

originally envisaged, as a space for gathering and civic display, rather than what it had become, a traffic roundabout. Trafalgar Square has always been heavily managed in one form or another since its original construction, but in common with many other spaces around the world, this management did not extend to perhaps the most pervasive and character-changing element of the street scene, the growth and growth of the private car. The appropriate balance between people and vehicles in public space marks a source of considerable management conflict in many cities throughout the world. In Trafalgar square, this relationship has been shifted somewhat back in favour of the space, and away from the car, although three sides of the space are still dominated by heavy traffic.

GATHERING AND COMMERCIAL DISPLAY

While Trafalgar Square is an example of a high-profile planned urban public space for public gathering and civic display, an example of high-profile organic urban public space for informal public gathering, and latterly commercial display is Piccadilly Circus. Piccadilly Circus in its original form of 1819 was part of Nash's grand scheme that linked Charing Cross and Regents Park, its function being no more than a road junction. The public space was created in the 1880s when Shaftesbury Avenue was cut through from the north-east, enlarging the circus area. A focal point was added in 1893 with the erection of the Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain (Figure 2.13), better known as Eros (GLC 1980: 7).

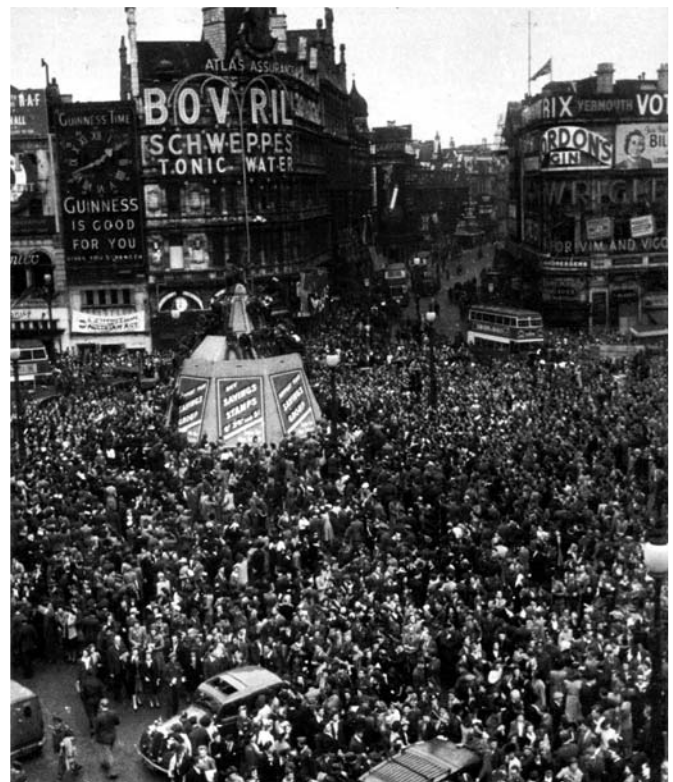
Even before Eros, the circus was widely known as a centre of entertainment and popular pleasures (Tames 1994: 119). This role rapidly expanded in the late Victorian period with the building of theatres, music halls, shops, and restaurants around and near the circus. Meanwhile Shaftesbury Avenue added to the acute traffic congestion that contended with the movement and congregation of pedestrians (GLC 1980: 7). Yet by popular choice reflected in and reinforced by the new picture postcards, this constricted and misshapen space became the 'hub of the Empire', a magnet for Londoners and visitors (Oxford 1995: 7). Piccadilly Circus, like Leicester Square, but more emblematically, became the focus for a rejuvenated London life.

It was commerce that gave Piccadilly Circus the glamour and significance the public expected of it. In the 1890s electric advertising signs began to appear on buildings on the north-east side, which the leases previously granted by the Metropolitan Board of Works were unable to prevent, although the rest of the circus which was in the ownership of the crown remained clear of signs (GLC 1980: 11).

Refined critics deplored 'those many-coloured electric illuminated advertisements' as 'blatant, vulgar and useless' and 'a hideous eyesore which no civilised community ought to tolerate' (Ditchfield 1925: 102).



2.13 Piccadilly Circus in 1897



2.14 Victory celebrations and electric advertising in Piccadilly Circus, 1945