consumerism requires, it will become increasingly difficult to sustain Millennium Square as a genuine open public space. However, it is nonetheless to some credit of the Leeds City Council that they have so far emphasised the space as a living space for events and performances to happen, and that they are fairly open and relaxed about what those events should be and who should organise or own them. If Millennium Square is to be socially constructed as a living experience, then there should be wide diversity in its use for the broadest representation of the population as possible, and allowance made for events and activities that will also critique and challenge civic hegemony. There is a need for urban spaces, such as Millennium Square to 'welcome diversity and meet the contrasting needs of different social groups' (Beall 1997). As Beall further reminds us:

The structure of urban space presents both constraints and opportunities which impact in different ways on the lives of the different inhabitants of a city. Women and men, the elderly, children, teenagers, disabled people, racial, ethnic or religious minorities, refugees and newcomers, migrant workers, the wealthy, people in poverty - all have contrasting needs and contributions to make and they experience and engage with the physical environment in different ways. (Beall 1997 :3)

Perhaps the most exciting Millennium Square event I have witnessed so far has been the fireworks performance of the Spanish group L'Avalot, where strange dinosaur creatures emerged and paraded through the streets of central Leeds with fire and sparks, to a grand finale in Millennium Square that was as aesthetically glorious as it was exciting and even dangerous. Low in her book points out that it is such as fiesta and carnival that break the official order of the plaza, which temporarily appropriate the civic controlled space from officialdom and challenge the prevailing political hegemony by breaking normally applied rules, procedures and protocols. (footnote/ endnote 6) With the Spanish sense of fiesta, the fireworks, in their imagination, boldness and danger worried the Council officials and their concern for bureaucratic health and safety procedures and regulations. For an hour or so, the square was taken away from a

bourgeois sense of order and control and appropriated by fire, mayhem excitement and art. In itself, perhaps this is a powerful case for the place of art and imagination in urban space.

As Low implies this in itself is part of the democratic lived transformative process of plazas and such public spaces. In spite of often being controlled and commandeered for ruling political forces, in her conclusion she argues that: Meaningful public contexts must be conserved for this cultural significance and political importance and maintained as representational centers of social conflict and cooperation.....Through the making and remaking of public spaces, we retain the spatial and cultural dimensions of democratic political practices. (Low 2000 :247) (Footnote/endnote 7)

Such is an ambitious requirement for Millennium Square, but one that needs to be acknowledged in any evaluation and monitoring of the square. It is also clear from Low's methodology that any such evaluation needs to be rooted in a theoretical perspective that will allow the many facets of social construction to be assessed. For the Leeds City Council, Millennium Square already has become a success in its role in helping to rebrand the city, and by already bringing into the immediate neighbourhood 150 million pounds of private investment and regeneration. It has also provided the context for the city to transform its own nearby civic environment, with for example, a major refurbishment for the adjoining Leeds Institute building which is to become the site for publicly displaying the collection of the Leeds Museum. It could also be demonstrated that Millennium Square is helping to bring people back into the city centre, stimulating greater use of the city centre at night and has opened up new vistas in the city environment, so fulfilling its original ambitions.

Any future or on-going evaluation of Millennium Square will require a range of interdisciplinary methodologies, taking into account its history, ethnographic aspects, aesthetics and design functions, and above all how it was socially produced and constructed by its users and potential users. Indices other than the economic will need to be used to account for the socio-political aspects of the space. For example, there will be the need for some mapping and usage profiles to highlight class, gender, age, and disability to assess whether the square is truly an inclusive public space, or whether it is dominated by a particular social stratum by both use and by the nature of its users. There will also be the need for participant observation and the collection of narratives to highlight its emerging expressive and



Night view of refurbished Leeds Institute Building, situated on the perimeter of Millennium Square.



Open air tables at the café bar in Millennium Square

symbolic role in personal and social identity. Farrar in one of the discussion papers of the Millennium Intervention Group (Douglas, Gunn, Farrar et.al : 2000), suggests that events and activities held in Millennium Square might be characterised by polar opposites to determine whether they simply conform to prevailing ideologies or whether they are more radical and challenging. Such could form the basis for a semantic differential evaluation of its activities, which although initially bipolar, could through scaling and factor analysis provide a three dimensional conceptual map of the social transformative nature or otherwise of Millennium Square and its activities. [Footnote/endnote 8]

The balance between organised and spontaneous public use is another important factor in determining the extent to which Millennium Square will be successful as a public space. If events and celebratory use of the square depend solely on those officially organised, then no matter how well intentioned and varied these are, the space will be perceived as a civic controlled space and this in itself will be detrimental to its public 'ownership', purpose and use. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1999) makes the distinction between official space and urban vernacular space - the former designed, controlled, designated and secure, the latter mapped by temporary and spontaneous use. She cites Washington Square Park in Manhattan where on weekends in good weather 'strangers gather at the park and produce complex ensemble performance without plans, sponsoring organisations, funding, publicity or announced schedules' (:20). As Washington Square Park was never designed for such activities, urban vernacular space could be regarded as the creative manifestation of genuine public space, which by its spontaneous public use re-define the formal parameters of designed space. Within Low's framework it could be argued that urban vernacular space through social construction challenges or redefines its own social production. In the last analysis it is how Millennium Square will be socially constructed and used and how the space is to be transformed into a public living experience that will determine its success or otherwise.

Footnotes/ endnotes

1

The Pride in The City proposal was supported and directed by a coalition partnership of Leeds business, public sector and educational institutions, including the two major universities. Lead by the Leeds City Council and known as the Leeds Initiative, this partnership and its sub-committees is increasingly playing a major role in the strategic development of the city in all its aspects. The Leeds City Architect, John Thorp, was the creative author of the proposal and he also had overall responsibility for the creative development and management of the Millennium Square project that emerged from Pride in The City.

2

Construction Sights was funded by grant awards from the Royal Society of Arts (Art and Architecture Scheme), the Arts Council of England, and the Yorkshire Arts Board, as well as Leeds City Council. Curated and managed by Anna Douglas, the project included lighting and information presentation and the design of the building site's public interface.

Pavilion also set up a number of seminars and discussion groups bringing together local academics and commentators to form a Millennium Intervention Group that presented discussion papers examining the history, purpose and potential of Millennium Square and its socio-historical and political nature, (Douglas, Farrar, Gunn et. al.: 2000). The papers represent a salient intervention by an academic community into the civic urban design process. The Leeds School of Art, Architecture and Design at Leeds Metropolitan University, through project seminars with students and staff of its urban and landscape design courses, also contributed to a practical exploration of the potential design and uses of Millennium Square in its early development stage (Leeds Metropolitan University : 1998). These seminars involved local architects, politicians, relevant professionals and students, as well as individual members of the public. Workshops sessions, involving John Thorp and other Leeds City council officers, significantly provided for open debate and public scrutiny (albeit by a mainly professionally interested constituency) at an early developmental stage in a Leeds major urban planning project. (Smales and Burgess : 1999).

3

The political and cultural issues around Leeds and its relationship with public art are explored in Sandle (2001).

4

For example, representatives of the management team have visited Tarrega in Spain, and other show-case festivals in their search for street performers.

5

Criticisms of Millennium Square, as for example featured in the local BBC Website chat page, often highlight its apparent drabness and greyness. Aesthetically, it could be argued that the underground-stage entrances and lift blocks with their grey bunker-like appearance contribute little to the square's organic structure and are rather too austere. However, the appearance of Millennium Square will change considerably as the



Growing plantation display in Millennium Square.

Mandela Gardens, surrounding border plantations and the moveable trees thicken and grow.

The addition of new venues, including a proposed theatre around its south side perimeter will also improve its appearance.

Maintenance and environmental damage, however does seem to be a problem. The local opposition political party, the Liberal Democrats for example, are critical of the expenditure involved in replacing damaged paving stones that are caused by lorries and vans having to travel over the square's surface to set up shows and performances. There are also problems with the fountain, which has not been working regularly.

6

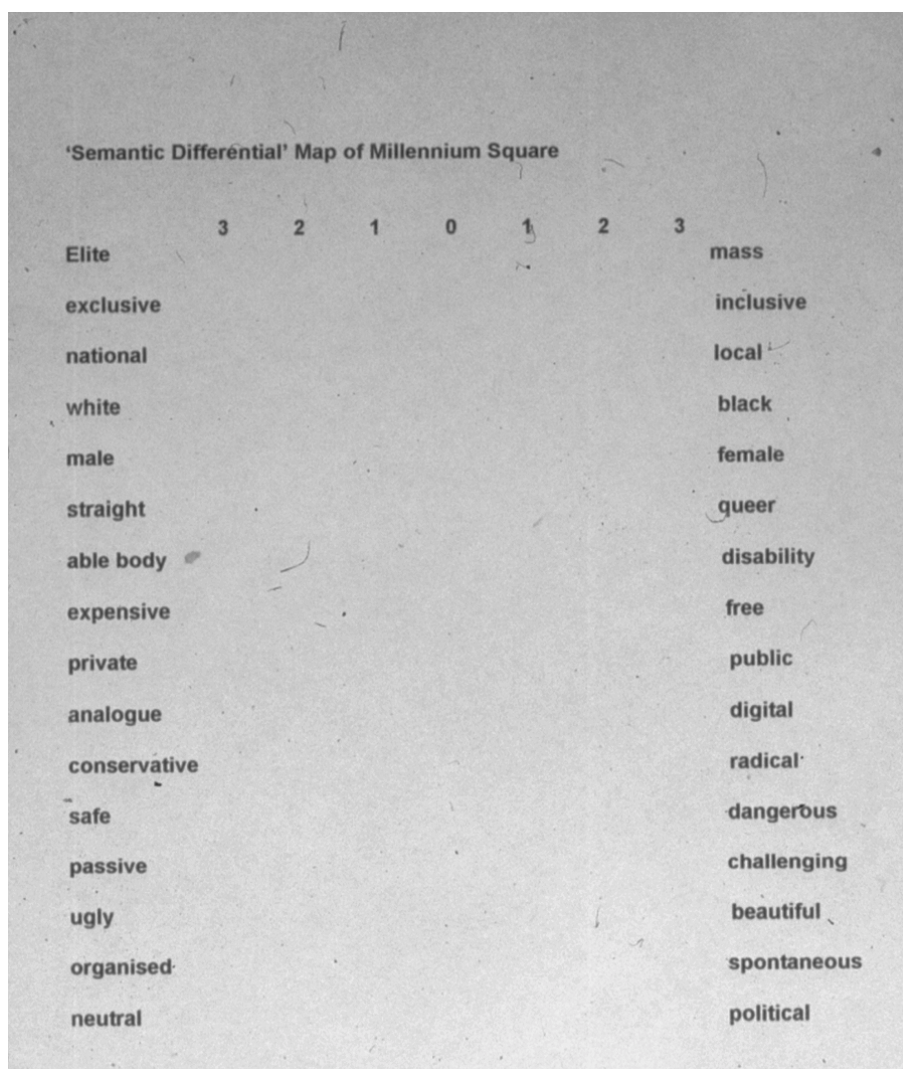
Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1999: 21) highlights New York's Chinese New Year celebrations in which 'the rules are relaxed, and laws are selectively enforced.' Although firecrackers are illegal in New York, she observes that by the end of the Chinese New Year day, sidewalks and roads are littered with shredded red paper from the firecrackers. The carnival in appropriating space uses it in a different way to the normal civic and business life of the city.

7

Also Beall (1997:3) observes that :In these urban spaces social identities collide, collude and accommodate each other. Social relations are built and challenged and social divisions occur while political coalitions and organisational linkages emerge and fade. Struggles for survival and power are played out in physical spaces and built environments that are spatial and organisational expressions of social relations and contesting realities.

8

Using 7 point semantic differential rating scales of terms such as elitist / populist, inclusive / exclusive, queer / straight, able-bodied /



disabled, expensive/free, passive/ active, bland/sensual, white/ black, inclusive/exclusive, spontaneous/organised, political / apolitical/ bland/ sensual, and so on, an evaluation could be made of the perceived social and cultural meanings of different events and activities held in Millennium Square.

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