

Microanalysis: the area close up

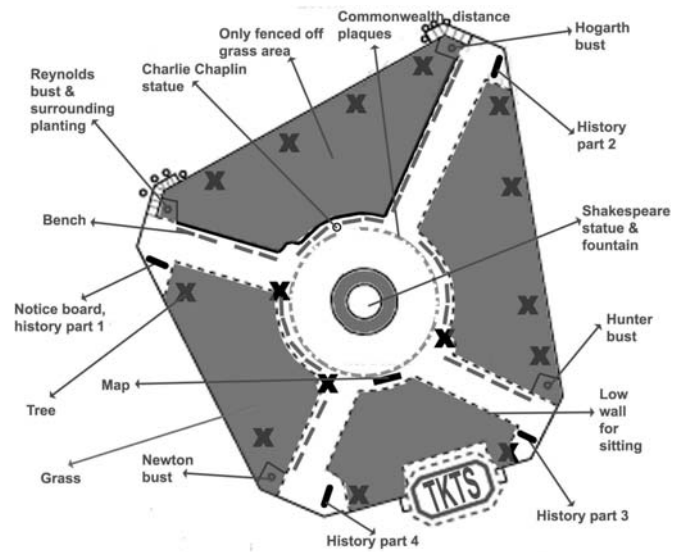
Like the previous chapter, the following sections move from a general overview of the area and its components and seek instead a more detailed dissection of the three spaces that make it up. The spaces are examined to assess how ideas of civility, community and inclusion – historically present in public space – interact with the pressures for control, exclusion, homogenisation and commodification that would be expected in the core of a global metropolis.

SPACE 1

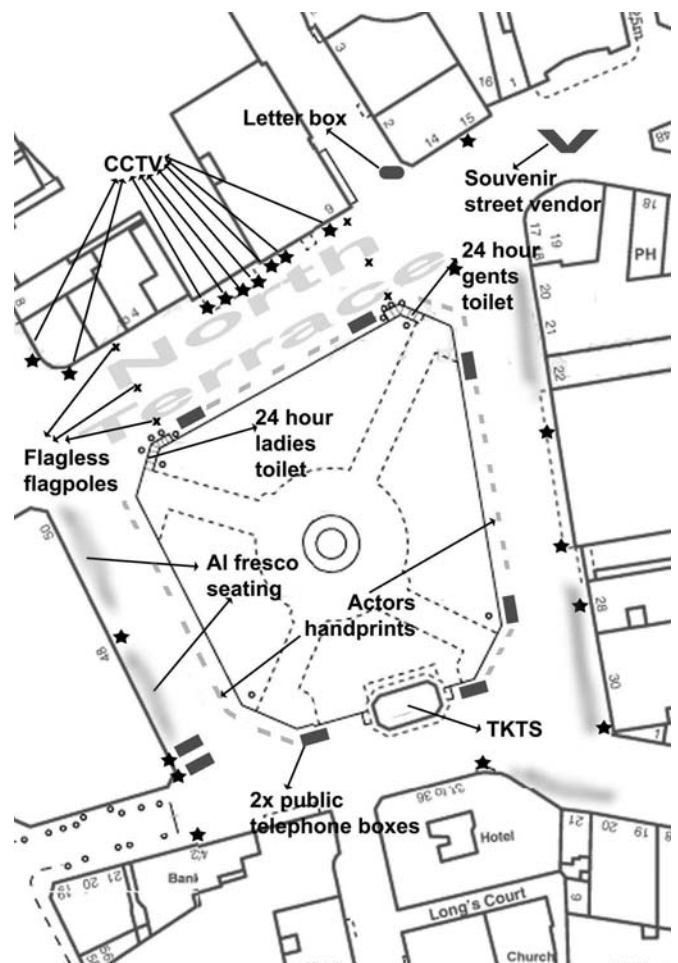
Space 1 is Leicester Square proper (Figures 10.11 and 10.12). In its centre, the gardens have historically been intended to foster behaviour associated with civility and community (see Chapter 2). As well as containing 30 benches, with each bench designed to take four people, there are low walls and grass for sitting on and trees to shelter under in summer. Each of the four busts is placed in a carefully tended flowerbed. The statues of Shakespeare and Chaplin will appeal to tourists, but neither exist to facilitate commerce, whilst the byelaws listed opposite the busts at each entrance to the gardens provide the major visible projection of state authority in the design of the gardens. The Westminster City Council logo also appears on the 24 litterbins in the gardens, projecting the presence of the state into an element of civility. The gardens are open to everyone during daylight hours and there is no visible exclusionary element at play, related either to social status, age or ethnicity. Nonetheless, the closure of the gardens at dusk is a reminder of the limits on public use set up by the controlling organisation, in this case, the elected local authority.

The street furniture around the square contains little reference to the presence of state or BID management and control. Indeed, the most visible displays of some form of management are the 16 red telephone boxes around the square, and the one letterbox at the southern tip of Leicester Place. However, even more than the litterbins in the gardens, the telephone and the letterboxes have become integral elements of London streets, and therefore are much more strongly associated with notions of civility and community. Other strong symbols of civility and community are the large public toilets on the north terrace – clean, free of charge and with a 24-hour attendant – and the bike racks on the south side of the square (Figure 10.13).

Reflecting what has arguably become the most surveilled city in the world (thisislondon.co.uk/news_2007) there were 19 CCTV cameras around Leicester Square alone, a fact that might suggest an Orwellian ‘Big Brother’ presence surveying and controlling the square and its users. In



10.11 Plan of Leicester Square Gardens



10.12 Plan of Leicester Square