



2.12 St Patrick's Day in Trafalgar Square

For his part, Barry thought that the first public square in London should be more artistic in nature:

Giving scope and encouragement to sculptural art of a high class, and ... giving that distinctive and artistic character to the square, which is so needed in public areas and squares of London, to excite among the classes that respect and admiration for art, so essentially necessary to the formation of a pure and well grounded national taste.

(quoted in Mace 1976: 77)

In this regard, the debate reflected notions that aesthetic properties could give rise to public pleasure, and reflected the Ancient Greek view that at least one role of public space was to meet the higher spiritual needs of onlookers. Barry suggested that the sculpture be grouped on pedestals in the square in a regular axial form, an arrangement believed to be in keeping with the idea of a cultural space. The designs also included two fountains, a design feature considered helpful for a baser function, the policing of a possible 'urban mob' or riotous public assembly.

Over the following hundred years, Trafalgar Square turned into a home for statues of military and naval war heroes, who occupied the plinths Barry had intended for great art. Trafalgar Square also soon became a meeting area for gatherings and demonstrations; its central location and public nature making it a natural arena for Londoners to assemble, particularly since there was nowhere else in central London. Significantly, assemblies were banned in 1848 soon after completion of the square, but this was later relaxed until Bloody Sunday in 1887, a demonstration against unemployment. This event led parliament to debate the nature of the square in 1895. If the space was public, a Liberal MP claimed, then the

right of assembly at the square should be permitted. The Tories claimed that the land belonged to the queen and was therefore private (Mace 1976: 155–200). This debate echoes public versus private arguments seen in connection with public space to this day.

In recent times Trafalgar Square has been the scene of many assemblies, whether demonstrations – such as the suffragettes at the start of the century, nuclear disarmament in the 1960s, trade unions in the 1970s, anti-apartheid rallies in the 1980s, and anti-war rallies in the 2000s – or regular celebrations, such as New Year's Eve and sporting victories (Figure 2.12). However, it also functions as a cultural space, representing London to tourists, and high culture via the presence of the National Gallery. Until recently it has also been a largely barren place for much of the year, encircled by traffic and containing only tourists and pigeons.

Richard Rogers and Mark Fisher (1992: 105–6) were amongst the first to suggest that traffic on the northern side of the square could be re-routed, connecting the National Gallery to the central space. Later, under the 'World Squares for All' project, Norman Foster suggested better access to the square's monuments, a redevelopment that commenced in December 2001 and was completed in 2003, and that includes a new chain café on the square itself.

The Greater London Authority (GLA) now manage the space and the square has its own bye-laws and 24-hour 'heritage wardens' preventing spontaneous activities such as music and non-planned demonstrations. In addition, London's first mayor, Ken Livingstone, managed to clear the square of pigeons by banning the sale of pigeon feed, until then the only legal commercial activity allowed in the space.

So, like many of London's public spaces, Trafalgar Square has been transformed, but in this case bringing its function more into line with that