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# Shopping with Art

How Art Creates its Role in Public Places

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Trondheim, January 2012

Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Faculty of Architecture and Fine Art  
Department of Architectural Design, Form and Colour  
Studies



**NTNU – Trondheim**  
Norwegian University of  
Science and Technology

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ISBN ISBN 978-82-471-3328-6 Electronic (printed ver.)

ISBN ISBN 978-82-471-3326-2 Printed (electronic ver.)

ISSN 1503-8181

Doctoral theses at NTNU, 2012:32

Printed by NTNU-trykk



Til fire banditter, en stor og tre små



Tiller, August 2007



The Bullring, November 2007

## **Acknowledgements**

This project was made possible by generous support from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, NTNU, Faculty of Architecture and Fine Art. I am grateful for the funding and interdisciplinary environment which it provided. Thank you also goes to my advisors Eivind Kasa and Gunnar Lamvik who gave support and necessary criticism, and by hook or by crook pushed me and my work in the right direction. Solrunn Williksen gave in-depth feedback and helped me on two occasions to take a large step forward, and I am very grateful for the help and encouragement that she provided. To the Architecture and Civil Engineering library thank you for all the help along the way. To all my colleagues at the Department of Architectural Design, Form and Colour Studies thank you for being the weird and wonderful crowd that you are.

During the research period I have spoken to hundreds of shoppers and workers inside and outside City Syd and the Bullring, and I am very grateful to all those who took the time to answer my questions. It was this group who in the end made this research possible, and made it, for me, a very rewarding experience. I would also like to thank all those associated with the public art project in Trondheim, particularly those working for Trondheim City Council. Special thanks go to Ulrika Johansen for allowing access to the workings of the City Council and the public project, and to Finn Dybdalen at City Syd who allowed me to wander freely around the shopping centre and to pose my questions to customers and workers alike. In Birmingham I would like to thank Hammersons plc, Freeform and staff at Birmingham City Council for generously giving their time to answer my long list of questions. A big thank you also goes to the Bullring management for taking the time to answer my questions and allowing access to the shopping centre and its public.

To all of my coffee drinking friends a thousand thank yous for your cheerfulness in the face of occasional gloom and just for being there in good times and bad. Finally to my family, the most important people of all, thank you for your patience and support.

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## Introduction: What is the Social Role of Public Art in Shopping Centres?



Tiller, May 2008



The Bullring, February 2008

Shopping is an important part of our everyday lives. We shop because we have to and because we love to. Shopping centres support the retail activities associated with the activity of shopping, and people spend increasing amounts of time in shopping centres, but they do not often go there to look at art. Public art is at the core of this analysis, but art is not often something the public associates with shopping centres. This makes what will be described and analysed an unfamiliar collaboration, one which defamiliarises the familiar frameworks of shopping centres, presenting them not only as a place to shop but also as a place to meet and relate with public art.

Shopping centres are active physical and social contexts, and the visual impression is often overwhelming, with merchandise, shop fronts, advertising, lighting and plants all competing for the public's attention. As a place for the presentation of public art, they represent a case of extreme public distraction. Within such a dynamic physical framework, one that is not often associated with art, it is relevant to ask, *what is the social role of public art in shopping centres?* This question is central to the research presented here, which is multidisciplinary involving public art, architecture and

anthropology. Analysing the social role of public art lays bare the choices made when planning a public art project and questions why particular public works of art were chosen for the shopping centres. The analysis also questions whether the intentions specified during the planning process are part of the social activity around the art within its shopping centre locations, looking at the reasons for the actual social activity between the artworks and their public, and how this affects the understandings of the place.

Two shopping centres and their art are the focus of this analysis. The Dandelion, a nine-metre tall bronze sculpture painted bright yellow and green, is installed on a roundabout outside the City Syd shopping centre in the Tiller neighbourhood, a suburb of Trondheim, Norway, and the Bullring in Birmingham city centre in the UK, which has eight works of art located in and around the shopping centre. The intention is to present an anthropological analysis of the public's relationship with the art at the two shopping centres. When analysing art it is not often the public who receives the attention of the researcher; more often it is the art object which is analysed in relation to its aesthetic qualities or meaning. The artist's intentions and creative skills have also often been considered, but the relational activity between an artwork and its public within the physical and social context received little attention by anthropologists or art theorists prior to Alfred Gell's agency theory, which was published in 1998. Gell's theories changed the way the anthropology of art was understood; instead of the artwork being primarily understood as an inert object with little influence, artworks began to be understood as active participants within the social context. They were no longer simply used; artworks were more often understood as having influence on the people using them. Locating where and when public works of art are active within the social context is central within this study, which is an analysis that is primarily based on the public's response to the artworks located at City Syd and in the Bullring. This provides insight into the artwork's role within the relational context.

### **Planning Public Art**

I began questioning the role of public art within public places when I was a public art consultant working for South Trøndelag County Council. This was before I was given the



opportunity to study public art in shopping centres by the Faculty of Architecture and Fine Art at NTNU. Working as a public art consultant mainly involved organising the planning of public art for new county council buildings. In addition, I followed up the art after its completion, making sure that it was registered as a work of art within the county council art archive, and I also dealt with the public. During the initial stages of this work, it was my background from the arts which seemed most relevant and not my anthropological qualifications. My fine art education and experience meant I had the knowledge and understanding required to plan, explain and defend art, but increasingly I felt that there was something wrong with the planning process. The public response meant that I was sometimes required to defend the art from criticism; in addition, it often appeared that the art that we, the members of the county council public art committees, expected to have with aesthetic, functional and social qualities played little or no obvious role at all. There was a disparity between the expectations of those planning and producing the public art and the response of the public that the art was intended for. As an anthropologist I felt that the small bureaucratic artworld in which I worked lacked understanding about the social relevance of public art. It also lacked knowledge about the public's role in defining an object as art and in giving the works of art a social role and meaning within the public places in which it was installed. The social role of the public was not being paid enough attention.

### **What is Public Art?**

Understanding the social activity associated with the artworks located in and around City Syd and the Bullring requires a definition of what public art is; one which distinguishes it from the art found in museums and galleries, and the private collections of wealthy individuals or successful corporations. There are particular expectations associated with public works of art which stem primarily from those who commission, plan and produce the art and in which turn influence the role that the art plays in its location and the relationships it develops with its public; these are closely related to the understanding of the objects as not just artworks but as public works of art. The understanding of public art presented here follows a tradition which started in classical antiquity but which has strong links to the development of a public for the arts during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Public art is seen

as playing an active role within public places in relationship with a public, although expectations about what kind of role it should play have changed since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The term public art broadly describes artworks which have been commissioned for “sites of open public access” (Miles, 1997:5). The Dandelion and the art at the Bullring are located outside in physically and socially accessible places and are therefore included within this definition of public works of art. The term public art in this sense refers to location and not to the way the art objects are funded, who owns them or who their public is. Publicly located works of art are often privately funded and then given as a gift, or offered as a source of moral enlightenment to be installed in a public place. Geographers Massey and Rose suggest that although artworks are almost always situated in a place, it is the relationship with the public that defines whether it may be described as a public work of art or not (Massey and Rose, 2003:12). In addition, they suggest that if a work of art is without a relationship to an audience and without agency, it may not be possible to define an artwork as a “public” work of art at all (2003:18). The Dandelion and the eight works of art in the Bullring are associated with the social context found within the two shopping centres by those who plan and produce them and by their public, and they may therefore be understood as public works of art. However, the kind of relational activity which they are engaged in and how this affects the social role that they play within the two shopping centres has yet to be described.

Massey and Rose’s analysis points to the problems relating to the installation of a work of art in a public place and the importance of the public response. It is an understanding of public art which focuses on the social consequences of installing art in public places. The public response, however, is not the only aspect which defines an object as a public work of art. The associations with the art that exist within the more traditional arenas of a museum and gallery also help to define public works of art as art, as do the traditions within public art. This is a background of theory and history provided by an artworld. The artworld is a term often used to describe where the definitions of art come from, and it will be described in more detail later in the introduction. Furthermore, the intentions of those who plan and produce a public work of art also influence its definition. Knowledge and practice prepares the ground for the social relations which do

or do not develop after installation. The definition of a public work of art as it is understood here therefore combines the knowledge and practice of those who plan and produce the artworks with the social and relational practice of the public.

### **What is a Shopping Centre?**



City Syd, December 2008

Shopping centres are, as I mentioned earlier, not usually associated with the presentation of art, they are more commonly regarded as market places with accommodation for cars. They are also a collection of individual retail stores and services, maintained by a management unit within a single climate-controlled physical framework. In addition, shopping centres often contain restaurants, banks, theatres, cinemas, offices and other commercial establishments. Within the physical framework of shopping centres, it is possible to say that retail architecture has reached a structural climax. Shopping centres

are now bigger and more luxurious than any previous retail structure. This is despite the false start encouraged by the less than luxurious retail atmosphere of the late 1950s and early 1960s when shopping centres first became a popular retail form. Present retail forms also include art.

### **Differences and Similarities**

City Syd and the Bullring are different kinds of shopping centres. City Syd is located in Tiller, a suburb of Trondheim. The shopping centre represents a Norwegian version of an out-of-town suburban shopping centre development built in 1987. The retail history associated with the neighbourhood is relatively recent. The Dandelion was installed in 2007, twenty years after the City Syd shopping centre was opened. The eight works of art in the Bullring were unveiled in 2003 on the same day as the new Bullring shopping centre opened. The shopping centre is in the heart of Birmingham city centre. It is a contemporary redevelopment of an existing shopping centre site, in a location which has a retail history dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Together, the two shopping centres enable a comparison of the differences and similarities associated with shopping centres, and they make it possible to see them as physical frameworks which depend on more than commercial requirements. Shopping centres are also influenced by social, physical and historical factors. They are not therefore one big retail mass, they have individual characteristics, functions and form which influence their public art.

The public art around the Bullring and the Dandelion outside City Syd are located in places of open public access, and the art projects in both cases were developed within what can broadly be described as public art programmes, but the art projects in the two shopping centres are also dissimilar. The Dandelion is a public work of art in the traditional sense; it was financed by public money from the local city council and Public Art Norway (KORO). The Dandelion is located within a publicly owned and run site. Trondheim City Council and the Directorate for Public Roads are responsible for the roundabout upon which it stands. It is located in close physical proximity to the City Syd shopping centre, outside the entrance to its car park, but not actually within the boundaries of the shopping centre.

The public art programme for the Bullring was tailored specifically for the location by the Birmingham Alliance, the developers of the Bullring site. Hammerson Plc, part of the Birmingham Alliance, used public art in other developments, but the use of public art depends on the form and scale of the project and it is not an obligatory part of any development. The public art in the Bullring is privately owned and stands on a site that is privately owned, although the site is open to public access 24 hours a day.

### **Shopping Centre Art**

There is a decorative tradition in retail architecture, one which is particularly associated with shopping centre predecessors, arcades and department stores, but autonomous art in the modern sense does not have a close association with retail architecture. The use of decorative or aesthetic elements in retail architecture has a function. Its use is based on the idea that the majority of us have to shop at some time, and retailers have historically aimed at understanding and satisfying customer needs, seeking to make shopping a pleasurable experience (Dennis *et al.*, 2005:9,10). Consumption has a history of pleasure and entertainment. The market place is traditionally not only somewhere to buy goods but it is also a place for social interaction and diversion. The link between recreation and shopping in today's shopping centres recognises the importance of social activity within commercial places. Shopping centre developers know that pleasure encourages shopping, but it is not just entertainment that encourages pleasure in shopping; positive aesthetic qualities are also important. The public likes places that look good and shopping centres with a strong self-image have higher sales turnovers, a larger catchment area and better rental income than shopping centres with a weaker self-image (2005:19,20). The use of art in and around contemporary shopping centres like the Bullring aims at encouraging a luxurious atmosphere as well as supporting shopping centre identity. A shopping centre with art becomes a particular place and not just any shopping centre.

The role of public art in shopping centres has been considered before, but only as one aspect among many within shopping centre design or in analyses of public art. However, it is possible to suggest three main understandings of the role of public art in shopping centres. Firstly, it is seen as part of the controlling practice of retail managers, because it

is suggested that public art may be used to guide the public's movement along pre-designed paths, or in an effort to avoid loitering is installed in spaces which do not have a clearly defined use (Goss, 1993:35). This functional understanding of public art provides a negative description of retail structures and the role of public art within them. Secondly, a more positive understanding of public art's functional role is provided by architect and retail designer Nadine Beddington who suggests that public art can be used to enliven and provide a sense of style to otherwise characterless retail spaces (Beddington, 1982:48). This understanding of public art sees it as playing a primarily decorative role, one where it offers a sense of place by providing positive aesthetic qualities. This functional but non-active use of art is described by art historian Cher Krauss Knight as "a missed chance" (Knight, 2008:76). Knight provides the third suggested understanding of public art in shopping centres and comes closer to the active definition of public art proposed earlier. It is suggested by Knight that the use of public art in shopping centres within a North American context is relatively common, but it only offers its public aesthetic values and does not attempt to engage with them. This is a missed chance because there are a lot of shopping centres and a large number of people visit them every day. Public art that attempts to engage with its public has the potential to make a large impact, but because shopping centres are essentially a conglomerate of private business interests who are afraid that art which presents political ideas or social issues will dampen the public's desire to shop, there remains a strong possibility that public art in shopping centres will continue to be a missed opportunity.

None of the three analyses of the role of public art considers directly the public's response to the artworks which are offered to them in shopping centres. The definition of public art presented earlier suggests that it is art which is intended in some way to engage with its public, which makes an analysis of the public's response relevant, providing answers to the question of what kind of social role, if any, public art plays within the distracting surroundings of the shopping centre.

### **The Shopping Centre Public**

An analysis of public art requires an understanding of what or who a public is, because as the name suggests it is intended to meet with a public. A public exists within the social

practices and relationships which it participates in, all of which may be under negotiation (Massey and Rose, 2003:6). A public does not have to be a clearly defined social group, it can change and regroup, and within a public place there can be more than one public. The idea of the existence of a public developed during the 18<sup>th</sup> century where it was seen as different from the uncultivated crowd or mob (Craske, 1997:13). The public was defined as that part of the population with “feeling, sympathy or sensibility”. Access to the arts was understood as being a factor which encouraged the development of a more socially amenable or controllable public (1997:14).

A public for the arts is often associated with the artworld. The artworld is a term first used in 1964 by art theorist Arthur Danto to describe where the definitions of art come from. It was the theory and knowledge stemming from the artworld that Danto believed encouraged the definition of certain objects as works of art (Danto, 1994:477). Not everyone had access to this knowledge and history, and those with access to it were members of the artworld. The philosopher George Dickie proposed that it was not just knowledge and theory which defined an object as a work of art, but the practices of the artworld’s members also encouraged the definition (Dickie, 1974:31). Artworld theory will be considered in detail in Chapter 6, but it is mentioned here to provide an understanding of who the public is for the public art in shopping centres. Danto and Dickie are not particularly interested in the public’s role in defining an object as a work of art, but there is an artworld public. Works of art require a public to contemplate or interact with them. A work of art has always, Alfred Gell suggests, to be seen in relation to some specific reception, and this reception may be active or passive (Gell, 1998:24). Without a public the chain of activities around a work of art remains incomplete. A typical artworld public has knowledge about art and visits artworld settings and displays in a museum or gallery because they wish to come into contact with art (Senie, 1992:240). The relationship with the art is not accidental.

The public relationship with public art is much more accidental because it does not necessarily choose to enter a place because there is public art located there. A meeting with a piece of artwork is only occasionally caused by a particular interest in the art. Regardless of this, it is suggested by planners and producers that public art plays a role and is necessary in the shopping centres with art. The choice of shopping centres as

fieldwork locations meant that this piece of research was dealing with a specific public for public art, but I suggest it is not an artworld public. The public at City Syd and in the Bullring is made up primarily of workers and shoppers visiting the two shopping centres for short or long visits. Their meeting with the art in the two shopping centres was accidental. During this research, I did meet individuals with a particular interest in art, but they were not visiting the shopping centres because of the art. The shopping centre public is therefore different from the “enlightened” public deemed necessary to appreciate art within the artworld; this difference makes them an interesting group to study. Most of the people I spoke to at City Syd and in the Bullring professed to have little knowledge about art. The focus of my research meant that an active approach was necessary within the non-art-focused frameworks which I suggest City Syd and the Bullring are, because the public art in the shopping centres only plays a small part in the everyday activity that takes place there. However, the public did respond to the art and have ideas about it, some of the ideas were unexpected.

### **Choosing Shopping Centre Locations**

Shopping centres are about buying and selling, production and consumption, and the needs of these activities have left little space for art. Placing art within such a context provides challenges in relation to the public, because choosing art that will be able to attract public attention within such active physical and social places is difficult, and also why should the public be interested in looking at the art if they are there because of the shopping? Attracting public attention and interest is the kind of challenge which most public art projects face, but I suggest that because shopping centres offer an extreme case of public distraction, they offer *particular* insight into the social and relational challenges and possibilities associated with public art.

It was not initially obvious that shopping centres would be the location for my fieldwork. My intention was to choose a fieldwork location which would allow close contact with the public. Public art is, as mentioned earlier, by definition located in public places, but this does not mean that there are always a lot of people around with the time and energy to talk about art. My interest in the public’s response to public art meant having access to



a large and preferably diverse public was important. City Syd offers such a public. It also provided a public art project which was still under development within a location with an established physical and social form. There were no other public art projects within its immediate vicinity, and it was therefore virgin ground for public art. In addition, City Syd is a local shopping centre icon. There are no other shopping centres in central Norway with such a strong identity. In 2007, everyone knew about City Syd, but it was City Syd without public art. Placing art outside a shopping centre with such an established identity provided an extra challenge to the planners and producers of the public art and gave this project much of its initial fascination. There were therefore a number of qualities associated with City Syd as a fieldwork location which encouraged this project to become about shopping with art.

A final important quality which City Syd provided was climate control. The climate in Trondheim can be quite demanding. City Syd provided a fieldwork location where it would be possible to interview a large group of people all year round without getting frostbite.

Working within a multidisciplinary field with the Faculty of Architecture and Fine Art at NTNU meant that I was also working within a scientific tradition which encourages comparative analysis. My fieldwork therefore took place in two locations, City Syd and the Bullring. Relative to other work completed within the Faculty of Architecture and Fine Art this is a small comparative study, but it's a lot for an anthropologist who is interested in the details of the public response to art in shopping centres. Anthropologists are also interested in comparisons, where providing information and analysis of different social or cultural groups is key concern of the discipline. However, anthropologists do not often do fieldwork within two separate locations at once. Traditionally they do fieldwork in one location over a period of six months to a year. A large amount of comparative material was the result of my fieldwork activity and I felt it was necessary to try and do justice to this in the final analysis. The reader is therefore provided with a lot of chapters.



The Bullring, May 2009

The Bullring was chosen as the second location for my fieldwork because I wanted to find a different kind of shopping centre with art. One where there was a lot of art that was integrated into the shopping centre's physical framework. City Syd only has the Dandelion and the sculpture is installed on the outskirts of the shopping centre. There is little art in and around Norwegian shopping centres. I therefore decided to look outside Scandinavia for my shopping centre location.

The UK was the obvious place to start looking because its retail structures are similar to the Norwegian ones, although there are more of them and they are often on a larger scale. The UK is often used as retail inspiration; Norwegians go on shopping trips to London and retail designers and managers also look to the UK for ideas. A member of a Norwegian corporation who manages and develops shopping centres mentioned British shopping centres as a source of inspiration during an interview. My own British background was also helpful during the search for a location. I was able to start my

search in an area of the North of England which I knew well, and then expand it until I found what I was looking for in the Bullring in Birmingham. Few shopping centres have an active relationship with art, most shopping centres have a sculpture or two in place in or around their physical framework, but it is rarely important to the character of the place. It was hard to find a shopping centre with art on the internet because very few shopping centres advertise themselves using art. The Bullring was initially chosen as the location for fieldwork because there are a number of works of art and the art is important to the fabric of the building. Furthermore, during 2007 public art was used to advertise the shopping centre.

One further element encouraged me to choose the Bullring as my second fieldwork location. In November 2007 I made a preliminary fieldwork trip to the Bullring. I arranged to meet an urban designer from Birmingham City Council by the Bull in the Bullring. I arrived a little early, and while I was waiting I passed the time watching people going in and out of the shopping centre. After a while, I became aware of an interesting figure approaching the entrance to the shopping centre in front of which the Bull is located. The man was tall, slender, black and elegantly dressed. He was moving quickly and as he got closer I realised that he was heading for the Bull and not for the entrance to the shopping centre. He rushed up to the sculpture, swooped down and stroked the Bull along its raised front hoof, turned and headed off in the opposite direction. It looked to me like a ritual action. Other people saw the man stroking the Bull and two approached the sculpture and stroked it reverently along its hoof and over its nose. This activity made me think that there was more to the art in the Bullring than what we can necessarily see at first sight.

In November 2007 I had already started my fieldwork at City Syd; due to its physical isolation on the roundabout, the Dandelion is difficult to interact with. The Bullring offered a shopping centre framework where it was possible to interact with the art and where there was social activity around this art. I saw the same man on another occasion kissing the Bull on the nose, but I never got the chance to talk to him and ask why he behaved as he did. The Bull is active within the Bullring in a number of ways, and a few people behave ritually towards the Bull on a daily basis. Seeing the Bull being

given this kind of attention gave me insight into the social activity around the public art in the Bullring; it was an inspirational moment, the one where I finally decided on the Bullring as my second fieldwork location. The Bullring also has more to offer than the Bull, although the social activity around it makes it the focus of attention. There are seven other public works of art, some of them are active within the physical and social context, and some of them are not. Their relationship with the physical and social context makes the Bullring an interesting location for fieldwork and allows for a broader field of comparisons with City Syd.

### Four Sections



Tiller, January 2008



The Bullring, May 2009

The physical form of the public art in the two shopping centres is important within the analysis. For example, the Dandelion, the Bull and the statue of Nelson in the Bullring are large naturalistic sculptures; they look like the plant, animal and person that their names suggest that they represent, but there is more to them than initially meets the eye. The public art in the shopping centres has a background and history which includes changes and developments within the physical context, the expectations of the planners and producers of the public art, and everyday relational activity within their locations.

These aspects are part of the social role of the public art found in the two shopping centres and they require analysis.

How and why a social role for public art is established and the qualities associated with a social role in the two shopping centres are presented in four sections. The first section presents the theoretical and methodological tools used during the fieldwork and analysis of the responses from the planners, producers and the public in the two shopping centres. These tools were also used to analyse the research question. The form of the next three sections is based on a suggestion by Arjun Appadurai, that when trying to understand the social life of a “thing”, we should follow the things in themselves because their “meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses and their trajectories.” (Appadurai, 1986:5). Appadurai is referring to a specific kind of thing, commodities, when he suggests that they may be studied in terms of the paths that they follow. He clarifies the directions of the paths by proposing three main aspects with which the object is associated. These are the context in which it may be placed, its candidacy and the commodity phase (1986:13). It is during the commodity phase that the biographical aspect of the commodity is most obvious, where the object lies within the social context, and according to the standards and criteria established by the candidacy, acts most like a commodity. The commodity phase is called the active phase within this analysis because it is not primarily commodities that I am analysing, although it is possible for a work of art to function as a commodity. It is during the active phase that the object planned may be seen in relationship with its public or not. The final stage of my analysis therefore looks at the phase when the public becomes actively engaged or not with the artwork. It is during this phase that it is possible for the object to act most like a public work of art in the terms suggested by Massey and Rose, and it is here that the social role of the public works of art studied becomes most apparent. I will be giving a more detailed description of the three aspects in Chapter one.

The context is the first of Appadurai’s “aspects” to be presented. The section starts with a chapter presenting the retail history which culminated in the physical framework of today’s shopping centres. The next two chapters present the historical, physical and social factors associated with the two shopping centre contexts as they were

experienced during the fieldwork periods. The candidacy of the public art projects is presented next in the third section of the thesis. Appadurai does not define who can be involved in the candidacy of an object, but the focus here is primarily the planning process which preceded the installation of the art in the two shopping centres. Defining the norms and values associated with an artwork can involve more than planners and producers, but they are closely associated with the processes of expectation and evaluation, and the planning process is therefore presented before the shopping centre public's understandings. The public's expectations and evaluations are also understood as playing a role in the candidacy of public work of art. The section starts with a presentation and analysis of artworld theory and continues with a chapter about public art. This chapter provides an overview of the public art traditions that have aesthetic, historical and social connections with the art found at City Syd and in the Bullring. The next two chapters provide an analysis of the expectations and intentions associated with the Dandelion and the Bullring art by the public art committee in Trondheim and the shopping centre developers in Birmingham. The active phase of the public art at City Syd and in the Bullring is, as I mentioned earlier, analysed in the final section of the thesis. The four chapters therefore present different aspects or qualities associated with the art by its public in the two shopping centres and shed light on their social roles. A chapter presenting a summary and reflections concludes this thesis.



# Section 1:

## Understanding the Field



Tiller, May 2008

## **1. A Theoretical Approach to the Study of Public Art in Shopping Centres**

The intention of this chapter is to present the theoretical approach which will be used to answer the main question, *what is the social role of public art in shopping centres?* Answering this question requires the focus to be on the role of artworks like the Dandelion and the Bull within the social context in collaboration with the public, rather than just on their qualities as objects. The study of a social role implies relational activity between the artworks and the public and the analysis presented here seeks to discover if it is possible for public art to play a social role in shopping centres, and if so what kind of role or roles it plays. This requires following the artworks through the course of their everyday lives. The anthropology of art provides a social understanding of artworks, but public works of art are not independent of their context. Shopping centres, because they are physical, social, historical, aesthetic and commercial places, require multidisciplinary theory that can capture the dynamic character of shopping centres as a location for public art.

### **An Anthropology of Art**

Social anthropology may be described as the study of the total social fact, and the interactions and interdependencies of everyday life are the primary preoccupation. In the case of the anthropology of art, it is the interactions and interdependencies between persons and things that are in focus. At City Syd and in the Bullring, the intention is to establish if there is any interaction or interdependencies between the public and the public art.

The analysis of art stems from an established field in anthropology, the anthropology of art. Its earliest form, the study or classification of ethnographic objects, can easily be traced to 18<sup>th</sup> century collectors and their curiosity cabinets, a then fashionable preoccupation and one which signified a healthy enthusiasm for science. Art objects from strange and exotic places were among the objects which aroused collectors' curiosity. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, anthropological expeditions collected and classified



objects in an attempt to illustrate and support evolutionary and diffusionist theory. Encounters between art and anthropology at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century focused around the term “primitive” and a scheme to classify objects, one which defined them as either primitive art or ethnographic artefacts. As primitive art, they were considered the work of individuals and consigned to art exhibitions, while ethnographic artefacts were studied in anthropology museums. The leading figures of 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropology such as Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown wished to avoid association with anything that reminded them of what they considered Victorian gentlemen amateurs and spurious racial theory. As a result of their influence, scepticism to photography, material culture and art was firmly established in 20<sup>th</sup> century social anthropology.

In 1973, Anthony Forge suggested that the anthropology of art was overly focused on museology and he played an active role in drawing art into mainstream anthropology by embedding the study of it within ethnography (Thomas 2001:1). Despite Forge’s efforts, Nicholas Thomas, in a summary of the theoretical developments within the anthropology of art in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, suggests that it was, “largely an anthropology of style and meaning in indigenous art” (2001:1). The anthropology of art had no body of theory aside from ethnography of indigenous art which could be used to study art in general within the context of social life. Robert Faris Thompson during the 1970s addressed ideas relating to the agency of art<sup>1</sup>, as did Robert Layton during the 1980s (Layton 1991:43). However, it was Alfred Gell who elaborated on the theory of agency. Thomas describes Gell’s 1998 book *Art and Agency* as “a radical elaboration” in the anthropology of art, one which emphasised process in the analysis of works of art (2001:2). It marks a shift of focus in the anthropology of art. Instead of art objects primarily being understood as passive objects to be contemplated and analysed, they were now also seen and understood as active participants within a social context.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Faris Thompson suggested that there was a processual dimension to African art in *African Art in Motion: Icon and Act in the Collection of Katherine Coryton White* (1974).

## Agency

An understanding of public art as an active element within public places follows an established anthropological tradition in the study of objects or things. In 1923, Marcel Mauss stated in *The Gift* that, “Originally – so much is sure – things themselves had a personality and an inherent power. Things are not the inert objects that the Justinian and our own legal systems conceive them to be” (Mauss 2005:63)<sup>2</sup>. Within this understanding things are seen as active objects rather than as passive props within the social context. However, Mauss was not specifically referring to art objects, because as mentioned earlier, due to the efforts of early 20<sup>th</sup> century pioneers, art objects were not a central field of interest. Works of art were previously primarily analysed in terms of their visual form and decoration. Anthony Forge suggested in 1973 that primitive art is rarely a representation of anything, it is about relationships (Forge 1973:xviii). Forge goes further to suggest that we can analyse a coherent body of art according to form, but it is more than just form because meaning is given to art on every level by artists and by its “beholders” (1973:xiv). Looking at art objects is therefore not enough. Forge is suggesting that anthropologists should also look at the people making, using and looking at the art. Alfred Gell’s theory of agency proposes that we look closer at the actual objects, particularly art objects and their effects (Miller 2005:13). In this way we are therefore no longer just studying people using objects but we are also looking at the effect of the objects on their users and beholders.

Gell’s theory of agency was the culmination of his writings on art<sup>3</sup>. In a previous essay, *The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology* (1992), inspired by Malinowski’s description of garden magic in the Trobriand Island, Gell began looking at works of art as a form of social magic that works through enchantment (Gell and Hirsch 1999:8). Works of art are, Gell suggested, actively influencing the people using and beholding them. They are devices for securing the “acquiescence of individuals in the networks of intentionalities in which they are enmeshed” (Gell, 1992:43). The examples he used were the prow boards of Trobriand canoes, which were regarded as tools of

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<sup>2</sup> *The Gift* was first published in 1923-24 in the *L’Année Sociologique*. The first English translation was published in 1954.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Gell died in 1997 before the publication of *Art and Agency* in 1998.

psychological warfare during the competitive exchange associated with the Kula trade. It was in the work with this essay that Gell first expressed his desire to avoid what he called the “soggy embrace of philosophical aesthetics”, as well as an aversion to the semiotic understanding of art. Language, Gell said, is “so fiendishly complicated, has so many rules and is so evanescent, whereas there is something solid and elemental about art objects” (1999:17). In this way he attempts to distance himself from Anthony Forge and his interest in the meaning of art. According to Gell, the problem with meaning is that it assumes its embeddedness within the social practice and because of this we are not always conscious of the significance of art.

Art objects with agency are social actors amid the context of everyday social life. Not all artworks have agency; sometimes artworks are the passive recipients of agency imposed upon them by their human counterparts, while others have agency which acts upon others (Campbell 2001:118). In addition, the roles of art objects are not necessarily fixed, sometimes they may be passive and sometimes they may be active depending on the social context around them. The examples Gell used in *Art and Agency* are much broader than in his article on the technology of enchantment. Dolls, idols, Michelangelo’s *David* and Toyota cars were all referred to on page 18 and are understood as having agency within the social context. This provides a broad cross section of artefacts which is not limited to art objects, but it does allow us to see that agency is not limited by form or visual appearances. Anthropologists have traditionally studied the people using objects, and objects were therefore often seen as playing passive roles within the social context. Alfred Gell’s agency theory provides a theoretical starting point with which to discuss the active role of art. Agency, Gell suggests, is “attributable to those persons (and things) who/which are seen as initiating causal sequences of events of a particular type, that is events caused by acts of mind or will or intention” (Gell 1998:16). It is therefore not just people who can cause things to happen, art works can also trigger events. Gell explained that agency is most commonly associated with social actors, but that he was most interested in “the kind of second class agency which artefacts acquire once they become enmeshed in the texture of social relationships” (1998:17). He stresses, however, that art objects cannot alone cause things to happen but they must act in collaboration with social actors.

Gell's agency theory encourages us to look beyond the material qualities of the art object and into what the work of art does within the social context: its effect. Public works of art are intended to be active within the physical and social location, and to be defined as public art they must, as Massey and Rose suggest, have agency (Massey and Rose, 2003:13). Shopping centres are active social contexts in which public art is installed, but it cannot just be assumed that the artworks will become enmeshed within the social texture. Understanding how and why agency is attributed or not to objects like the Dandelion and the Bull and where the active relational aspect comes into effect is a central part of the analysis. The effect Gell suggests is dependent on social actors where it focuses on "the social context of art production, circulation, and reception, rather than on the evaluation of particular works of art" (Gell, 1998:3). Arjun Appadurai, who provided this thesis with a form with which to present different aspects associated with the social role of public art in shopping centres, is also interested in the social context. Furthermore, he suggests that understanding the role of objects requires that we follow the changes in use and value that an object experiences because "value is embodied in commodities that are exchanged" (Appadurai, 1986:5,3). Value does not depend on the social context alone. Public art within this analysis achieves agency within shopping centre contexts, which are dynamic physically and socially and where agency cannot be taken as given.

### **Context, Candidacy and Phase**

The active role that Gell describes depends on social actors, but art objects have qualities which do not always depend on the response of the public. These qualities may be carried from one social context to another. Values may change, but some things may remain the same. Understanding which qualities are essential to the object and which depend on the social context requires information about all aspects of the social life of a work of art. This information is necessary if we are to understand the role of objects like the Dandelion or the Bullring art within a shopping centre context. Arjun Appadurai in *The Social Lives of Things* (1986) provides three aspects with which to study the life histories of objects. These are the context, candidacy and commodity phases. It is suggested in this analysis that Appadurai's analysis also provides the means to study the social lives of public works of art even though his analysis is primarily intended for the study of the

social life of commodities, and places art objects within a wider relational context than is suggested by Gell's analysis of agency.

The politics of exchange and the social implications which these have is Arjun Appadurai's focus. Exchange is, Appadurai suggests, a source of value; it is not value which causes the exchange (Appadurai, 1986:56). The link that Appadurai says exists between exchange and value is politics, which is understood as the relations, assumptions and contexts pertaining to power. However, everyday exchange is not political because of the relations of privilege and social control, but because of the tension between existing frameworks and the tendency of commodities to breach this control (1986:57). To understand the paths, diversions and strategies that cause an exchange and establishment of value, it is suggested that we, "follow the things themselves" (Appadurai 1986:5). An object's value can be understood by analysing its "total trajectory" from production, through exchange/distribution and during consumption, in a comparative and processual manner. Commodities with this processual point of view can, it is suggested, be regarded as having "life histories". The commodity phase therefore does not exhaust the biography of an object. The object can be seen to move both in and out of the commodity state and a commodity is not one thing instead of another, but one phase in the life of some things (1986:17)<sup>4</sup>. The paths the object takes during its life history are clarified through the analysis of the aforementioned central tripartite; the context, candidacy and commodity phase of an object. The "commodity-hood" of the object is understood as being present within the three aspects (1986:13).

A commodity is, Appadurai says, "any thing which is intended for exchange". He then goes on to ask not what a commodity is, but "what sort of exchange is a commodity exchange?" (1986:9). Within this understanding, commodities are "things" with a certain kind of social potential and this is what makes them different from other objects (Appadurai, 1986:7). There is, according to Appadurai, an assumption that commodity exchange can only take place when money is involved, which he says is a limited understanding of what exchange is about (1986:10)<sup>5</sup>. Exchange creates value

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<sup>4</sup> This is an idea suggested by Igor Kopytoff in *The cultural iconography of things: commoditization as process* 1986 in *The Social Life of Things*.

<sup>5</sup> Appadurai gives bartering as an example of commodity exchange in which money plays little or no role (1986:10). Barter and gift exchange are often seen as preceding commodity exchange and they are

which is not only monetary, but it is also social, and it is within the relational context that objects are understood as commodities. The act of exchange is when value is expressed through objects (1986:3). We should, Appadurai proposes, stop searching for a distinction between commodities and other sorts of things, and instead look at the commodity potential of all things. By looking at what is associated with a commodity exchange and what is not, Appadurai is able to focus on the dynamics of the exchange. Art objects are also part of the systems of exchange between those who produce and consume them, and they experience changes in the value and meaning associated with them. Being described as a work of art is not a fixed definition, it must be established and expectations, understandings and requirements may change.

Appadurai was not writing about art. Art objects are mentioned as objects not commonly existing within the commodity state. Appadurai suggests that they exist instead within their own particular exchange systems<sup>6</sup>. However, I suggest it is possible to study art objects in the light of the commodity exchange description provided by Appadurai, because art objects also exist within systems of exchange and are subject to changing values. The public works of art studied in the two shopping centres also have life histories and are part of the social context<sup>7</sup>. The Kula trade described by Bronislaw Malinowski in *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* in 1922 is a classic example of the exchange of “art objects” which play an intimate and powerful role within the wider social system. In addition, shopping centres are a commercial social context where a study of the changing value of art objects has relevance.

The context, candidacy and commodity phase will be used within this thesis to highlight specific qualities, which it will be suggested influence the social roles of the public works of art in the two shopping centres. The commodity phase will be here known as the active

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understood as mutually exclusive. An understanding of exchange which sees it as depending on monetary transactions ignores the fact that capitalist society also operates according to cultural designs. It is also based on the assumption that gift exchange takes place on a disinterested basis, when in fact it is often far from disinterested (1986:11,12).

<sup>6</sup> The restrictions that Appadurai noticed around objects which did not exist within the usual commodity state had implications for framing and facilitating exchanges of a mundane sort (1986:24). Their restricted flow services the reproduction of social and political systems and they show insensitivity to supply and demand (1986:25).

<sup>7</sup> The gallery system and auction houses which deal in exclusive works of art are exchange systems that may be exclusively associated with art.

phase to distinguish it from Appadurai's analysis of commodities and to allow this analysis to focus on when public art becomes active within the social context. Each of the three aspects will be described separately in three sections in the thesis to emphasise the qualities which are specifically associated with them. However, it is not proposed here that the three aspects are so clearly separate from each other in reality. Appadurai's description suggests a close interrelation between all three during the commodity situation. The fieldwork experience and the process of analysis and description for this research also showed them to be closely interrelated. There are therefore a number of overlaps within the presentation of the context, candidacy and active phase, but describing the social life of the public art is supported by clarifying the differences and links between them.

Another quality which is implied by the separation of the three aspects in the three sections is that the social life of the public work of art appears to be a linear progression starting with the context, moving through the candidacy and ending up in the active phase. There is a historical aspect associated with the development of the public art projects and this is also presented in the sections about the context and candidacy. However, according to Appadurai, all three aspects must be present for an object to be understood as a commodity. It is during a certain phase within a certain context that the objects meet the requirements of their candidacy and are understood as commodities. This phase is known as the commodity phase (Appadurai, 1986:16). Appadurai's description is processual but it is not linear. The presentation of the three aspects in the three sections presents a degree of linearity because it presents historical qualities associated with the public art project prior to the active phase. The context and candidacy, however, are not understood as separate from the active phase. All three aspects are understood to be present during the active phase of a public work of art because it is only during a certain phase of their career in relation to a certain context and its public that a work of art meets the criteria suggested by planners, producers and a public, and becomes a public work of art within the active definition suggested by Massey and Rose in the introduction of this thesis.

## **The Context**

The context in which the exchange takes place influences an object's value. The context refers to "the variety of social arenas, within or between social units, which help link the commodity candidacy of a thing to the commodity phase of its career" (Appadurai, 1986:15). There are, Appadurai suggests, a variety of contexts within and across a society. A context has the potential to bring together actors from different cultural systems even though they may only share a minimum of understanding about the objects in question.

The context is described by Appadurai as social and historical, but I suggest that physical aspects associated with the context are also important. They support the social and historical activity and they influence the understanding of planners, producers and the public. However, it is not always easy to separate the physical aspects from the social aspects within a context. For example, the architecture which is found in shopping centres has both physical and social qualities. We respond to it physically by moving through and around it, and it meets physical requirements such as protecting customers and goods from what the climate can offer, but it also meets the social needs defined by the activity of shopping. It is suggested here that including physical qualities offers a broader description of the influence of the context, because it has the potential to include physical and sensual impressions of the shopping centre context. Commodities and artworks can exert influence independent of social activity. The context can also exert influences which are not necessarily entirely dependent on the social aspects associated with the context. The section about context will present historical, demographic, physical and social background information about the shopping centre locations in Tiller and Birmingham.

The context links the candidacy of an object to the commodity phase of the object's career, but Appadurai does not specify that the context should come first within the social life of things. However, I suggest that the shopping centre contexts provided by City Syd and the Bullring influenced the planning and production process associated with the art objects and therefore provided background for the candidacy of the public art and the expectations about the role it would play within the context during the active phase. The context is therefore presented first. The context is also understood as connecting the



candidacy of the artworks with the active phase of its career. It brings together the public with the public art and the standards and criteria suggested during the planning process may be imposed.

### **A Place**

Shopping centres are contexts with a specific physical form and social activity; they are also places where we have particular expectations. When providing a definition of place I suggest that it must offer understanding which is relevant to the active and fluid social environment found in shopping centres. This suggests an anthropological understanding of a place, because a place is here understood as more than just a physical location. A place is initially associated with a geographical location, it points to a particular area or part of an area, but places are also often linked to a certain purpose or are seen as somewhere something is situated or happens. It is therefore both a physical and social context. Traditional understandings of place emphasise its boundedness, its essential (and sometimes unchanging) character. A place is also often seen as a secure coherent community, with an essence which is internally generated and that has a set of inherited traditions (Massey 2003:3). Criticism of this idea of place points to it being unrealistic to imagine a place as self-contained or unchanging.

An alternative understanding of place stresses its openness to influences, trade, cultural flows and migration. This idea of a place describes it as a meeting place. The major challenge which this fluid idea of place meets relates to the constant negotiations necessary to allow differences to exist side by side (Massey and Rose, 2003:4). The anthropologist Marc Augé would describe this kind of place as a “Non-place”, because it has qualities which are fleeting, temporary and ephemeral. Supermarkets, hotels, airports and refugee camps are given by Augé as examples of non-places (Augé 1995:78). Shopping centres could be understood as fitting with Augé’s understanding, but as I mentioned in the introduction, both City Syd and the Bullring may be associated with particular senses of place where public art may be expected to play a role. In addition, a rejection of the fleeting and the temporary ignores the active use and understanding of even the most stable and traditional of locations. Place is not a given thing in itself (Williksen and Rapport 2010:3), it is generated by the activities of the people within it in

collaboration with the physical framework. A place is “practised”, and both its past and present contribute to making sense of it (Massey and Rose, 2003:4, 5). An analysis of the social and physical contexts provided by shopping centres clarifies what makes them different from other places, particularly in relation to the presentation and reception of public art.

### **The Candidacy**

Commodity candidacy is the second of Appadurai’s “*aspects*” to be presented and refers to “the standards and criteria (symbolic, classificatory, and moral) that define the exchangeability of objects in any particular social and historical context”. However, he goes on to suggest that, “despite a vast universe of shared understandings, a specific exchange is based on deeply divergent perceptions of the value of objects being exchanged” (Appadurai 1986:14). The candidacy therefore describes more than just the cultural framework within which things are classified because the background for an exchange may be less stable and defined than it initially appears. Appadurai suggests that in most situations there is a cultural framework which defines the commodity candidacy of things, but some situations are characterised by a shallower set of shared standards than others (1986:14). The differences that exist between the parties involved in the exchange will often be ignored because the conventions that allow the exchange to take place are complied with.

In relation to public art, there are two main groups involved in an exchange; the public, and the planners and producers of the public art. The public has expectations about the role a public work of art will play in a public place, but their understanding of public art only comes into play after the artwork has been installed. The planners and producers of public art consider the needs of the public but the public itself is not actively involved in defining initial expectations. The public understanding primarily makes an impact during the active phase of the artwork and will receive most attention during this section of the thesis.

In relation to the Bullring and City Syd, the section on candidacy primarily considers the social groups who planned and developed the public art projects as well as their expectations about the role of the art in the shopping centres. These groups are

understood as having knowledge and values which influence the planning and production process. The candidacy also looks at their influence on the role and value of the public art which was eventually installed.

Knowledge, Appadurai suggests, is distributed at various points in a commodity's life history (1986:41). The production of commodities has often standardised recipes for fabrication which are also understood by the consumers, for example primary commodities such as grain and fuel. According to Appadurai, secondary commodities like works of art, which are luxury items where taste, judgement and individual experience are involved, create greater variation in production knowledge. In addition, most societies also have variation in production knowledge due to age, gender or criteria distinguishing, for example, castes or artisan households (1986:42). There is therefore a difference in knowledge control which causes some segregation between the processes of production, consumption and exchange. However, Appadurai suggests that the knowledge variations do not hinder the bulk of exchange activities because a series of small overlapping circles of knowledge link the original producer with the consumer (1986:43). Variations in the distribution of knowledge also exist in the exchanges that take place between the public and public works of art. Artworld theory provides a theoretical background for the analysis which takes place within the candidacy. It presents a system of knowledge associated with those who plan and produce public art. The activities of the public art committee who worked with the Tiller neighbourhood are part of the candidacy of the Dandelion, and the shopping centre developers who planned the art which was installed in the Bullring provide candidacy for the Bull and the rest of the art installed there. Overlapping circles of knowledge potentially exist between the artworld and the planners and producers of public art and the public, but the degree of overlapping may vary.

### **The Active Phase**

In the commodity phase described by Appadurai, things can be seen as moving in and out of the state when they may be seen as commodities. The movements may be slow or fast, reversible or terminal, normative or deviant (Appadurai, 1986:13). The term commodity defined by Appadurai refers to "things that, at a certain phase in their careers and in a

particular context, meet the requirements of the commodity candidacy” (1986:16). It is a similar presentation of public art that the use of the three aspects associated with Appadurai’s social life of things is leading up to. The active phase presents the biographical aspect associated with public art within this analysis. The artworks can be seen as actively engaging with their public within the social context and can therefore be defined as public works of art, but it is also during this phase that they may be seen as moving out of the state when they can be understood as public works of art. The biographical aspect which is explored in the commodity phase, Appadurai says, may be more noticeable in some objects than others, and it is understood here that the biographical aspect will be more noticeable in some works of art than others (1986:13). This, I propose, will make the active relational aspect more obvious in some objects or works of art, allowing the particularly active ones to be defined as public works of art.

Within the thesis as a whole, the active phase allows analysis of the role of public art installed at City Syd and in the Bullring within the actual relational context of the shopping centres as experienced during the fieldwork. The public’s relationship with the art at City Syd and the Bullring is the focus. It is here that the expectations or “standards and criteria” associated with the planning process may or may not be seen to be in effect. The relational complexity that Appadurai describes places emphasis on “commodities in motion” (Appadurai, 1986:16). The value of an object is not static and it may change. In Appadurai’s view, the flow of commodities in any given situation is “a shifting compromise between socially regulated paths and comparatively inspired diversions” and the commodity phase of an object may only be one part of its life history (1986:17). Commodities are seen as moving in and out of the commodity state (1986:13). Other kinds of objects, such as works of art, are also affected by changes in value. Prior to its installation on the roundabout, the Dandelion was a large metal object intended to be a public work of art and its actual physical and meaningful role only became apparent after installation when it was placed in an up-right position on the roundabout. In addition, the artworks at City Syd and in the Bullring, although they may achieve an active social role, may not continue to be active within the social context. The presentation of the statue of Nelson in Chapter 13 allows particular insight into changing roles. The challenge, Appadurai suggests, is to “define relevant and customary paths, so

that the logic of diversions can properly, and relationally, be understood.” (1986:29). It is suggested here that by following the paths that public works of art at City Syd and in the Bullring follow, it may be possible to understand why some works of art achieve a social role and some do not within their shopping centre contexts.

The analysis of the social life of things shows commodities as part of a broad set of agreements about what is desirable, what are reasonable compromises, and who can demand what. However, commodities have a tendency to break out of these frameworks. There is a tension within the relational framework around objects involved in an exchange because not everyone has the same beliefs in the object’s value, nor are their interests in the exchange taking place identical (1986:57). Public works of art are also part of a system of production, exchange and consumption, and there is a background of expectations about what can be expected of them. Artworks are also capable, in a similar way to commodities, of breaking out of the frameworks of expectations and following paths that are unexpected. The public art at City Syd and in the Bullring was also subject to the unexpected.

### **The Meaning of Art**

Understanding the social role of art objects in shopping centres requires information about a complex of social and relational factors. The theory of agency provided by Gell allows us to see public works of art playing active social roles within the contexts in which they are installed. The artwork is no longer merely an aesthetic object to be contemplated but it becomes part of the social complexity which is found in public places like shopping centres. There is a stringency to Gell’s theory, however, which discourages the use of several aspects traditionally associated with the analysis and understanding of art. Gell’s scepticism to meaning, semiotics, the artworld and aesthetic theory have all been mentioned. On the other hand, I suggest that in relation to the examples I will be using from Western public art it is relevant to use elements associated with Gell’s exclusions because they are part of the understandings associated with the art by the artists, planners and the public in the two shopping centres. They provide a background of theory and an understanding of the materiality of the art objects. Gell’s exclusions suggest a path to follow when studying what influences the social role of public art in

Western shopping centres, because in pointing to his frustrations in relation to the study of non-Western art he highlights what the primary concerns in Western art are and what makes art objects different from other objects we find in shopping centres. For example, there is often meaning associated with art objects. Art is not just associated with a sensory experience; it may also be understood as having meaning beyond its immediate visual appearance, although the meaning associated with a work of art has increasingly been associated with physical and sensory qualities associated with the object by its public<sup>8</sup>. A traditional understanding of art, one which goes all the way back to Plato's *Republic*, suggests that art has meaning (Plato 2008:32). An analysis of a work of art often requires that the art critic, art theorist or anthropologist should look at what a work of art means, or what the artist intended it to mean.

Works of art have often been understood as signs or symbols, their physical form representing or expressing one thing, for example, the shape of an animal, but the meaning associated with them may not refer directly to their physical form, for example, the Bull in the Bullring symbolises more than a large bronze bovine animal. A symbol is often understood as a semantic concept which substitutes one term or entity for another (Molesworth 1995:412). The symbolic quality of many works of art has meant that anthropologists have often attempted to find ways to interpret them and an interpretive or semiotic anthropology of art therefore pays attention to all sorts of talk and interpretations. Alfred Gell was of the opinion that artworks cannot talk, and he actively avoided an interpretive understanding of art (Gell, 1998:6). In the interpretive anthropology associated with Clifford Geertz, culture is understood as shared meaning which is expressed through communication and cultures are read like they are texts. Geertz says that artworks are not mechanisms for defining social relationships, sustaining

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<sup>8</sup> Up until the invention of photography and its use by artists during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, mimesis or imitation defined a work of art. A successful work of art was judged by how closely it imitated its subject matter. After it became clear that imitation was not enough in itself to define an object as a work of art, a number of definitional suggestions were proposed to deal with the experimentation which took place in art at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example it was suggested that art should be defined according to its expressive qualities or even that it is not possible to define art. Two definitional directions are commonly referred to in relation to contemporary art, namely aesthetic quality and the institutional theory, both of which are mentioned in this chapter.

social rules and strengthening social values. The central connection between art and social life is therefore not instrumental, it is semiotic whereby works of art “materialize a way of experiencing, bring a particular cast of mind out into the world of objects, where men can look at it.” (Geertz 1983:99). If we analyse works of art from the semiotic starting point which Geertz suggests, they may be understood as signs which are in effect standing in for something else. They are ideationally connected to the society in which they are found and are thus participating in a general system of symbolic forms as part of culture (1983:109).

Agency theory moves focus away from the interpretation of an art object’s meaning and into the social context around the work of art, but meaning is still associated with art objects by the public. Arthur Danto proposed in a definition of art objects that an object becomes a work of art when it has meaning (Danto, 2005:6). Art theory and art history help to establish meaning and they help to establish an object as part of the artworld. Meaning lifts an object out of the realm of the purely decorative and gives it a role associated with art objects. The physical forms of the Dandelion and the eight Bullring works of art had meaning and value associated with them before their installation within the shopping centre contexts. However, meaning does not just refer to a set of predefined truths, it is also a product of social norms and is influenced by the conditions in society. Kirsten Hastrup offers an active understanding of meaning when she suggests that meaning is not given by or derived from a pre-existing scheme: “It occurs in practice” (Hastrup 1995:163). The meaning that we associate with the art object influences its role and the agency it achieves, but the meaning associated with art objects is not static and unchanging. Changes in the social and physical framework will influence the meaning associated with an art object. Analysis of meaning and the interpretation of symbols alongside the use of agency allow understanding of what encourages the active role of public art in shopping centres and is relevant in a social context where the social actors often do not have a particular interest in art and where the accepted criteria for defining a work of art do not always exist. In a museum or gallery we accept the objects presented to us as works of art but shopping centres are not known for the presentation of art. The objects presented there are often something else.

## **The Artworld**

The influence of the artworld relates to an established philosophical and theoretical discussion which follows two main arguments. The first argument is that there is a body of theory produced by an artworld which establishes an object as art. This line of thought is associated with Arthur Danto (Danto, 1994:477). The second main line of thought, developed by George Dickie, is that there is an institution, a loosely associated group of individuals who confer the status of candidate for appreciation (Dickie, 1974:35). There is therefore an established social, theoretical and creative structure that decides which artworks are produced and where they are installed, which is where the artworld is influential. The artworld also encourages the definition of an object as a work of art. Within an analysis of public art, the influence of the artworld is less clear because public art is installed in locations where the influence of the public on the meaning and value associated with an art object is often greater than it is in museums and galleries.

The activities of the planners and producers of public art largely take place away from the site where the art will be installed, and the social group who planned the public art is often not seen after the art has been set up in its location. However, the artworld does, I suggest, play a role in the relational context around art in shopping centres because it defines the physical form and it offers expectations about the role the art will play. Alfred Gell criticised the artworld theory for lacking the ability to understand art within the relational complexity of its actual context. Anthropologists, he said, should study the works of art in a general and not just in a specifically artworld context (Gell, 1998:8). Artworld theory is not enough in itself to provide an understanding of the relational situation around a work of art, it is only one aspect but it does play a role in the social life of a public work of art. It helps to explain why an artwork is installed in locations like the roundabout outside City Syd, and it also provides a background for the meaning and values that develop after the installation, it is part of its candidacy. It may offer an explanation of the relational successes or failures of public art because it helps to explain the differences between expectations and understandings associated with a public work of art which exist amongst the members of the artworld and those members of the public.



### **The Inherent Agency of Art**

Defining an object as a work of art places it within a historical or theoretical art context and therefore places it within an established framework of meaning and value. Alfred Gell proposed that anthropologists should not have to define an object as art in advance so as to satisfy theoreticians and art historians. The relational perspective provided by Gell suggests that agency is not an inherent quality in an art object; agency exists in fleeting the contexts and predicaments of social life, “Nothing is decidable in advance about the nature of this object, because the theory is premised on the idea that the nature of the art object is a function of the social and relational matrix in which it is embedded” (Gell, 1998:7). Furthermore, he suggests an art object is anything which is “inserted into the “slot” provided for art objects in the system” (1998:7). The system Gell is referring to is the art nexus or system of relations, the art object’s actual relational context. The people using the objects are the primary point of reference for Gell, not the context and not the qualities associated with the object, but the intentionality of people behind their artefacts. It is through objects that people achieve the aimed-for effect and are able to influence the social context (Miller, 2005:13).

Nevertheless, this lack of prior definition and avoidance of the existing theoretical art framework makes it difficult to establish what it is that allows us to define some objects as art, or what makes our relationship with them different from our relationships with other objects. Artworks are, it is suggested by Gell, different from other objects because of the manner of their agency, and their agency is a product of their role within the “art nexus”. This is not just about how the public responds to them, but as art objects they are also “indexes” of the power and potency of those who created them (Osborne 2007:3,4)<sup>9</sup>. The relational understanding which Gell proposes suggests a focus on the system of relations during the creation of the art object and its meeting with its public, but it underestimates the influence of the art’s theoretical background, particularly within a Western context. In addition, Daniel Miller suggests that there is an assumption of dualism in Gell’s theory, in which people and the objects that they use are viewed as

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<sup>9</sup> The art nexus is made up of entities that can be in relationship with each other. Indexes refer to the art object, artists, recipients and prototypes which the art object often represents (Gell, 1998:27).

being separate yet are also in a relationship with each other. This duality underplays the influence which objects have upon those using or relating to them (Miller, 2005:14).

The active social role therefore depends on the social context that influences the meaning and value associated with an art object. Moreover, an art object may bring something to the context; it is not just up to the physical and social context to impose understanding on art objects and meaning does not just exist in practice. There is a background of history and theory associated with art objects that is also active in the relational context in which a public work of art is installed. Art objects may also assert influence over the relational context.

### **The Role of Aesthetic Quality**

Understanding the art object requires that we look at its physical form and the qualities associated with it. Art objects are meaningful objects and they are also visual or sensory objects. Aesthetic theory and aesthetic quality have played a part in the analysis of Western art at least since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when aesthetic theory became a central field of thought among the philosophers of the enlightenment. The use of aesthetic theory in the anthropology of art is the source of debate because it tended to impose a predefined set of Western codes and values on non-Western art (Rampley 2005:527). Alfred Gell recommended “methodological philistinism”, which consists of taking an attitude of “resolute indifference towards the aesthetic value of works of art” (Gell 1992:42). Anthropologists should, he said, instead focus on what we do with art objects and what the art objects do with us. Gell’s criticism of aesthetic theory associates the aesthetic experience closely with the art object and its evaluation, but the aesthetic experience is also sensory and may be related to broader experiences of the world around us. It may be associated with natural elements, everyday objects and experiences, and have relevance in shopping centres where aesthetic objects like the Dandelion may be used to explain the social nature of the neighbourhood, or be criticised because they do not fit with a sensory understanding of the changes in the seasons.

The close relationship between art and aesthetics appeared in the philosophical discussions about aesthetic theory during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the theories of the philosopher Friedrich Schelling (Lübcke, 2010:632). Previously, aesthetic theory was

associated with a number of different phenomena such as nature but not particularly with works of art. As aesthetic theory developed, the focus moved away from the object and on to the role of the public and the artist. The value and charm of aesthetic appreciation was no longer seen as lying in a precision and distinctness of thought, but in the wealth of associations which the contemplation of the art object provokes among its public, associations which can be both diverse and conflicting. Aesthetic qualities are often seen as contrasting with practical qualities associated with moral, scientific and economic factors (Dickie, 1974:9).

Arthur Danto suggests that “aesthetics” are defined by the way “things show themselves”, and that as long as there are visible differences in the way things look, “aesthetics are inescapable” (Danto 2005:2). Aesthetic theory is therefore closely tied to our appreciation of art objects, although enlightenment philosopher Alexander Baumgarten implies that the sensory experience does not have to be tied to any objects. Defining beauty, taste and the role of the senses in relation to reason guided the development of aesthetic theory and found its form in the writings of Baumgarten as “the science of sensory knowledge”, in which a correlation between a stringency of knowledge and reason is understood as existing alongside the more diffuse realms of sensation and taste (Baumgarten 1988:3)<sup>10</sup>. In an analysis of the role of aesthetic quality in art, Arthur Danto suggests that during the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the nature of aesthetic quality was first analysed, it was maintained that the “point of art was the provision of visual pleasure” (Danto, 2005:7). The ready-mades which Marcel Duchamp presented between 1913 and 1917 tested this belief because they made it clear that art could exist that was philosophically independent of aesthetic theory (2005:5). Artworks no longer had to be beautiful or aesthetically pleasing, and the fact that art did not depend on aesthetics meant that there were other “necessary and sufficient conditions” which define an object as a work of art (2005:5).

Art is therefore separated from reality in a way that is not just perceptual. However, Danto says that it requires more than a decree from the artworld saying that an

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<sup>10</sup> The quality which makes aesthetic theory different from other fields of knowledge in Baumgarten’s theory is the “doctrine of sensibility” (Cassirer 1955:340). Baumgarten maintained that aesthetic theory was still ruled by reason and it was therefore concerned with law and order in general, but aesthetics was not striving for perfect knowledge. Instead it aimed at perfection in sensory and intuitively experienced knowledge.

object is an art object. Something is a work of art, Danto says, “when it is about something” thus works of art are embodied meanings (Danto, 2005:7). Aesthetic qualities do not define an object as a work of art, instead, Danto suggests, they are the means to help us to understand what the point of a work of art may be. Through their aesthetic qualities, works of art are intended to influence the public in some way, and beauty may be a part of its effect. Artworks, Danto tells us, present meanings by visual means (2005:10). Understanding the aesthetic approach used can therefore, Danto suggests, tell us a lot about the objective spirit of the social world (2005:8)<sup>11</sup>.

Aesthetic theory provides a material understanding of art objects during the active phase. Aesthetic quality influences how artworks are understood and the value they are accorded. It provides a connection between the public and the art object, what we see when we look at the Dandelion and the Bull provides access to what we know about them, and to the meaning associated with them. Aesthetic quality helps to break down the duality between the art object and its public and it can help to initiate a response from its public.

### **A Theory of Shopping**

Aesthetic quality in shopping centres is mainly associated with the activity of shopping, the goods bought and sold, and the physical and social structures which support the act of shopping. Public art is intended to give aesthetic quality to a shopping centre as it supports the physical and social experience. Understanding the role of public art in shopping centres requires that we know something about the activity of shopping. The majority of people visiting or working in City Syd and the Bullring are there because of the shopping and not because of the art. Other activities take place within shopping centres; we can meet, eat, work and go to the cinema in shopping centres, but these other activities are often intimately connected to the act of shopping. The active phases during the careers of the Dandelion and the Bullring art are therefore associated with social activities concerned with shopping. We can expect that the meaning and value that they

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<sup>11</sup> The objective spirit is the way art is used economically, politically or socially within an art history context to achieve goals. Danto does not say by who but it may be assumed that he means the artworld or the socially powerful that use the artworld (Danto, 2005:8).

achieve to be influenced by the role that they play within the shopping centre contexts in association with the activity of shopping.

The market, Marcel Mauss says, has always existed. Even before we had money we had markets, and the morality and organisation which existed in the pre-monetary markets still exists and even though it lies below the surface, it is one of the foundations upon which our society is built (Mauss 2005:5). In the Trobriand islands described by Malinowski, the whole of the tribal life was permeated by a constant give and take, the wealth given and taken was one of the main instruments of social organisation (Malinowski 1984:167). It is also suggested by Mauss that the obligation and economic self-interest fundamental to the most basic form of exchange, giving gifts, underlies consumption which takes place within modern markets (2005:4). The relational interdependence which giving, receiving and reciprocity encouraged in pre-monetary markets is therefore a central but under-communicated dynamic in today's shopping activities.

Shopping is about production and consumption, buying and selling but it is not just about that. It is also about the people who do the shopping, their relationships and why they shop. The physical framework of a shopping centre, and this includes the public art, has to take all these aspects into consideration. Daniel Miller suggests that shopping is not individualistic, related purely to the subjectivity of the shopper, it is "an act of love" (Miller 1998b:18). The love described by Daniel Miller in his analysis of shopping is normative ideology found in long-term relationships. Romantic love is only a small aspect of the love described by Miller, which is specifically associated with feelings of obligation and responsibility involved in family relationships (1998b:19). The bulk of everyday shopping may often be seen as mundane, but it is important not just because of the provisions it provides, but also because the daily conscientiousness associated with it "becomes one of the primary means by which relationships of love and care are constituted by practice" (1998b:18). Shopping is not always about love; shopping can be about individual needs and desires, but Miller suggests that love is normative, and it is dominant in the motivation for the bulk of actual shopping practice (1998b:23). The physical context provided by shopping centres is intended to support the relational

activity of shopping. Not only does it aim to make the act of shopping a pleasant activity by providing elements such as cafés, meeting places and waiting areas but it encourages social activity to take place within it, because social activity encourages shopping. Public art is part of the relational context.

Shopping has its fair share of negative associations and these are often connected with consumption. There exists, Miller suggests, an academic prejudice against shopping, one which assumes that any emphasis on material culture will take the place of social relations, rather than being a means of enhancing social values (Miller, 1998b:128). In abstract terms, shopping is often seen as “extreme shopping”, an over-the-top activity devoted to indulgence. Shopping in these terms is associated with “materialism” – an obsession with buying things, and “hedonism” – a self-indulgent form of pleasure and leisure, and finally “spending without caring about the consequences” (Miller, 1998b:68). Consumption is often seen as a practical, moral and context-based activity, rather than as a system of knowledge for those who produce, sell and consume goods, and is therefore understood as lacking the relational complexity which Miller suggests (Miller 1998a:6).

Consumers are in general understood as being in less control than producers and retailers, and shopping centres are regarded as places associated with the abstract pursuit of shopping for its own sake (Miller, 1998b:68). The geographer Jon Goss emphasises the controlling form which shopping centre architecture is based on. Consumers, he claims, are not allowed to move around the space independently and they are unable to follow anything other than a predesigned path. Shopping centres are seen as strategic spaces, owned and controlled by an institutional power, and its designers seek to deny the possibility of tactics and oppositional behaviour (Goss 1993:35). Shopping centre developers use the physical framework to guide the public’s movement around shopping centres, with the aim that shoppers move past the maximum number of commercial establishments and causing shortcuts to be hard to find. Access to stairwells and escalators in City Syd and the Bullring are intended to channel customers past as many opportunities to shop as possible. Miller admits that capitalism thrives off the desires of the consumer, but he insists that the consumer is not just following where it leads (Miller, 1998:69). Shopping is a stance taken towards the world; it says something

about the shopper's identity and their morality. It tells us something about what they believe in and what they care about (Miller, 2001:111). Shoppers do not just allow themselves to be guided around shopping centres; they also impose their needs and desires.

Both the positive and negative associations with shopping and shopping centres have the potential to influence how public art in shopping centres is understood and the role it plays. Art in shopping centres is associated with the physical context and the social activity which takes place within them. Understanding the activity of shopping supports an analysis of the role of public art in a shopping-focused environment.

### **Summary and Reflections**

The theoretical approach to answering the main research question about the role of art in shopping centres starts with an anthropological analysis, and focuses on the relational context around the art object, rather than just on the physical qualities associated with it. The relational understanding of the art object has agency theory as its starting point. Agency, it is suggested, is attributable to persons and things, and is expressed in the texture of social relationships which develop around artworks. Art objects do not, Alfred Gell suggests, have an effect on their own; it is through their association with people during social interaction that the agency of art objects develops. However, it is suggested here that art objects are not just being used; they can also influence those who make and use them. Therefore, if we are to understand the social life of the Dandelion and the art in the Bullring, then we need to understand all of the aspects associated with them within the relational context, including production, exchange and consumption as well as their physical qualities as art objects.

Understanding the role of the art at City Syd and in the Bullring requires that we do not just study them within one social situation, but follow them through all the paths they take. Appadurai suggests a tripartite relationship between the context, candidacy and commodity phase to analyse the social life of things. The context is the first part of the tripartite; it is understood here as both physical and social, but not self-contained or

unchanging. Social actors decide upon a response to the social situation in relation to expectations based on prior experiences within similar contexts. The contexts of the two shopping centres set the scene for the social activity which takes place, and therefore influence the social response.

The standards and criteria that define an art object's exchangeability within the social and physical context is the second part of the tripartite relationship, and are known as the candidacy of an art object. The process of planning and production are here associated with the candidacy, and the anthropological analysis of the social process of production is supported by the artworld theory. The candidacy provides background information and expectations but the social activity around the public art at City Syd and in the Bullring does not stop here.

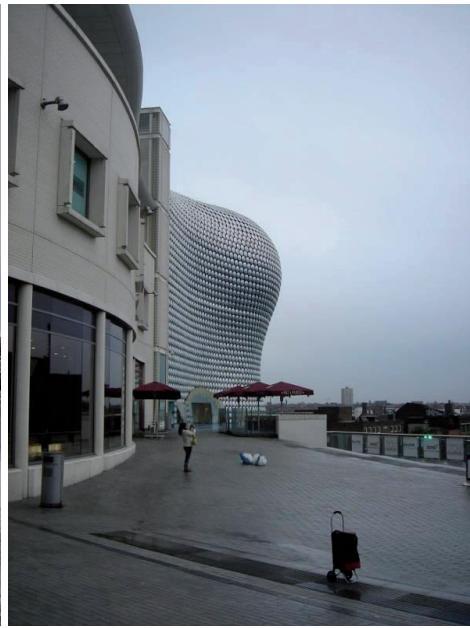
Appadurai's commodity phase, known here as the active phase, describes the biographical aspect of an art object's social life, and completes the tripartite within the timeframe of the fieldwork. It describes the social activity between the public and the artworks within the two shopping centres. The relational situation has the potential to change, as does the object's value. It is proposed here that there may be inherent qualities associated with art objects, ones that are associated with its background of theory, history and process, but the physical and social contexts which the art objects experience during their relational trajectory influence both the role and understanding of art objects. The activity of shopping influences how the art objects are understood and the installation of public art in and around shopping centres influence the public's relationship with the shopping centre framework. Shopping centres are not just strategic places aimed at controlling the behaviour of those who wish to shop within them. They are places with which the public has a relationship and contexts where shoppers can play out relational activity. Public art supports the relational potential which exists within City Syd and the Bullring. Context and candidacy influence the artwork's role, and so do traditional understandings of art as an object, particularly its aesthetic quality. The aesthetic qualities of the art objects are seen and understood within the physical and social frameworks of shopping centres. All these factors are relevant during the active phase of the artwork.



## 2. In the Field



City Syd, February 2007



The Bullring, November 2007

The fieldwork experience and the methodology used to gather information about the social role of public art at City Syd and in the Bullring is the focus of this chapter. Anthropologists are known for their devotion to first-hand empirical investigations within a fieldwork location whose parameters are defined by social, cultural, and/or physical boundaries. The information gathered is qualitative, and the anthropologist's main tools apart from notebooks and a camera, are their abilities to observe social activity, and to engage the people encountered during the fieldwork period in conversation. This methodology is known as ethnography. Daniel Miller describes it as “a year or more of research at a specific site with a commitment to adapting oneself to the situation and developing a sensitivity to the people one is learning from” (Miller 2001:10). Miller's description points to the local understanding and reflexivity necessary when working within the field, and it broadly describes what I attempted to do in Trondheim and Birmingham. A lot of time was spent in the two shopping centres, and the way I

approached the shopping centre public and the questions that I asked were a result of my experiences on site and were inspired by the responses from the shoppers and workers that I met. Sociologists Hammersley and Atkinson suggest that the ethnographic method is not far removed from the method we all use during our everyday lives to make sense of the world around us and the people we meet. What makes the ethnographic method different is “a more deliberate and systematic approach” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:4). Ethnographic survival in the active fluid social locations of the two shopping centres required deliberation and planning because otherwise I would not have met or spoken to enough people to gather information about art in shopping centres, and observation alone could not support the demands of the enquiry.

This chapter presents some of the themes associated with the ethnographic method, particularly fieldwork, participation, observation and visual anthropology. An analysis of what is different about the ethnography of art in shopping centres from a general ethnography of art concludes the chapter.

### **The Field**

The fields for this research covers two shopping centres, City Syd and the Bullring, studied during a period starting in February 2007 and ending in May 2009. Fieldwork is the period when the anthropologist collects the majority of his or her primary data. It is traditionally understood as living with a group of people for an extended period, often a year or more, in order to document and interpret a distinctive way of life (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:1). The isolation and in-depth involvement in the social life of a group of people became the norm within anthropology after the publication of Bronislaw Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* in 1922, but it is not what will be described in this chapter. My fieldwork was long and in-depth, but I did not live my whole life in the two shopping centres. I did shop at City Syd and in the Bullring, but I did not work there, or spend hours in conversation with the same people. Michael Carrithers suggests that “fieldwork can take as many forms as there are anthropologists, projects and circumstances” (Carrithers 1998:229), which suggests that actually being in

the field is often equally if not more defining than the anthropological traditions started by Malinowski.

The anthropological method is about acquiring social knowledge in the relevant field, which is done through close engagement for a period of limited duration, by the employment of various techniques and strategies, engaging in different styles of learning and understanding, and ending up with a body of “discursive and practical knowledge” (Watson 1999:2). This body of knowledge is gathered on the basis of the knowledge and understanding provided by anthropological theory, and it is also based on who the anthropologist is. An anthropologist’s work is never completely neutral; the gaze of the anthropologist comes from a particular point of view (Hastrup 1995:4). An anthropologist can therefore not often avoid relying on common-sense knowledge or avoid influencing the social situation being studied (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:15).

My point of view is based on many things, but I have narrowed it down here to what I suggest are three main elements relevant to the fieldwork activity. Firstly, the need to talk to people in the two shopping centres was the main challenge that I faced, but I did not ever really want to approach strangers; each approach took an effort of will. Secondly, my background and knowledge from within the arts provided me with an interest which I believe is outside the norm within shopping centres. Finally, my research was affected by family life outside the field, which placed limitations upon how many hours a day I could spend in and around shopping centres, and which shopping centres I chose to visit. These three elements affected how I talked to people, who I talked to, what I talked about and when and where I talked to them. In addition, being in the field provides numerous influences that affect the contact with the public in some way, for example the weather at City Syd. The Bullring always seemed positively spring-like compared to all the seasons in Trondheim. It was possible to work indoors and the management team at City Syd was happy to let me interview people inside the shopping centre, but this hindered contact with the Dandelion. Experience taught me that it was easier to talk about public art if the person I was talking to had eye contact with the artwork in question.

## Participation and Interviews



The Dandelion, May 2008



The Dandelion, August 2007

Within the ethnographic method, participant observation is the most well-known method used by anthropologists in the field. Malinowski described it as entering into the “imponderabilia of actual life and typical behaviour” (Malinowski, 1922:20). In particular, participation was recommended by Malinowski. He believed that previous attempts at ethnography had concentrated too much on observation and they therefore lacked the necessary understanding of the actual social life of their subjects of study. Malinowski thought involvement in the social life of the people studied was necessary because it allowed important phenomena to be observed in their “full actuality” (1922:18). To achieve this, the ethnographer must on occasion “put aside camera, notebook and pencil, and to join in himself in what is going on” (1922:21). By participating in everyday life during fieldwork, the ethnographer is able to gather information about all sides of social life, both the exceptional and the commonplace.

The stringency of practice prescribed by Malinowski is no longer the norm in anthropology, although understanding the context where you are working remains important. The social and cultural environment where people interact influences them to think and feel in a definite manner (Malinowski, 1922:23). Shopping centres influence how people think and feel when they are in them. My main research question asks what the role of public art in shopping centres is so if I had joined in with the everyday life at City Syd or in the Bullring, it may have given me a lot of information about the exceptional and the commonplace in shopping centres, but I suggest it would not have given me much information about the role of art in City Syd or the Bullring, because art is a small part of shopping centre life. Shopping is the focus of shopping centre life. The influence of public art is subtle and not always immediately obvious. Alex Stewart suggests that good ethnography has breadth, but that anthropology has moved away from comprehensiveness towards a narrower focus (Stewart 1998:6). The relationship between the public art and the shopping centre is important, but there is so much happening in shopping centres that it is easy to get distracted and lose sight of what is happening with the public art, and it is public art which is the focus of this analysis and not the everyday life found in shopping centres.

Shopping centres are particularly active and fluid social places where thousands of people pass through every day, and ethnography is in general considered useful for the study of an active social situation around people and places. Alex Stewart suggests that “Ethnography is a mode of continuous learning about topics – people, their cultures, their relationships – that are themselves in flux” (Stewart 1998:15). Interviews therefore replaced participation, and various interview forms were used because I tried to match my style and tempo with the day-to-day activity at the shopping centres in an attempt to involve myself in a person’s life at the point where it touches upon the public art.

Studying the role of public art in shopping centres requires a specific focus on the art in the two shopping centres. There was little art related activity to participate in, and therefore an active approach towards potential informants was required. It was no good just hanging around and hoping that something would happen (as some anthropologists do). I therefore chose to ask numerous people specific questions about

public art. The framework used to ask these questions was an open and unstructured interview, based around six to eight questions that were memorised<sup>1</sup>. I called them interviews but what I hoped to achieve was conversations, preferably long ones about art and the physical and social frameworks in which the art is installed. Thomas Hylland Eriksen suggests having long conversations with people on their own terms, in order to obtain their versions of the issues at hand and their reflections about their own existence, rather than using questionnaires to acquire concise answers to specific questions (Hylland Eriksen 2004:46). Conversations did happen, but mostly I used a list of concise questions and managed to get the people that I spoke with to say just a little bit about art.

According to Kirsten Hastrup, anthropology is about seeing from the point which makes up the contact zone (Hastrup, 1995:4). My point of contact was the brief encounters with shoppers and workers in and around the two shopping centres, and the information that my analysis is based upon is the spontaneous response to the art that I received during the conversations or interviews. Contact between the anthropologist and a member of the public is an interactive co-presence of historical subjects responding to and improvising the encounter (1995:4). My questions provoked thoughts and ideas about the art because the majority of the people I spoke to were not thinking about the art before I asked my questions and nor were they expecting to meet an anthropologist interested in art in the car park outside City Syd. I informed the shopping centre management and the people working at City Syd about my fieldwork activity, but in general the people I met were a little puzzled by my role in the car park and the focus of my questions. Hastrup suggests that the ethnographer by his or her presence in the field is actively engaged in the construction of the ethnographic reality (1995:16). Anthropological knowledge develops from shared cultural experience; the meetings between me, the anthropologist, and the public provoked the response to the art found at City Syd and the Bullring which will be presented in this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> More information about the interviews and the questions asked is available in the appendix.



## Understanding the Visual



The Bull, February 2008

Participant observation has two parts, participation and observation. Participation in shopping centres has already been mentioned. Observation also plays an important role in ethnographic activity. Malinowski recommended minute and detailed observations of social activity to be recorded in a fieldwork diary (Malinowski, 1922:25). Observation is something we all do as part of our everyday activities. When we enter a physical or social framework we make observations about it and decide upon our response to it based on what we know about similar frameworks, and it is also based upon what we have seen. Observation is an important aspect of ethnographic methodology, but it is not without its challenges. Within my fieldwork experience there was little to observe in the form of social interaction with and around the public art in the two shopping centres. This does not mean that interaction did not take place, but that it took a subtler and more

contemplative form. Agency in this capacity may be active in the way the public looks at the art work, reflects over the artwork's place within the social and physical context and considers what it means to them on a personal level.



The Dandelion, August 2007

The Dandelion's physical isolation on the roundabout outside City Syd meant that I was unable to watch the public interacting with it. I saw cars driving around the roundabout and I know that people do occasionally venture out there to be with the sculpture. Trondheim City Council's Technical Services are responsible for the upkeep of the sculpture and someone in 2008 drew graffiti on the stems and leaves of the Dandelion, but I never saw them there<sup>2</sup>. I have therefore not had the luxury of being able to distinguish between what people say and what they do in relation to the art at City Syd. The public art around the Bullring provides a greater number of opportunities to observe

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<sup>2</sup> Trondheim city council's technical services removed the graffiti at some point during 2008.



activity around public art. The Bull is positioned in a particularly active area just outside one of the main entrances to the shopping centre, and other works of art are also positioned in central locations in and around the shopping centre, but interviews are still the main source of information because although the public is often in close proximity to the art in the Bullring, people may not always be actively aware of its presence. The role of public art in shopping centres is not always dramatic. Once it has become established in a place it may receive attention in a way that is similar to shops or cash machines, whose presence becomes noticeable when we need them or when someone asks a question about them.

Although there is little observable behaviour between the art and the public, observation is still important because the research is based on visual qualities. The two main artworks, the Dandelion and the Bull, are both massive figurative sculptures; they were made to be seen. The insight which I gathered during interviews with the shopping centre public is founded on the public perception of the art. The spontaneous response of the public at the two shopping centres was provoked by my questions, but my questions got me nowhere if the person answering them had not seen the art. During the interviews, the public's response was based not only upon my questions but it was also based upon what they had observed. The analysis that will be presented is based on the access I achieved to the public's response to the visual. The public understanding of art is based on more than just visual qualities; knowledge, history and art theory also influence their response, but I suggest that their knowledge about art varied and that the starting point was a response to what they had observed about the art at City Syd and in the Bullring.

There is, suggests Anna Grimshaw, a "curious paradox" in the field of anthropology, which is that although vision is central within the ethnographic fieldwork developed by Malinowski and his contemporaries, there is no acknowledgement of the role of visual techniques, technologies or vision itself (Grimshaw 2001:3). The actual role of observation within the ethnographic process and the means with which we gain access to the visual are taken as given. Observation is as I suggested earlier something which we all do. According to Grimshaw, the lack of focus on observation and the visual in

anthropology is part of a “profound scepticism” within anthropology to photography, art and material culture (2001:4). The ethnographic revolution started by Malinowski required a break with the past, and this included the visual projects of their predecessors. Images are condemned as “seductive, dazzling, deceptive and illusory” (2001:5). At the same time the “ethnographic eye” is cultivated, and anthropology is characterised by the activity of going to see for oneself (2001:6).



The Bullring, February 2008



The Bullring, May 2008

My own understanding of the visual in the two shopping centres took some time to develop. I realised early on that I would not be able to observe much social activity around the public art, but it did not initially occur to me that what I could look for was the public’s response to the visual qualities associated with the works of art. When the Dandelion was first installed on the traffic island outside City Syd, there was a lot of feedback from the public because at first the sculpture had a very visual impact on the area outside the shopping centre. The visual impact was connected to the immediate response; people were surprised by the sudden arrival of a nine-metre tall Dandelion on

the roundabout outside City Syd. The town council had not sent out a prior warning to the population in general. It was easy to get a response because most of the people that I spoke to had an opinion about what they saw. The visual impact waned as the sculpture became more established in the space, and my consciousness of the importance of visual factors also diminished, but the answers to my questions retained the visual.

As the fieldwork period progressed, I became aware of how little I concentrated on the visual. I had wandered around the shopping centres in search of meaning, association, symbol and function, and overlooked the obvious, which is the visual side to art. The fact that the people I spoke to constantly referred to visual aspects connected to the Dandelion and the Bull did not initially seem relevant. Everyone knows that the Dandelion is yellow and the Bull is big. They were small facts among many comments and reflections made by the public. When I became aware of this factor I also understood that my method is a kind of visual anthropology, because it is about gaining access to the shopping centre public's response to the visual.

Visual anthropology is commonly associated with the use of film and photography<sup>3</sup>. However, Morphy and Banks describe visual anthropology as the anthropology of visual cultural systems or visual forms (Morphy and Banks 1997:5). In this view of visual anthropology, what we see and how we interpret it provides access to understandings of the world around us. Visual forms do not simply describe the world. Visual systems are the processes whereby humans produce visible objects; the study of them is concerned with how things are seen and how we understand what we see (1997:21). This requires that we not only look closely at the Dandelion and the Bull for example, but we should also use our knowledge about them (Banks 2001:3). The social life of a public work of art has its starting point in visual qualities. The physical and social contexts, the public, the planners and producers and myself the anthropologist, all play roles in establishing meaning and provide information which aid understanding. Our knowledge about these elements is also part of the visual system and it influences the role of public art in the context.

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<sup>3</sup> Film and photography are useful tools for the researcher but they are not just potential techniques, they also provide objects and images to be studied in their own right. I did not use film, but I have taken numerous photographs.

Using photography was part of the process of understanding the visual at City Syd and in the Bullring. I recorded the physical context, the visual context and, if or where possible, the social context. The photographs provide a visual reminder of the fieldwork context and they support and complement the response of the shopping centre public recorded in my notebooks. Within the text, photographs provide a constant reminder of the visual focus of the subject in hand. The captions relate to place and time. The images say something about the art in relation to the focus of the text at that point, but essentially they are intended to reiterate the visual emphasis of the research as a whole. The images should not be read as aesthetic objects. They present the fieldwork experience. The quality of the images varies, but they represent the best available illustration of the context described in the text.

### **Summary and Reflections**

The previous sections of this chapter provide a description of the ethnographic method used to gather information about the social role of public art in shopping centres. Participation allows the anthropologist to gather a breadth of information about social life, but my aim is narrower. The intention is to discover the social role of public art within City Syd and the Bullring. This requires focus on public art through specific questions asked during informal interviews and conversations because public art is a small issue in shopping centres.

The majority of the people I spoke to have a positive attitude towards the art; very few were directly negative. Despite this, most people have little to say about the Dandelion or the Bull. Just liking something does not necessarily mean that you easily become engaged in it as a subject for conversation, and my interviews with participants often did not get beyond an opinion that the sculpture is “*nice*” or “*OK*”. Clifford Geertz pointed out that art is “notoriously hard to talk about” (Geertz 1983:94). Many of the people I spoke to seemed genuinely surprised to be asked questions about art, and several agreed to talk to me only after emphasising that they were not really the right people to be talking about art because they knew nothing about it. No one I spoke to at City Syd or the Bullring was there because they were interested in art. They were there because of the shops, or because they had errands to do connected to other services available in the area.

The approach used was therefore an active one. Their response was provoked by my questions, and the majority of the people that I spoke to did respond. It was not always easy to get people to elaborate, but the analysis which is presented here does show that when asked to reflect on the presence of public art at City Syd or the Bullring, the public did have thoughts, ideas, opinions and suggestions which shed light on the role and relevance of public art in shopping centres.



The Dandelion, August 2008



The Bullring, May 2009

In addition, there is little observable social activity at City Syd and in the Bullring around the art, but the analysis arising from the fieldwork is based upon what the public saw. The response to my questions about the Dandelion or the Bull starts with their visual qualities. The study of public art in shopping centres is therefore a kind of visual anthropology because it is about gaining access to visual qualities and the knowledge and understanding associated with them.



# Section 2: The Context



The Bullring, February 2008



### 3. Shopping Centres



City Syd, April 2007



The Bullring, May 2009

The context, according to Arjun Appadurai, provides a location for and a connection between the candidacy of an artwork and its active phase, it influences the exchanges which take place, and it can affect the value of the objects exchanged within it (Appadurai, 1986:13). The intention of this chapter is to analyse the architectural structure and retail history of shopping centres, which the social and physical contexts of City Syd and the Bullring are based upon. Shopping centres provide the context for the public art and they influenced the planning processes in the two shopping centres. City Syd and the Bullring, although they are both shopping centres, do not on initial comparison seem very alike. For example, the age difference and the difference in the type of location influence the visual impact that they make. At the same time, they are both shopping centres and are part of the same architectural family, with a background within the same architectural and retail history. The character and form of shopping centres in general needs therefore to be understood if we are to understand the role that public art plays in and around the two different physical frameworks found at City Syd and in the Bullring<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The term shopping centre was chosen instead of shopping mall. Shopping mall is North American terminology. The examples referred to here are Norwegian or British, where the most common term is shopping centre. The term shopping centre is also more true to the Norwegian term, 'kjøpesenter'.



The context defined by Arjun Appadurai is primarily social and historical, and it refers to the variety of social arenas that connect the candidacy of an object with the commodity phase of its career (Appadurai, 1986:15). An object, it is suggested, cannot act independently of the context. Commodities are the focus of Appadurai's interest, and commodities, he says, are "thoroughly socialized" (1986:6). When describing the context, Appadurai is specifically referring to the social arenas where an exchange takes place and auctions and bazaars are mentioned as arenas which particularly encourage the commodity aspect of objects (1986:15). However, it is suggested here that contexts are not only social, they are also physical and both the planners and the public in the two shopping centres referred to physical and social qualities when describing the context. It is not always easy to define what separates the physical from the social because social requirements influence the development of physical structures. In this chapter, and in the following two chapters, it is primarily the physical context and its historical background which is in focus. The social context is described in more detail during the active phase which is the final section of this thesis.

A shopping centre has similarities to a traditional marketplace. It provides customers with goods and services; it also offers entertainment and is a place for social interaction. However, while marketplaces may be outdoors, housed in temporary outdoor structures, or be a loosely organised group of businesses within a large hall, shopping centres are housed within a single large air-conditioned building. This structure contains a number of retail units, is supervised by a managing company and serviced by a large car park. This physical form first became established in the USA during the 1950s and became popular in the UK during the 1960s. Nonetheless, shopping centres are not simply public places; access and the social activity within them is controlled by the owners and/or developers. Shopping centre architecture may be associated with other physical and social retail forms in addition to marketplaces and these will be presented as well as markets in the first part of the chapter. The second section concentrates on the physical form of shopping centres today.

## **Shopping**

The meaning and value that public art achieves is closely associated with the shopping centre contexts in which they are located, and shopping centres whatever their age, form or location, are associated with the activity of shopping. Shopping centres exist because the public needs or desires the goods that they supply, and retail managers and owners aim to make a profit by supporting and encouraging this need. However, shopping is not just about making and spending money. Shopping is also, according to Daniel Miller, an act of love (Miller, 1998b:18). Shopping can be about practical needs and personal desires, but it is also a social activity in which the act of caring for family or friends is expressed. The obligation, giving, taking and reciprocity found within the relational activity associated with shopping are, according to Marcel Mauss, one of the foundations upon which our society is built upon (Mauss, 2005:4). It was part of traditional market structures and it is part of shopping centres today. Shopping is therefore part of the shopping centre context. It is a norm which encourages the candidacy of the public art, which I will go on to present in the next section of the thesis, and it is part of the relational activity which takes place during the active phase of the public art, which will be presented in the third section.

Despite Daniel Miller's assurances about love, spending and earning money is important in shopping and shopping centres, and there is a persisting high-cultural disdain for the focus on consumption which shopping centres encourage. The architect and urban planner Joe Holyoak complained that in "the mall we see a deliberately engineered social and environmental uniformity, one that does not reflect the richness and complexity of real life" (Holyoak 2004:21). It is true that shopping centres provide planned social and commercial spaces, but they have been around for at least fifty years, and the vast majority of the Western population has a relationship with one or more of them. Shopping centres in many cases do not just reflect the richness and complexity of urban life; for several hours during the day, they are places where a large chunk of our daily life takes place. The public likes being in shopping centres, which Cher Krauss Knight suggests is because shopping centres are easy to understand and comfortable to be in: "While this overtly commercial nature can be crass, it is refreshing too: we know what

malls want from us, which might help us better to determine what we want from them. People often feel comfortable and confident in their actions in malls, which directly opposes how many characterize their feelings when in museums” (Knight 2008:75).

We appreciate shopping centres while many other public structures such as museums, office complexes and hospitals are not always so easy to understand or comfortable to be in. Public art is, I suggest, one of the reasons the public likes being in shopping centres. It helps to make them attractive and recognisable, encouraging a sense of place which can lead to personal associations.

Shopping centre design is intended to encourage maximum profit, but profit is not only made using practical and functional design. It is also made by encouraging pleasure during the act of shopping and by encouraging the social behaviours that are central to the act of shopping. Public art is used to encourage pleasurable social activity. Art is not something we commonly associate with shopping centres, but there is a decorative tradition associated with retail architecture and the use of decoration and art does occur within shopping centres. The architect Nadine Beddington suggests that shopping centres should have style: “With style comes a new dimension – to transform the routine task of shopping into one of interest and pleasure to the shopper” (Beddington, 1982:xii). The retail industry encourages the association of leisure and pleasure with shopping, and art in shopping centres encourages the sense of a pleasurable place, although it is sometimes difficult to separate what is art from what is decoration. Art in shopping centres is intended to be pleasurable; it lacks the moral aspect often associated with art in other public places. It is intended to please, but not necessarily civilise its public<sup>2</sup>.

### **A History of Retail Architecture**

City Syd and to a large extent the Bullring are fully enclosed shopping centres. The first fully-enclosed shopping centre was the Southdale centre in Edina, Minnesota in the USA, designed by architect Victor Gruen, which opened in 1956. Shopping centres in more open forms have existed for longer and similar retail frameworks have existed for

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<sup>2</sup> Public art’s use in shopping centres will be addressed in more detail in chapter 7.

thousands of years. As mentioned earlier, marketplaces have an affinity with shopping centres, especially covered markets. In these cases it is not shops that are found next to each other, but stalls, often without walls or clear physical boundaries. The shopping experience is one of a jumble of senses meeting and competing with each other. Markets still exist, competing with shopping streets and shopping centres, and in some cases within close physical proximity. The Bullring shopping centre's neighbours on one side are a rag market and food market, and on the other side are high street shops. The fact that they can cohabit points to them offering different kinds of shopping qualities and services.



Wakefield's covered market, March 2007



Leeds' covered market, March 2007

When looking at the history of shopping centres, it is possible to meander through all the previous and existing retail forms and their architectural solutions, from small corner shops to large designer warehouses. However, to do so would make this chapter impossibly long, so I have therefore decided to concentrate on those retail forms which have clear architectural associations with today's shopping centres. Exchanges,

high street shops and bazaars will be mentioned, but the main focus is the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century precursors to shopping centres, namely markets, arcades and department stores<sup>3</sup>.

The basic pattern of shopping and retail trade developed in Europe during the middle ages, and it did not change much until a period of population growth and economic prosperity during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the middle ages a city was not a city if it did not have a market. The architectural historian Donatella Calabi suggests that “*the very essence of the metropolis lay in its market and busy streets*” (Calabi 2004:xxiv). In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the building fabric around the church, town hall, shops and stalls in close proximity to a square became the emblem of a town, and the urban strategy connected to trade often influenced the entire form of the city (2004:4,6)<sup>4</sup>. Markets played an important role in daily life. They ensured that food and fuel was always available and provided a place for social interaction, also between people from the countryside and the town (Morrison 2003:5).

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the growing urban population was housed mostly in high density accommodation, far away from the self-sufficient rural economy that had previously been the norm. Wages improved for middle and working classes, bringing with it a demand for goods, and changing expectations about the shopping experience and the architecture which supported it<sup>5</sup>. In the mid-Victorian period, town centres and commercial retail developments were invested in (MacKeith, 1986:9). Outdoor markets were moved into purpose-built halls and shopping arcades were built. In a market hall, the movement and behaviour of traders could be controlled, and unsavoury elements such as betting, prostitution and begging could be excluded. Market halls included all kinds of traders and established new standards of hygiene. Market halls were where the working class bought their goods; the middle class purchased their goods in shops or in the new arcades.

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<sup>3</sup> The focus is on British shopping history because it provides a background for what has developed in the Bullring, and there is a larger number of architectural examples among the precursors to shopping centres than exists in Norway.

<sup>4</sup> Birmingham’s city centre around the original Bullring fitted this pattern.

<sup>5</sup> The industrial revolution affected consumer goods, causing a change from craft to factory production, for example in the shoe and clothing trade. The display of goods became important, as did advertising and visible pricing.



Huddersfield market hall, October 2009

The market hall buildings have succumbed to change to a much lesser extent than other types of retail architecture (Morrison, 2003:109). Stalls change and so do the goods sold, but the architectural form that the market hall provides is a flexible framework which still functions today. The internal arrangements in market halls are fairly standardised. The halls are divided into long aisles, connected by cross aisles, often with shops around the periphery. The Bullring markets that opened in 2003 have a similar architectural form to the market halls built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The roofs of market halls are often supported by rows of cast iron columns<sup>6</sup>. The columns use a minimum of floor space and often support a glass roof which allows in the maximum light.

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<sup>6</sup> St. John's market in Liverpool built in 1820 was the first to use cast iron columns.





The Huddersfield market hall, October 2009

The world exhibition at Crystal Palace in London and Les Halles Centrales market area in Paris influenced the architecture of the market halls, encouraging the use of glass rather than masonry (Morrison, 2003:114)<sup>7</sup>. Glass structures were popular during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but stall holders complained about uncomfortable and unprofitable conditions for selling perishable goods in glass houses, and bricks and mortar became popular in market hall buildings again. Market halls continue to be built. Post-World War Two market halls were often built during inner city redevelopments in close proximity to new shopping centres. The 1964 Bullring shopping centre and market halls are an example of this. These new market halls were more utilitarian in design, with

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<sup>7</sup> The Great Exhibition of the Works of the Industry of all Nations was housed in Crystal Palace in 1851. The building was designed by Joseph Paxton with support from structural engineer Charles Fox. The design was based on Paxton's experience in designing greenhouses on the estate of the Duke of Devonshire. Les Halles market in Paris was first established in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and finally demolished in 1977.

little natural light, and what lighting there was came from fluorescent lighting tubes (2003:121).

The early arcades where the middle classes shopped supported privilege. This is an impression upheld today by the Burlington arcade in London, where visitors are still forbidden to whistle, sing, play a musical instrument, carry a parcel, open an umbrella or run (1986:23)<sup>8</sup>. In a similar style to market halls and future shopping centres, arcades and their architecturally related retail associates bazaars, were made up of a variety of traders collected under one roof, controlled by a single proprietor who demanded rent and imposed regulations on the trading and behaviour within the building (Morrison 2003:94)<sup>9</sup>. An arcade is a passageway with shops on one or both sides, often with high lights or a fully glazed roof<sup>10</sup>. Their streets look inwards and provide a central space with covered protection from the weather. It is a physical form which has much in common with today's shopping centres. Shopping centres often have similar pedestrian corridors running through them (MacKeith, 1986:1). The town planners of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw arcades as the ideal retail centre, because they did not just provide shops, they also served as pedestrian thoroughfares.

The street patterns of British city centres often follow routes established during the Middle Ages and an advantage to arcades is that they allow maximum use of old alleyways and narrow roads. The first arcades were either planned as a new street or built over an existing alley and link with other streets and are part of the city's street network. Shopping arcades, due to being privately owned, are usually closed and gated at the end of the shopping day, but unlike city centre shopping centres which can create large closed spaces, the closure of arcades at night did not dramatically reduce the utility of street networks, and they even improved them when they were open (Holyoak, 2004:18).

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<sup>8</sup> The Royal Opera Arcade in London was the first British arcade, built by the Prince Regent and his architect John Nash.

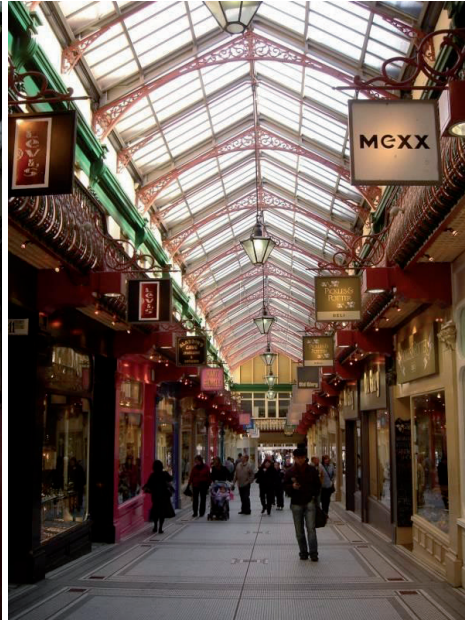
<sup>9</sup> Bazaars traded on open counters in open spaces, in a way not unlike that which takes place in covered markets, but they were aimed at a more genteel market.

<sup>10</sup> The term arcade refers to the arches and vaulted roofs which are common within these structures. In France they were called passages or galleries.





An arcade in Barnsley town centre, October 2009



An arcade in Leeds city centre, March 2007

In 1839, engineer and architect Ralph Redivivus pronounced arcades a pleasant environment for the British public to shop in. “Here there is no disagreeable, perhaps I should say, delightful variety of mud, ankle-deep at one time, and hovering, but alas not golden clouds of dust at another. On the contrary there is a monotonous constancy of uniform dry, and level pavement, where a lady might walk without soiling a white satin slipper” (Civil Engineer and Architect’s Journal, March 1839 cited in MacKeith, 1986:1). This reference to the dangers met by those who use silk slippers, points to general climatic problems faced in Northern Europe, and to the fact that architectural solutions which protect and provide comfort during the activity of shopping have been with us for a while. Shopping centres are therefore continuing a tradition of providing shopping comfort, and in doing so are providing structures which offer climatic control and comfort.

The first arcades appeared in Paris during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the idea was then gradually taken up by the rest of Europe and North America. The majority of the British arcades were built after the 1860s during a period of city expansion and modernisation; most were built for local merchants by local or regional architects. At the

end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were a growing number of individuals with wealth, a desire for luxury, and a wish to promenade and window shop<sup>11</sup>. Arcades allowed the accommodation of these activities. Large profits were achieved by developing modern shops, residential accommodation, and safe, climatically controlled pedestrian streets all in one place (MacKeith, 1986:14).

Arcades created the perfect habitat for a culture of leisured urbanity (Parsons 2004:28). According to Walter Benjamin it was the Parisian arcades that first made *flânerie* possible (Benjamin 2002:32). *Flânerie* comes from the French word *flâneur*, and means stroller, lounge, or loafer. A *flâneur* is not interested in shopping; their main preoccupation is observing the urban life taking place around them. Charles Baudelaire described a *flâneur* as a gentleman stroller of the city streets. He is a detached observer, but also plays a role in understanding and portraying the city. “For the perfect *Flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite” (Baudelaire 1995:9). The covered streets of the arcades created a climate-controlled location for the study of city life. According to Benjamin, the *flâneur* disappeared as the commercial world moved out of the arcades and into department stores (2002:61).

It is suggested by Jon Goss that today’s shopping centres appear to encourage something similar to *flânerie*. Pedestrian malls with their indoor streets and cafés are designed to sustain “relaxed strolling, window shopping, and people watching”, but Goss says it is not really *flânerie* that has emerged (Goss 1993:35). Instead, Goss says, what we see is nostalgia for *flânerie* due to the fact that shopping centres would not be able to function if shoppers were not encouraged to shop during their visits to shopping centres (1993:35). Commerce puts pressure on shoppers to do more than stroll around and window shop when they visit shopping centres. On the other hand, I believe that the climate-controlled interior spaces of shopping centres do encourage a kind of *flânerie*. Shopping centre management may not always directly encourage it, but they are wise

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<sup>11</sup> Dresses, accessories, millinery and materials were the main items of exchange.

enough to know that customers encourage more customers, and even those who come primarily to observe must eventually shop somewhere.



The cafeteria, City Syd, February 2007

At City Syd and in the Bullring I met pensioners and unemployed individuals who spent time in the shopping centres window shopping and/or people watching. City Syd's cafeteria on the second floor is a popular meeting place for pensioners from all over Trondheim. They meet in the mornings to drink coffee and chat. The favourite spot in the cafeteria is the gallery, which overlooks the main internal stairwell. It is the perfect place to watch the activities of the people shopping and the movements of an anthropologist visiting the shopping centre.

The development of arcades reached its peak during the last couple of decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>12</sup>. Arcades did not disappear overnight but there was a gradual decline starting at

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<sup>12</sup> The Civil Engineer and Architects Journal added arcades to the list of new building types of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with club houses, railway termini, stations and bazaars (MacKeith, 1986:18).

the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when department stores became popular, and increasing in momentum during the 1960s due to competition from shopping centres (MacKeith, 1986:4). The first British department store was opened in Brixton, London in 1877 and sold almost everything including food, furniture and clothing (Morrison, 2003:134)<sup>13</sup>. The 1880s and 1890s saw the establishment of numerous British department stores. Famous stores like Harvey Nichols, Peter Jones and Harrods were established during this period although none was on the scale of their Parisian contemporaries.

Department stores have much in common with the earlier bazaars and covered markets which also exploited the technological potential of iron and glass. These materials were used to create large centralised spaces surrounded by galleries which were lit naturally from above (Morrison, 2003:94)<sup>14</sup>. By the end of the 1890s, many shops incorporated steel girders or full steel frames, allowing in more light and with the added advantage of a greater resistance to fire than their predecessors (2003:143).

The most innovative shops were built in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in London when the big store had its heyday. Selfridges led the way with a store on the western end of Oxford Street. Its size and open plan design became the new standard for department stores. The big stores aspired to be much more than just shops. Gordon Selfridge's original marketing strategy included architecture and design. In 2003 when Selfridges opened a new department store in the Bullring, it was again leading the way in department store design. Department stores provided shopping, glamour and entertainment. Lewis's in Manchester, which opened in 1912, had a sprung marble dance floor, and the largest soda fountain outside the USA. Until the 1930s when modernism began to influence the architecture, department store buildings were heavily ornamented. Selfridges had a classical Georgian façade and other stores gathered inspiration from French, Moorish and Egyptian design. In 1898 the first escalator was installed in Harrods, with assistants standing at the ready with cognac and smelling salts for those upset by this means of ascent. The escalator and elevator hall in Harrods is still one of the great

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<sup>13</sup> Its opening encouraged a general diversification beyond traditional trade boundaries among London's retailers.

<sup>14</sup> Bazaars were based on the older English tradition of the exchange. Warehouses and emporia also have a place in the historical background to shopping centres.

wonders of the shopping experience in London. Inspired by archaeological discoveries in Egypt, its heavy ornamentation overpowers any competition from advertising, and encourages a singular and exclusive shopping experience.



Selfridges, Oxford Street, February 2008



Selfridges, Birmingham, November 2007

In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Western world, the system of shopping from closely controlled counters, supervised by sales assistants gradually changed. Customers were allowed to circulate and browse freely, and floor space became more important because more goods were on display. The planning of department stores started focusing less on spectacle and more on the maximum use of the space<sup>15</sup>. After the Second World War the retail trade changed. Trade had stagnated during the war, and town and city centres were often rundown. Married women increasingly worked part or full-time, and more people owned a car. The post-war period was characterised by trading down to encourage the working classes to shop at department stores. Self-selection was

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<sup>15</sup> Lifts and escalators were used to manipulate the circulation of customers within stores, increasing the value of the upper floors. Restaurants were located on the upper floors to avoid food smells in the sales areas. Early in the career of department stores, roof top restaurants and gardens were in vogue.



encouraged and interiors were simplified through the use of a more austere modern style. Air conditioning encouraged stores to dispense with glass facades and natural lighting. Stores were designed without any windows at all. Department store architecture and interiors were similar to what we find in the first shopping centres. Shopping centres did not instigate boring retail architecture; they were following a trend. Department stores began to move into shopping centres during the 1970s, and many of those remaining on the high streets closed down because of competition from shopping centres. It was more than a decade before luxury began to reinstate itself, and this time it was not just associated with department stores, it was also associated with the shopping centres within which they were located.

### **Shopping Centres**

The development of shopping centres in Britain began with the first Bullring shopping centre, which opened in 1964 (Dennis, et al. 2005:14). It was followed by other town centre schemes such as the Arndale centres in Luton and Doncaster. Shopping centre developments of the 1960s had a dramatic effect on the physical form of city centres. The new shopping centres were large concrete structures, often described as brutalist architecture<sup>16</sup>. Their architectural form was often in stark contrast to existing city centre architecture. City centres were changed and physical and structural elements were lost. Luton city centre lost an Edwardian library and Birmingham's mediaeval street structure disappeared during the development of the first Bullring shopping centre. The impact of shopping centres on the towns and cities was not just physical and visual; it was also social and economic due to the impact they had on the retail structure around the shopping centres. Older shopping establishments struggled to compete and shopping arcades and department stores began to close, as did smaller neighbouring businesses.

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<sup>16</sup> The term brutalist comes from the French term "béton brut" which means raw concrete. The architectural style was popular from the 1950s up until the mid-70s. It was not just associated with shopping centres. Birmingham city library, built during the same period, is also a large concrete structure.



The Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre, London, April 2011

The first shopping centres like the Bullring and the Elephant and Castle in London had a minimum of windows, and blank concrete cladding was the shopping centre norm. Interior courtyards with fountains and sculptures were intended to compensate for low levels of daylight. Decorative coloured paving, public sculptures and trees were used to create a sense of place. Shopping centres generally included one large department store and the rest of the centre was occupied by smaller outlets and independent stores, interspersed with cafés. Shops and stores were arranged in straight lines and banks and large stores were allocated corner sites. By the 1970s, the post-war optimism about shopping centre developments had begun to evaporate. Many shopping centres appeared isolated and desolate (Morrison, 2003:260). Shopping centres had to change and the out-of-town centres which opened in Britain during the 1980s are an example of an attempt at change.



The Elephant and Castle Shopping Centre, London, April 2011

The stereotypical American shopping centre that still exists today is an out-of-town centre. These were first established when car ownership had become the norm and good roads and Greenfield sites made their development the obvious choice. The first out-of-town shopping complex was the Country Club Plaza in Kansas, which opened in 1923, but the idea did not really get going until the 1950s. Up until the early 1980s, British towns resisted the temptation to develop out-of-town shopping centres. The atmosphere changed during the 1980s when the Conservative Government voiced support for schemes that they believed would provide jobs and stimulate investment in areas of the country with social and economic problems. Between 1984 and 1999, seven out-of-town shopping centres were built close to motorway junctions and within reach of the country's largest cities (Morrison, 2003:298). Meadow Hall on the outskirts of Sheffield is one of these centres. City Syd may be considered a Norwegian example of a 1980s out-of-town mall, but although it is large by Norwegian standards in the late 1980s, it is no



way near as big as British shopping centres, which are ‘mega-malls’ with food courts, themed areas and associated leisure complexes. These shopping centres had an impact on the commercial activity in the centres of the towns and cities within their proximity. This caused change in planning regulations during the early 1990s, which aimed at limiting the impact on the livelihood of town centre shopkeepers. Planners also aimed to keep traffic congestion to a minimum and to preserve the countryside. Out-of-town shopping centres are no longer encouraged, and shopping centre development or redevelopment has since concentrated on town centres. The Bullring in Birmingham is a British example. Trondheim city centre boasts three shopping centres developed within existing structures in the city centre<sup>17</sup>.

Shopping centre architecture has changed a lot since the first concrete structures, gradually becoming less minimal and function-focused, and more related to the luxurious aspects of the early arcades and department stores. During the 1980s and 1990s, the materials used in shopping centres changed with the introduction of marble, brass and mirrors and the use of lighting was improved and experimented with. The reintroduction of the use of glass in façades and roofs, inspired by American malls or gallerias, was another trend which became common during the early 1980s in European shopping centres. Natural light has become a feature associated with the latest shopping centres. The idea that dark shops encourage the sale of shoddy goods is not new, but natural light is also important in today’s shopping centres because the new centres are often so large that the light from the roof provides necessary but limited contact with the outside world for both shoppers and workers<sup>18</sup>. The Bullring shopping centre in its marketing of the design of the centre emphasises what it calls a glass “*skyplane roof*”, which it says appears visually detached from the façades of the shopping centre and encourages “*a street feel*”<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> The three shopping centre developments include Solsiden, Mercursenter and Byhaven.

<sup>18</sup> Glass roofs were a feature of shopping arcades and may be compared with the larger roofs of 19<sup>th</sup> century railway buildings, exchanges and conservatories of the same period. MacKeith suggests that arcade roofs were of a much cheaper and more practical calibre than the cathedral-like structures designed for trains (MacKeith, 1986:80).

<sup>19</sup> The Bullring Information Pack 2007.

In the late 1970s, conservation became another theme in shopping centre development. Retail developers were encouraged to develop centres using traditional materials, and on a scale that had something in common with the surrounding architecture. This was not just a trend within town planning. Shopping centre developers saw that they could make use of a collective nostalgia for real places and historic roots (Goss, 1993:36). The Bullring has not used traditional materials or local architectural styles in its development, but it has preserved several historical elements within its proximity, for example St. Martin's church and the 1960s Rotunda office building. These buildings stand in close physical association with the structure of the shopping centre and encourage connection with the city centre.

The combination of maximum commercial profit, entertainment and shopping services does not have a tradition for subtlety, and this does not appear to be changing. Shopping centre developers are building a new generation of what has been described as "cathedrals of consumption" (Crossick and Bauman, 1999 in Parsons, 2004:31). Luxury is back in retail developments and on a larger scale than before. The luxurious developments characterising contemporary shopping centres, like the Bullring, show that even when under pressure from planning requirements and conservationists, the show must go on.

### **Summary and Reflections**

Shopping centres are social, historical and physical contexts and as such they influence the role public art can play in relationship with its public. The background to the character and form of shopping centres today is described here because it influences the exchanges which take place and the value that objects such as public art can achieve within them. Retail architecture started to change at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and it is still changing. Shopping now takes place within a variety of architectural forms, and the changes in form and structure point to a desire to achieve greater size, comfort and control. All this has taken place within the parameters of the primary objectives of the owners and developers of shops and shopping centres, which are to encourage the exchange of goods and to achieve maximum profit. Periods of economic expansion have

encouraged the development of luxurious retail structures; arcades, department stores and shopping centres all provide examples of this luxury. Public art in shopping centres helps to create places that the public enjoy visiting, and it supports an atmosphere of luxury although this does not necessarily mean that there is focus on art within shopping centres with art located in them. The art suggested by Beddington is decorative and unchallenging, supporting a pleasing atmosphere. Luxury was and still is seen as encouraging trade. Periods of economic decline, such as experienced after the Second World War, encouraged a simplification of retail architecture. Contemporary shopping centre architecture, of which the Bullring is an example, includes luxury and the spectacle in a way that is reminiscent of the first large department stores. A shopping centre context often now includes elements which encourage physical and social associations with their 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century predecessors.

Numerous traders are located under one roof in today's shopping centres and it is a retail collaboration that has its roots in the market places still found all over the world. Shopping is social and relational; it is not just about production and consumption. Shopping centres are both physical and social contexts, they are practical and luxurious, they provide places that we need and they are places that we like to be in. The challenge for public art within the physical and social complexity of shopping centres is achieving an active social role.

## 4. Tiller and City Syd



Tiller and City Syd, June 2007

The intention of this chapter is to describe and analyse the social, historical and physical context which inspired the Dandelion project. The shopping centre context provides a framework for social activity, and it both supports and influences activity which takes place within it. The context is one of the three aspects in the social life of an object suggested by Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai, 1986:13). The physical and social context described here provides a background of meaning and history that is part of the Tiller neighbourhood and is associated with City Syd's success. This background to the Tiller context influenced the development of the public art project, which will be described in chapter 8. The presentation of this contextual background is divided into three sections. The first section presents the Tiller neighbourhood, its historical form and physical

parameters. The second section presents the urban development process which started during the 1960s and the third section describes the City Syd shopping centre.



City Syd, December 2008

The City Syd shopping centre and the Tiller neighbourhood were established long before the Dandelion was installed, and it is the context into which the sculpture was placed in August 2007. This context was described by a taxi driver whom I met outside City Syd during the early days of my fieldwork in this way, “*It’s very practical. It is function before aesthetics every time.*” It was not unusual for the shopping centre public to describe the area as practical, but the taxi driver’s comments went further because he believed the area lacked positive aesthetic quality and that this was shown by an over-emphasis on practical considerations. Despite its visual problems, the number of customers visiting each year shows no sign of declining and the commercial district

around it continues to grow<sup>1</sup>. In a recent interview with the local paper, the manager at City Syd described it as, “*A success from day one*”<sup>2</sup>. The shopping centre opened on September 17<sup>th</sup> 1987. Its success is something that the other shopping centres in central Norway wish to emulate.

### What is Tiller?



Trondheim, August 2009

A place is defined by its geographical location, it may be associated with the architectural structure which supports it, and it is defined by its use and the people who use it. City Syd is a shopping centre located in the Tiller neighbourhood, which is a suburb of Trondheim in Sør-Trøndelag, Norway, eight kilometres to the south of the main city

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<sup>1</sup> The number of visitors is a steady 3.6 million people per year.

<sup>2</sup> Adressavisa December 5<sup>th</sup> 2009. My translation.



centre. It provides shops, jobs, a service centre, a place to meet and somewhere to observe social life, but it is not a public space. During the fieldwork period it was owned by the retail managers Steen og Strøm and it is now owned by Trondos and Storebrand<sup>3</sup>. It is City Syd's owners who decide its use, its opening hours and the rules of behaviour. It is an active fluid place, whose numerous visitors cause its social life to change constantly through the course of the day, but its use is also to a large extent predefined and expected. The shopping centre dominates the neighbourhood. It is a service centre and meeting place for the people in the neighbourhood. For people visiting the area it is often the main reason for the visit. The Dandelion is located outside City Syd. The roundabout where it stands is Trondheim City Council property, and it is therefore officially a public place. The public art project is influenced by the public context in which it stands and by the private commercial spaces around it.

The growth of the Tiller neighbourhood may be linked to its accessibility; it is only a short trip by car from Trondheim city centre and several neighbouring communities. Tiller does not just have City Syd; the neighbourhood is dominated by shopping centres, specialist warehouses and the road network which serves these commercial establishments. The neighbourhood also has housing estates, schools and a recreational area with woods and marshland, but the focus of my research is the busy commercial district in which the Dandelion sculpture is located. According to one of the members of the public art committee, this area represents "*one of the most ordinary areas we have, one that is common in the western world*". The architectural form is standard commercial warehouse architecture found in other commercial areas in Trondheim, the rest of Norway and other European countries. It is functional and quick and easy to construct. In contrast, Trondheim city centre may be described as historical and picturesque, and is often marketed as a wooden city with its low-rise wooden buildings dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Storebrand is an insurance company, but it is also involved with investment management and owns property. Trondos is Norway's largest consumer cooperative with 37 shops and supermarkets, and 113,000 members.

<sup>4</sup> Located in central Norway, Trondheim is the country's third largest city, with a population of just over 160,000. Founded in 997 primarily as a harbour town, it lies along the banks of the Nidelven River just as it swings out into Trondheimsfjord (Eriksen, 1999:140).



Map 1: Trondheim

The Nidelven River lies to the north and east along Tiller’s boundaries. Otherwise, Tiller is surrounded by the rolling landscape which is typical of the area around Trondheim, but Tiller itself is flat. Driving towards Trondheim from the south, the physical form of the neighbourhood is clearly laid out to the right. Marked first by Trondheim Electricity’s recycling plant, the warehouses and shopping centres follow afterwards in quick succession. The ‘milk carton’ or ‘Melkekartongen’, which is the local name for the Comfort Choice Hotel, towers above everything, but an observant driver will catch a glimpse of the Dandelion sculpture just before being distracted by City Syd’s great white building<sup>5</sup>. Office blocks and warehouses make up the rest of the man-made structures visible from the motorway. A really observant driver would perhaps notice the

<sup>5</sup> The hotel is intended to mark where the centre of Tiller is located. It is the result of an idea that was presented by architect Harald Høyem during the 1969 architectural competition.



long green mounds which are noise deflection walls, protecting and partially hiding the housing estates which lie further west beyond the shopping centres and warehouses<sup>6</sup>.

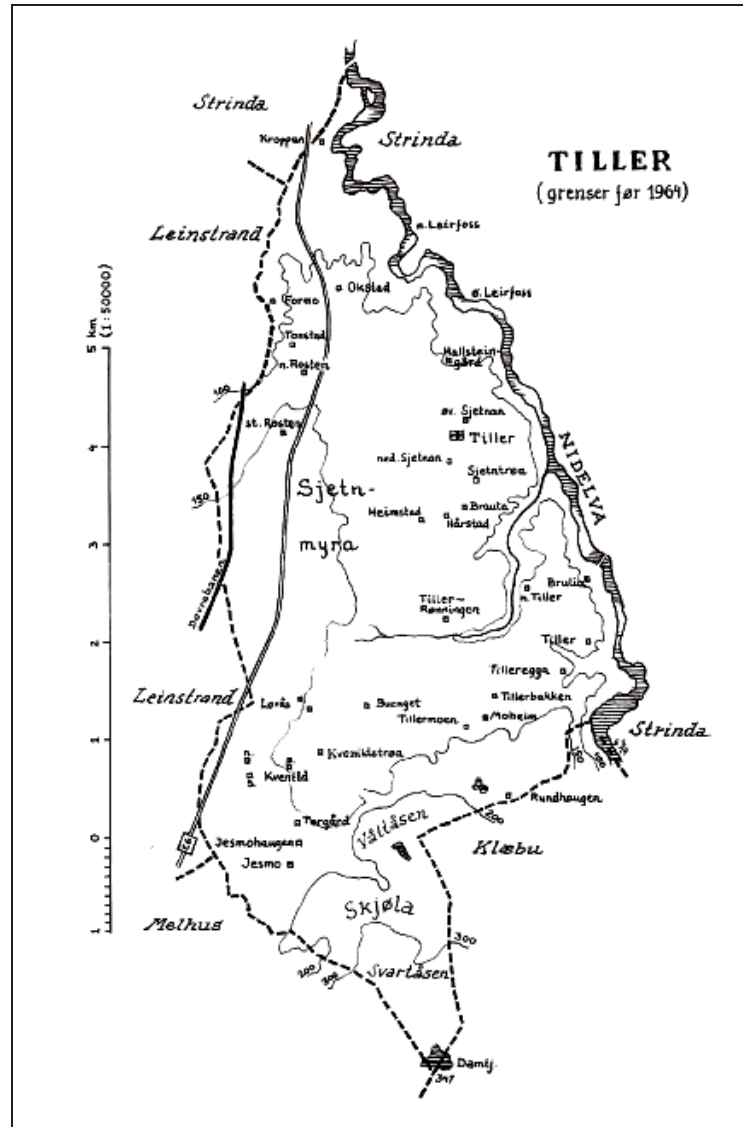


‘Melkekartongen’, Choice Quality Comfort hotel, Tiller October 2007

Local history provides a perspective with which to understand the neighbourhood’s development. Until 1964, Tiller was an independent parish council. In 1964, Trondheim City Council became the large council it is today when it merged with the smaller neighbouring councils of Tiller, Byneset, Leinstrand and Strinda. Tiller was the smallest of the four merging councils. In 1964 just before the merge, Tiller included 23.68 square kilometres of land. Within the area there were seventy-three farms and the population was 3,616. Despite its smallness, Tiller’s history is long. Archaeologists have found traces of human activity that are 1,600 years old and the land records go back almost 800 years (Jensås 1980:9).

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<sup>6</sup> The mounds are made up of the peat that was removed before the marshland could be built upon.



Map 2: Tiller municipality, 1964 (Jensås 1980:14)

Up until the 1970s, there was very little in Tiller except marshland, farms and a few houses. The area was used mostly for grazing and peat cutting<sup>7</sup>. Historian Henry

<sup>7</sup> The marshland was not suitable for cultivation as it was water-logged and deep, making it difficult to farm using traditional methods.

Jensås suggested in 1980 that it was the marsh, Sjetnmyra, in the middle of the parish that Tiller was known for: “It was several kilometres long and covered quite a large area for people to build and farm upon. Per Chr. Asbjørnson the collector of folk tales, meant that there ought to be considerable cultivation of the land here. At the turn of the century people believed that a peat industry should be established, and in the 1930s experts suggested the building of an airport. None of these things came about. In 1980 politicians are planning to build a town.” (Jensås, 1980:14,15)<sup>8</sup>. Several elderly people that I met at City Syd also mentioned the marshland and the peat that used to be cut there. One gentleman told me “*I moved into the area in 1964. There have been a lot changes since then. They used to cut peat here.*” These elderly shoppers were proud of their longstanding connection with the neighbourhood and also a little nostalgic about how it used to be.

For some people at City Syd, this history has been used to understand why a Dandelion was chosen for Tiller and City Syd, for example one elderly man said: “*It reminds me of my childhood. I grew up here. I remember the area when it was still marshland and full of flowers.*” Tiller, they suggested, was not just about shopping and commerce, its history and the natural forms that used to exist there could be associated with the Dandelion. Since the 1970s, the neighbourhood has been subject to physical and social changes, and the flat plain upon which it is built is one of the few physical reminders of the marshland which once dominated the area.

### **Planning for the Future**

In 1966, Trondheim City Council proposed a new suburban neighbourhood in Tiller. The council expected a population explosion and the neighbourhood was planned to take some of the pressure off urban development and to preserve existing environmental qualities within the traditional city centre (Stugu 1991:15). The planned suburban area in Tiller was initially visualised as an independent town centre; a kind of twin to the city centre was described in the 1969 architectural competition (1991:22)<sup>9</sup>. The population

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<sup>8</sup> My translation from Norwegian.

<sup>9</sup> The New Towns outside London and Glasgow in post-war Britain were, according to historian Ola Svein Stugu, an important source of inspiration for Trondheim’s city planners (Stugu, 1991:25).

explosion never actually happened (1991:9). In 1966, the housing administration envisioned a population of 35,000 to 40,000 in the new neighbourhood; by 1972, the envisioned number was somewhat reduced with some reports suggesting 24,000 and others 12-18,000<sup>10</sup>.

During the 1960s, town planners were interested in getting car related functions out of the city centre. The transport system in Tiller was taken seriously and all the roads were to have four lanes and a large number of parking spaces were planned. Privately owned cars were given a lot of space and an important role within how the neighbourhood was seen as functioning. The road network in and around Tiller has influenced how the neighbourhood developed. The E6 motorway cuts through Tiller taking traffic from North to South, not only in Trondheim but through the length of Norway. The road system today is a compromise between the expectations of the 1970s and the reality as understood during the 1980s. Cars dominate the visual impression of the neighbourhood and pedestrians move in zones that are not necessarily convenient or direct. The intention of the planners was to keep pedestrians and cars separate whereby they each had their own channels of movement as this was considered safer.

The faith in the car has so far not proved to be misguided. In 2006, the car was the most common form of transport in Trondheim with 52 % of all journeys made by car<sup>11</sup>. Tiller today covers a large area; it is a car-based suburb, locally known as “Bilbyen” or “Car City”. It is perhaps not surprising that the Dandelion sculpture should have ended up being installed in the middle of a traffic island. The best views and the closest contact are achieved from the inside of a car or other motorised vehicles.

The planning of the new Tiller neighbourhood was not left to chance; an architectural competition was announced in 1966. The intention was to provide guidelines for the building of the neighbourhood to define what was to be built, and where and how it was to be built. The original architectural plan was, according to architect Bjørn Røe who helped to organise the competition, very Nordic in form and ideals. The winning

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<sup>10</sup> Other new neighbourhoods were planned and developed parallel with the plans for the new town in Tiller. Sjetnemarka was built during the 1960s and the planning of Saupstad-Flatåsen, Kattem-Romulslia was well on its way. Today City Syd is the main service centre for these suburban neighbourhoods.

<sup>11</sup> Customer Analysis City Syd, June 2006, Strategi markedsanalyse AS ved Svend A. Eggen, p. 9

proposals were both by Scandinavian architects and the jury was made up of Scandinavian representatives. The intention of those who organised the competition and the architects who won was therefore different from the description of the area today by the public art committee member presented earlier in the chapter, where the area is described as being “*common in the western world.*” A local identity has been achieved around the housing estates, but the commercial zone where the shopping centres and retail warehouses are located does not have a particularly Nordic feel.

A low plan neighbourhood was initially planned with mixed use buildings. The plan presented in 1971 suggested 6,000 homes in small blocks of flats around a large square ring road which ran partially parallel with the planned E6 motorway. Shops and other services were to be built along the western side of the ring road. Practical and commercial needs have influenced the form that the neighbourhood has developed into today. The physical appearance does not suggest clear guidelines based on an architectural plan, particularly within the commercial area. When asked what she thought of the architecture around City Syd, a hairdresser who works in the shopping centre expressed irritation, “*It is absolutely awful.*” She could not understand why they had built the kind of buildings that have appeared in Tiller. In her opinion they are cheap and ugly, and she expressed disappointment about planning regulations for the area. She suggested that the city council should require more of commercial developers. The commercial area has a number of large retail warehouses, three shopping centres including City Syd, and fast food restaurants of which McDonald’s is a very visible representative. The architecture is typically retail; rapidly built and low cost. It is, I suggest, not aesthetically pleasing, but rather as the taxi driver quoted at the beginning of the chapter suggests, it is practical.

The architectural plans for the area were never realised because Trondheim City Council was unable to fund the development of Tiller alone. It was dependent on the involvement of private investors. The population explosion which the council had initially planned for did not happen and this made developing the area less attractive. In addition, draining and developing the marshland proved more costly than expected.

When asked why she thought a dandelion in particular was chosen for the roundabout, a woman shopping at City Syd said, “***Because the whole area suddenly grew out of nothing. It’s not that long since there was just marshland here.***” Dandelions, the woman is suggesting, also have the ability to grow out of nothing, just like shopping centres. Marshland is often associated with emptiness. This may be an emptiness which can be filled but it does provide physical limitations, and in Tiller it does in a subversive way continue to influence the physical form and the social activities in the place. The landscape is still flat and open, and the buildings that were built are a result of being cost effective in relation to the price of draining the marshland. Draining the marshland is not such a problem now, but the visual tone of the neighbourhood has so far been set by it<sup>12</sup>. In 1966, town engineer Gerhard Bjordal criticised the plans to build in Tiller. He characterised the site as “the worst construction site in the town area” (Stugu, 1991:35). Marshland had to be drained and the price of the land per square metre was high. During the late 1960s, Tiller was called “Northern Europe’s largest drainage project” (1991:21).

Despite this criticism, the local population and politicians in Trondheim were initially positive about the plans to develop Tiller. In the early 1970s, the attitude to the plans changed. This was based on scepticism to the site and to the fact that the population was no longer expected to grow at such a dramatic rate. Moreover there was the environmental aspect and the protection of agricultural land to consider. Plans for the neighbourhood therefore became less extensive and the speed of development was reduced. The idea that Tiller was to be a service centre for the city was also put aside. An architect involved in the architectural competition commented on the disparity between the expectations and what became the actual reality: “***The background was actually large town growth that never appeared on the expected scale. They invested in infrastructure which could cope with such growth. That is, not just roads but also the sewerage system. I don’t know if it is still on a very exaggerated scale but I think it is. They expected a totally different degree of density than what became the actual case.***”

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<sup>12</sup> The Tiller area has a history of geological problems. In 1816, Tiller church and the Nordgården farm were destroyed by a landslide. Large amounts of quick clay slid into the Nidelven River. The landslide and the tidal wave which followed killed fifteen people, including a farmer from Nordgården. Other landslides prior to the one in 1816 are recorded, but none were as serious.

As the architect suggests, some of the plans based on the expected growth became reality. For example, the road and sewage systems are partially a result of the early planning process. By 1990, it was suggested that a maximum of 2,300 homes should be built as opposed to the 6,000 suggested in the early 1970s. The first inhabitants moved into new houses in Tiller in 1977. By this time, small blocks of flats were no longer the fashion; Tiller housing is primarily low-rise houses rather than flats<sup>13</sup>.

### The City Syd Shopping Centre



City Syd, August 2007

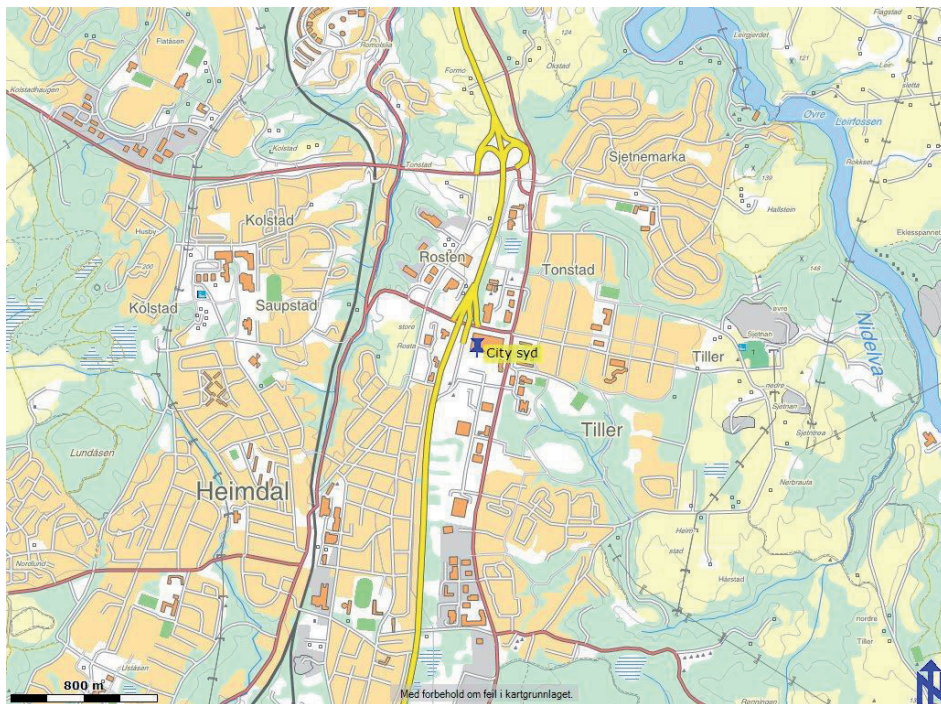
The Dandelion sculpture stands on a traffic roundabout at the entrance to the City Syd car park. For visitors to City Syd it may be the first thing that they notice before they begin to

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<sup>13</sup> The neighbourhood has nursery schools, two primary schools, a lower secondary school and two upper secondary schools. These were built during the 1980s as the population became more established. A sports centre is located close to the schools.



negotiate all the practical and retail options provided by the area, but I believe that the Dandelion has difficulty competing with the physical and social form which is City Syd. The exterior of City Syd and its surroundings are functional and perhaps not particularly exciting architecturally, but the whole thing is in many ways unique. City Syd has what the architect and shopping centre specialist Nadine Beddington would describe as a “strong self-image” (Beddington 1982:1). No other shopping centre in the region has exactly the same physical form, or has achieved the popularity and profits that City Syd has. The architectural design team from Rødal Architects who designed City Syd played with the idea that City Syd, and the area leading up to it, had similarities with Carl Johan gate and the Royal Palace in Oslo, and City Syd has in some ways become a commercial palace. The role that the Dandelion plays must therefore be seen in collaboration or negotiation with City Syd and the rest of the physical environment around it.



Map 3: The Tiller neighbourhood, Trondheim, 2010



In 1991, the historian Ola Svein Stugu summed up the physical environment in the neighbourhood in this way: “Commerce has triumphed, non-commercial elements have been marginalised and in the urban landscape it is difficult to see any connection with the vision from twenty years ago” (Stugu, 1991:79)<sup>14</sup>. City Syd is therefore not the result of the planning vision from the late 1960s and early 1970s, but commercial needs are what dominate City Syd and the area around it. There are three shopping centres in Tiller including City Syd. City Syd, which opened in 1987, is the largest of the three and until recently it was the largest in central Norway<sup>15</sup>.

The zoning plan for the shopping centre was presented at the end of 1983. Commercial development became a reality during the 1980s because the price of land in Tiller became more reasonable and the city council encouraged commercial development. Architect Bjørn Røe said in 1981 that “The idea of an alternative town has crumbled away and become a suburb” (Stugu, 1991:80)<sup>16</sup>. Trondheim City Council no longer saw the neighbourhood as a potential twin, and available land was regarded as a property reserve which was to be used for the benefit of the whole of Trondheim, and not just in a neighbourhood context.

With the opening of City Syd, Tiller was finally able to fulfil its intended role as relief for Trondheim city centre. When it first opened, the shopping centre was 28,500 square metres and it cost 200 million kroner to build<sup>17</sup>. City Syd was officially opened on September 17<sup>th</sup> 1987. The shopping centre building is currently 38,000 square metres and has seventy-one shops spread out over three floors. In 2007, there were 3.6 million visitors to City Syd. The location close to the E6 and also the spin-off effect of City Syd’s success has meant that other businesses have been established in the area. The retail business in Trondheim city centre was initially affected by City Syd’s success. Today, City Syd is an accepted part of the retail dynamic around Trondheim<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> My translation from Norwegian.

<sup>15</sup> Amfi Steinkjær has twice as many square meters, but City Syd still has a greater profit margin, Adressavisa December 5th 2009. Steinkjær is in the second largest town Nord-Trøndelag, and is 120 kilometers north of Trondheim.

<sup>16</sup> My translation.

<sup>17</sup> The name “City Syd” came from a competition amongst advertising companies.

<sup>18</sup> In 2008, the owners introduced plans to expand the shopping centre by 40,000 square meters in 2010. Political scepticism has prevented these plans from being realised as it was suggested that City Syd’s



City Syd, April 2007

City Syd is white and big, a member of the shopping centre public described City Syd as “*a mammoth*”. Architect Sigbjørn Berstad, who was a member of the team from Rødal Architects which designed City Syd, said that they aimed to make the shopping centre look big. He said that the design team had a choice when they were designing it; they could either make it look smaller than it actually was, or bigger, and they chose to make it look bigger, “*It was really big, and we did what we could to make it look even bigger.*” This has not gone unnoticed by the public at City Syd. A young mother I met in City Syd, when asked what she thought of the shopping centre’s architecture, put it this way: “*It is a very big building, and it’s the way they advertise for themselves, in relation to the XXL shopping centre campaign. It is in a way enormous, but I have seen nicer*

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growth would have a negative effect on town centre businesses and increase traffic congestion. The plans are on hold at least until the roads around Tiller have been improved.

*shopping centres both inside and out*<sup>19</sup>. City Syd is known for its size but as the woman suggests, big is not necessarily always beautiful.

Advertising boards add colour to the mainly white exterior of the shopping centre. The exterior walls are covered with logos, allowing the shops inside its windowless exterior to present themselves before the customer enters the shopping centre. The City Syd logo, which towers above the entrance saying City Syd, also adds colour. A large red arrow tells us that we are at City Syd<sup>20</sup>. The arrow is visible from the E6 motorway. The bowed glass entrance under the arrow breaks up the flat monotony of the façade and invites connections with glass façades of the luxurious shopping centres built during the 1980s in Europe and North America<sup>21</sup>.

City Syd's architecture is what architect Robert Venturi would describe as the "architecture of bold communication" (Venturi, et al. 1977:9). It does not attempt to be subtle. All the visual codes necessary to put that across have been used. During the late 1980s and the 1990s, City Syd was a symbol of central Norwegian shopping centre luxury, but some of the glamour has now worn off. City Syd is less polished than it used to be and it is starting to show its age. When asked about the architecture, some of the shoppers I met were negative about the visual form of the shopping centre, despite the fact they often chose to shop there and were positive to its practical characteristics. One shopper told me, "*It's UGLY. Yes ugly with capital letters. It's a typical shopping centre. There is nothing about its architecture which is intended to make people feel comfortable, not outside and not inside. It's impersonal.*" This shopper gave a negative response to my question about City Syd's architecture, but other people I spoke to did not have anything negative to say about the shopping centre. They liked City Syd, it is functional and the architecture did not arouse any negative associations. Several people said that they had not given it any thought. An elderly man whom I met in a café at City Syd had this to say about the architecture, "*I think it's terrific. Nice, well laid out.*"

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<sup>19</sup> City Syd ran the XXL marketing promotion in 2007. They described themselves as the extra, extra large shopping centre.

<sup>20</sup> City Syd translates as City "South". The arrow above the shopping centre does not point south, but it does point to City Syd.

<sup>21</sup> City Syd's architects were inspired by this architecture; they went on study trips to England and the USA.

Another feature which characterises the exterior of the shopping centre is the car park. If City Syd is the royal palace suggested by the architectural design team, then the car park in front is its parade ground. The car park was intended by its architects to emphasise the size of City Syd, but for some of the people I spoke to at the shopping centre, it also emphasises its lack of positive aesthetic qualities. A teenage boy who was positive about the shopping centre building was less enthusiastic about the area around City Syd: “*The area around it is not nice. There is no style; buildings have just been thrown out there.*” Practical considerations have full control over what is a very active public place. Rows and rows of cars fill a large open space. The monotony is only broken by the trolley sheds and a few small trees.



City Syd, February 2007

Not everyone sees the physical characteristics of the car park as negative. An elderly man described the area around City Syd as “...*very open and nice, there is a lot*”

*of space for parking but it's still not enough.*" There are 1,450 parking spaces and customers do not have to pay to park at City Syd. Despite this, at critical times of the year the car park is bursting at the seams. The centre manager at City Syd suggested that some customers would park inside the shopping centre if they were given the opportunity, so strong is the need to find a parking space, and not just any parking space, the most convenient space, the one closest to the entrance. The original plans for the shopping centre proposed an underground car park, but during the development of the centre in the 1980s this was considered too expensive and land was readily available in Tiller at this time. When City Syd's owners presented plans for the renewal and development of the shopping centre in 2008, an underground car park was part of these plans.

Trondheim town centre offers a pleasant shopping environment but it does not have the space for car-based shopping and shoppers have to pay to park within the city centre. City Syd has the parking spaces and the road network. City Syd was established in the Tiller neighbourhood because it was only fifteen minutes' drive away from Trondheim city centre and all the potential customers who live in the city. Its location close to the E6 motorway means that smaller communities like Klæbu, Melhus and Skaun, which lie to the south of Trondheim, find it easily accessible. At the same time, City Syd fulfils a role as a meeting point for the neighbourhood. It is the local shop and a gathering place for the people who live close to it. In a market report from 2006, it was stated that: "The areas Byneset, Heimdal and Tiller constitute 18 % of the city's population, 42 % of the visitors and about half the sales. This means that City Syd is dependent on its success in the local community. The shopping centre is not just a regional institution, but also the local shop for the community around it"<sup>22</sup> The shopping centre therefore not only plays a commercial role, it also plays a role within the community that lives around it.

The role as a local service centre was part of the original development plan, but during the development of the shopping centre, the idea seems to have been lost, while commercial requirements triumphed. There is no library, cinema or doctors' surgery and originally there was no chemist. The original plans for the neighbourhood developed

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<sup>22</sup> Kundeanalyse City Syd, June 2006, Strategi markedsanalyse AS ved Svend A. Eggen. My translation from Norwegian.

during the architectural competition in 1969 suggest an open but compact precinct with an underground car park. The centre was expected to include various services and functions, allowing activity during the day and in the evening. Open shopping precincts built in new towns in Britain and Swedish suburbs during the 1960s and early 1970s had not been completely successful financially or socially. Security and maintenance is cheaper in closed centres. Enclosed shopping centres had become the European norm and City Syd followed this trend. The odds were stacked against City Syd becoming a local service centre, but it is the main shopping complex in Tiller, and after thirty years of use its role at the centre of the neighbourhood context has become established.

### **Summary and Reflections**

The focus of this chapter is the physical, social and historical context, particularly around the City Syd shopping centre, which provides background for the Dandelion sculpture. The social aspect is represented here by the expected population explosion and the commercial focus within the neighbourhood, particularly in the area around City Syd. The physical aspect makes its presence known through the subversive influence of the marshland and the architectural form which characterises the neighbourhood. Tiller is a neighbourhood with a commercial bias; there are housing estates and schools as well, but it is best known for its commercial strip and the City Syd shopping centre. The historical aspect is present in the analysis of the neighbourhood's development and the physical, social and commercial factors which played a role here. Prior to the 1960s, there was very little in the Tiller area other than marshland. Trondheim City Council, who expected a population explosion during the 1960's, saw the benefits of developing a new city centre in Tiller. There are two main reasons why Tiller never became the twin city sketched out during the architectural competition; the expected population explosion never happened and the marshland which dominated the area was too expensive to develop. During the 1980s, the price of land became more reasonable and this allowed the development of the commercial zone. When it opened in 1987, City Syd was the largest shopping centre in central Norway, and it is still a profitable establishment with a large and stable group of customers, who are the envy of its competitors. It has become a little less glamorous, but its customers appreciate it because of its practical qualities. The



commercial history associated with Tiller and City Syd is relatively recent in comparison with the Bullring, which will be presented in the next chapter, but after more than 20 years it has a strong commercial identity and an established role within Trondheim and central Norway.

Visually, the area around City Syd has its challenges, but as one of the eight representatives on the public art committee suggested, “*It isn’t any worse at City Syd than at other places it would be natural to compare it with*”, which points to City Syd fulfilling a role within the urban context in Trondheim. However, there are still things that could be improved upon, as is suggested by the public art project which will be presented more fully in the next section of the thesis. The agency of the shopping centre is dominant in the neighbourhood and, I suggest, it influences the agency of any public work of art located within its vicinity. A context supports and influences social activity, and it also affects the meaning and value of objects that enter it. Being part of the Tiller neighbourhood in close association with City Syd will, I propose, influence the meaning and value of the Dandelion sculpture.



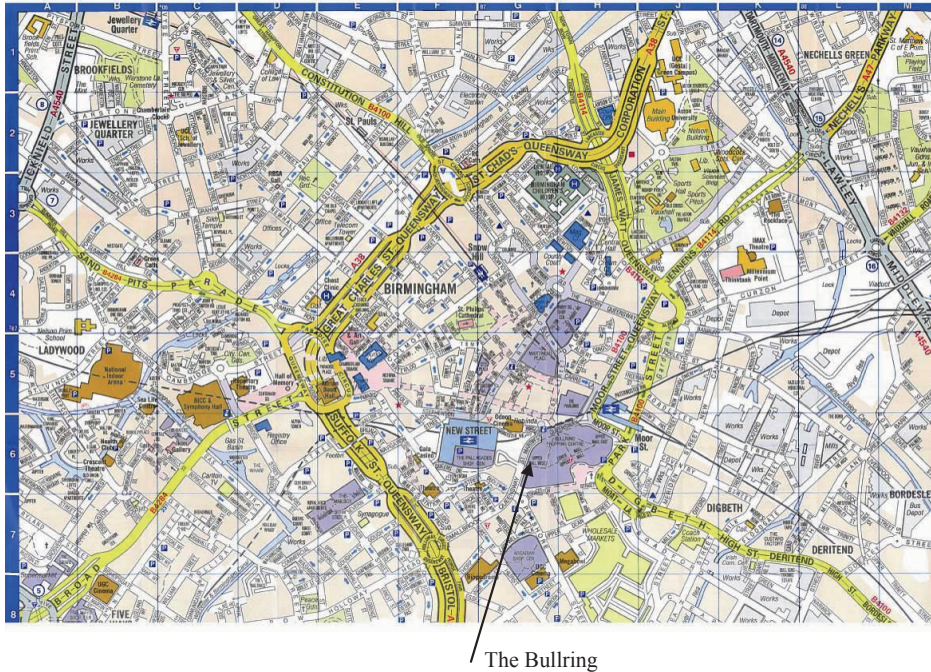
## 5. Birmingham and its Bullring



The Bullring, May 2009

This chapter provides the background to understand the role that the public art plays in the Bullring and the choices made by the shopping centre developers when they were planning the public art. It is primarily the shopping centre context which is described here. Arjun Appadurai describes the context as a social arena which influences the exchangeability of an object in past, present and future capacities (Appadurai, 1986:13). In addition to the social and historical influences suggested by Appadurai, it is suggested here that the context includes physical factors that influence the social activity, and the plans for development and change. The chapter therefore starts with a condensed version of Birmingham's history, with particular emphasis on the history of the Bull Ring markets. The next two sections present individually the two shopping centres that have

existed on the Bullring site. The chapter is concluded with a discussion about public space in Birmingham.



Map 4: Birmingham city centre, 2004

Since opening in 2003, the Bullring shopping centre has become a symbol of the new Birmingham and its economic revival. A young man who worked in a café in the Bullring said, *“I think the Bullring is really great. It’s the place to be in Birmingham. If you compare it with the old Bullring which was there before, it’s like chalk and cheese. The old Bullring represents what is traditional. The new Bullring represents what is modern, the future.”* The man is referring to the physical changes in the Bullring, the decline of the previous shopping centre and the development of a new Bullring. However, as this chapter intends to show, tradition has not been completely abandoned in the Bullring. The history of the place plays a role in the shopping centre today and it is part of the context that influenced the planning of the public art.

The Bullring is a very different shopping centre to City Syd. City Syd is a suburban shopping centre, and the site's trading history is relatively recent. The landscape in Tiller and the marshland it was built upon influenced the physical form of the neighbourhood and the location of the shopping centre. Physical and social processes, which include the history of the site, influenced the development of the Bullring, which is bigger, newer, has different architecture and more art, and in addition is located in the centre of Birmingham in close proximity to two railway stations, high street shops and traditional market halls. The Bullring is part of Birmingham city centre and its history.

## A Market City



Map 5: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 2011

The biographical approach to understanding the social life of things proposed by Arjun Appadurai suggests that an object may have a past, present and a future within the system of exchange that it is moving through, and the context in particular is described as not only social but also historical (Appadurai, 1986:13,14). It is therefore suggested here that the social life of a public work of art within the Bullring will be affected by the social and historical background associated with the context, and that the physical qualities of the

context are intimately linked with the social and historical. This section therefore provides a historical and social background with which to understand the Bullring in its location within Birmingham city centre. Birmingham is both a city and a metropolitan borough located in the West Midlands. It is the second largest city in the UK. The population in 2008 was a little over a million, and the Asian population is close to being the largest ethnic group in Birmingham. Its metropolitan area includes the towns of Solihull, Wolverhampton and the industrial towns of the Black Country located to the north: Dudley, Sandwell and Walsall. The Bullring shopping centre is located in the centre of Birmingham on the site of a 1960s' shopping centre, which is also where the first Birmingham market was established during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The shopping centre attracts customers from all over Europe. In 2007, forty million visitors passed through the Bullring.

Markets and shopping streets have been at the centre of the Birmingham economy since the market was established during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to the first shopping centre development in the 1960s, the city had a typical market square core that many great trading cities have, but Birmingham is different from cities like London, Antwerp or Paris, because there are few natural advantages connected to it as a site for a market. It was recorded in the Domesday book in 1086, as an “insignificant agricultural settlement” (Leather 2005:9). Birmingham historian Peter Leather suggests that it “was not nature but personal acumen that swung the balance” causing the local lord Peter de Bermingham to be granted a royal market charter in 1166 by King Henry II (2005:9). The original market place was not particularly large and as trade grew the market expanded into the streets around. In the early 1700s, Birmingham was still confined to a small area based on the mediaeval core of St Martin's church, the manor house, and the Bull Ring market<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The source of the name, the Bull Ring is uncertain. The Bull Ring was first referred to in ca. 1550, several hundred years after the market was first established, when butchers' stalls and shops had begun to dominate the market area (Leather, 2005:16). It has been suggested that the market contained an iron ring which it was possible to attach bulls to while they were waiting to be sold at the cattle market. It has also been suggested that bull baiting took place in the market area, though none of these suggestions has been confirmed by historical sources (Baird, 2004:10). The name was originally made up of two words, Bull Ring. The area was renamed the Bullring in 2003 by Hammerson Plc, the shopping centre developers, a change that was not popular with everyone, “The historic name of the Bull Ring, which until recently was the name of a public street which has existed for centuries, even surviving the 1960s cataclysm, has been appropriated by Hammerson as their private property and converted into the BullRing. It is now a brand,



A male shopper I spoke to in the Bullring said “*There wasn’t anything here before the 1700s*”. He considered Birmingham’s history to be industrial, starting during the industrial revolution and not in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with the establishment of a market. Between 1723 and 1815 Birmingham’s population grew from around 12,000 to almost 100,000. However, even after this massive growth caused by the mechanisation and expansion of Birmingham’s industries, the town’s core remained around the market and the church.



Birmingham, May 2009

The market kept Birmingham afloat through the trials presented by the Black Death and civil war. This was despite its location within a relatively poor agricultural area. By the

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the name of a piece of private property.” (Holyoak, 2004:22). I will be using the name Bullring, except when the original version is specifically referred to. This is because most of the research refers to the new Bullring.

1700s, the market was no longer the centre of Birmingham's commercial activity, but it serviced the rapidly growing population. The population grew during the industrial revolution when Birmingham's geological advantages became apparent. Birmingham was located within easy access to coal, ironstone and limestone, all essential elements in the iron smelting process. Initially, the industry was mostly based on the production of small items, such as buckles and buttons, so called "*toys*", an industry which was important well into the 1800s. This activity started out as workshop-based but by the late 1800s it was predominantly mechanised and mass produced. Peter Leather suggests that Birmingham's real affluence was based on the metal and arms trade. In the 1500s, the town specialised in blade making; from the 1700s, the speciality was guns (Leather, 2005:16). By the early 1800s, Birmingham also had good transport facilities in the form of an impressive canal network, the beginnings of a professional banking system, as well as a rapidly growing population (2005:26). In the 1830s, the first railway line was built and the opportunity to sell and transport its goods was further improved. Birmingham was on its way to becoming one of the largest cities in Britain.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the area around the Bull Ring was cleared to make way for a bigger market and the general market moved there from the High Street. Other markets followed and were located on the site of the old manor house moat (Baird 2004:9). The markets moved into a large covered market in 1835. The market hall opening drew crowds of visitors to the Bull Ring. It was the newest and biggest public structure of its day at 365 square feet. Birmingham historian Carl Chinn suggests that not only was it large, it was also "grand" with massive Doric columns and archways framed with porticoes (Chinn 2000:129). The town hall which was built during the same period had similar classical architectural influences, but the market hall was the first to be completed. It was the most exciting commercial structure of its day, in a similar way to the Bullring shopping centre today. The market hall was gutted by a bomb in 1940, but the outer shell continued to be used as a market place until the area was redeveloped in the early 1960s<sup>2</sup>. Several older members of the shopping centre public mentioned

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<sup>2</sup> The walls of the old market hall were demolished in 1963.

remembering the classical columns and the large iron gate, which was in front of the old market hall.



Market hall 1895, WK/D1/808 Warwickshire Photographic Survey (WPS). Birmingham Libraries and Archives

Birmingham's economic character changed in the late 1800s and early 1900s as major factories were established on Greenfield sites on the outskirts of the city. Cadbury's chocolate factory was opened in Bourneville and Austin's started automobile production at Longfield. The city's industry continued to grow during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its role as an industrial city was important during two world wars, and made Birmingham the target for a number of bombing raids during the Second World War.

The post-war period saw the redevelopment of the city. It is suggested by literature professor Deborah Parsons that "constant reinvention, however, is one of the historical characteristics of a city that has long been quick to demolish the past in favour of an embrace of the new" (Parsons, 2004:27)<sup>3</sup>. Change is therefore not something which

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<sup>3</sup> There were urban renewal projects after the industrial revolution with slum clearances, drainage projects as well as the relocation of the markets into the first market hall.



is new to Birmingham. However, when the first Bullring shopping centre was built, the physical changes were on a larger scale. The old Bull Ring market place and the buildings around it, as well as the mediaeval street structure which connected it to the city, all disappeared underneath the modern concrete shopping centre, and the area was enclosed in a ring road. The ring road connected the city centre to a major new road system, and effectively enclosed the Bull Ring, separating it from the rest of the city centre. I was told by a lady shopping in the Bullring that people were either in the market areas or on the other side of the road where the town centre shops were, they did not really cross over. The public art consultant who worked on the planning and production of the public art project in the Bullring described the reinstatement of the connection between the two parts of the city in this way: ***“this whole thing about the Bullring was an incredible engineering project....actually breaking through this concrete necktie. Re-establishing a central street which led down to St. Martin’s church, a very famous and very old part of Birmingham, and it’s on a hill, it literally sits at the bottom of a hill and you gradually go up to the town hall at the very top.”*** When the “concrete necktie” disappeared, the centre of Birmingham became a single physical structure again.

The physical framework of the market place has undergone a lot of changes, what has remained constant is the location of the markets and the main retail activity at the centre of Birmingham. During my fieldwork, I met a number of older Birmingham residents who had fond memories of the town centre before the redevelopment in the 1960s. An elderly woman who was shopping in the Bullring with her daughter did not have much good to say about today’s shopping centre and was nostalgic about the time before the two shopping centres. ***“I remember the old Bull Ring with the fish markets, the 50s’ Bull Ring before the 60s’ shopping centre. My family have bought me a lovely painting of the old Bull Ring with the markets and the old blind lady selling plastic bags.”*** She preferred the Bullring that existed before the shopping centres even though it was more than forty years since its demolition. However, the development of the two shopping centres has not completely wiped out all traces of the place as it used to be, with St. Martin’s church, the gradient and a few street names still remaining. These elements and

the less tangible memories of people of Birmingham prevent the Bull Ring as it was before the 1960s from disappearing completely.

Memories of the previous Bullrings and the mediaeval market history are important to the image that the shopping centre presents about itself today<sup>4</sup>. The history of the site is emphasised in the information pack which was available on the internet after the shopping centre opened in 2004<sup>5</sup>. It is also present in several of the artworks in place around the shopping centre. The Bull is the most obvious reference to the history of the site, but also the bricks outside a downstairs entrance and the 24-hour railings contain references to the markets. The history of the site as a market place with links all the way back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century has been used to legitimise the location of the contemporary Bullring on the site. The shopping centre is therefore presented as a continuation of established market traditions in Birmingham.

### **The First Bull Ring Shopping Centre**

The first Bull Ring shopping centre was opened in May 1964. The shopping centre was based on the designs of the architect James Roberts cost eight million pounds to build and provided 33,000 square meters of retail space. It was a large concrete windowless structure; this kind of shopping centre was popular during the early 1960s and was an example of the brutalist architectural tradition<sup>6</sup>. They began demolishing the first Bull Ring shopping centre in 1999.

The first Bull Ring shopping centre is important to the idea of the new shopping centre, which grew up on the same site. It was the shopping centre not to be repeated, and represented the Birmingham that was to be left behind. It must not be forgotten though that initially the first Bull Ring shopping centre was modern and popular, and it was a 1960s' ideal. A man who worked for Birmingham City Council explained to me that the old shopping centre had not been all that bad, it had been quite popular when it was first

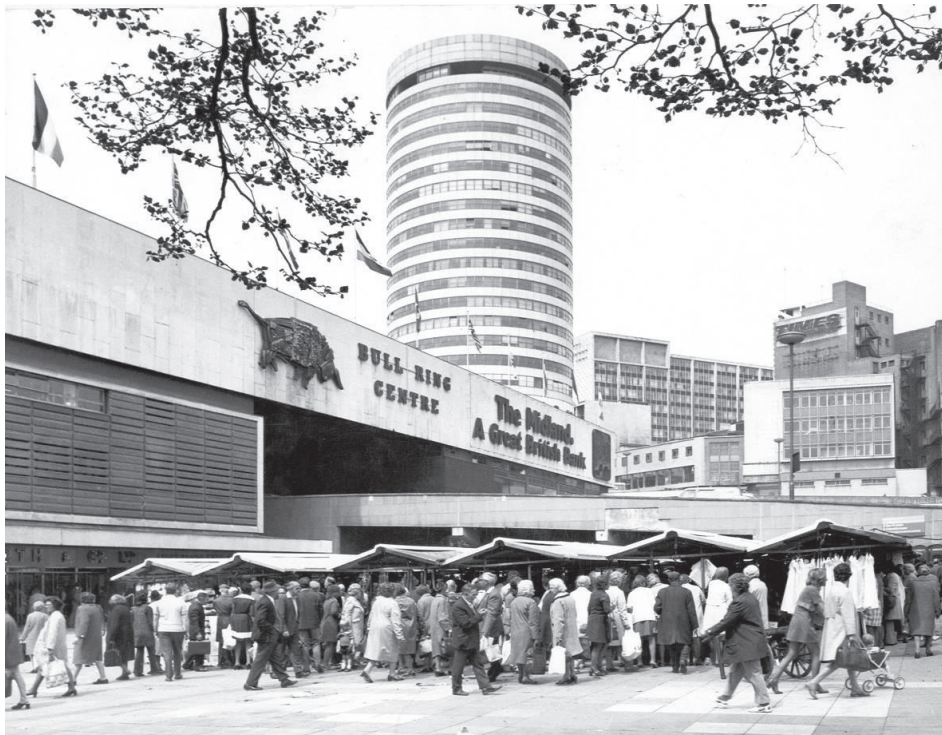
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<sup>4</sup> This historical background concentrating on market traditions is presented in an exhibition about the Bullring at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery which the shopping centre sponsored.

<sup>5</sup> The Bullring information pack, 2007. A more limited historical background is still presented on the website. <http://www.bullring.co.uk>

<sup>6</sup> The Brutalist tradition in architecture was mentioned in more detail in chapter 3.

built and rather special within the region. “*My brother-in-law is a butcher; he used to go there for the record shops. It was glamorous in a West Midlands kind of a way.*” He obviously looked up to his brother-in-law and had been slightly envious of his status as someone with access to the Bull Ring.



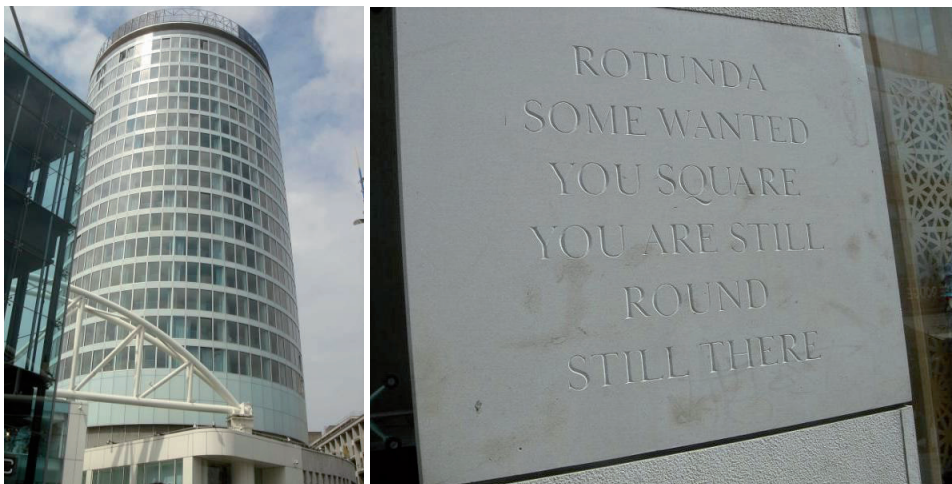
The Bull Ring ca. 1964, (Bull Ring 93, Warwickshire Photographic Survey (WPS). Birmingham Libraries and Archives)<sup>7</sup>

Birmingham championed 1960s’ modernism, and because its economy at that time was heavily involved with the car industry, it naturally championed the car and its needs. Urban theorist Liam Kennedy suggests that Birmingham “dedicated itself to the motor car and pressed pedestrians into subways; it championed mechanisation, mass production and the rational engineering of the urban community” (Kennedy 2004:1). These

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<sup>7</sup> The name Bull Ring was the official name which used to describe the area until 2003 when the second shopping centre was opened and Bullring was introduced.

characteristics, ones that were greeted with such enthusiasm in the early 1960s, had by the end of the 1970s lost a lot of their glamour. During the 1980s and 1990s, Birmingham's economic character underwent another change, where service industries became the main economic base and the heavy industries such as car production gradually disappeared from the city. The latest redevelopment of the city centre aimed at undoing the "motor city" image it was so proud of during the 1960s (2004:4).



The Rotunda, the Bullring, May 2008

The public art consultant who was involved in the public art project in today's Bullring described the enthusiasm for motor city in Birmingham: "*By the time we arrived, the Bull Ring as such was looking completely dilapidated and sort of third world really, because Birmingham was the first city to fully adopt the car. The car was all important, so roadways and everything were all over the place. It was the first place to have garages in the country, and stuff like that, so everything was subservient to the car.*" He was impressed by the extent of the belief in the car, but saw it as something which was not good for the city centre. An elderly man who struggled with the uphill gradient in the newest of the Bullrings still had a hankering after one of the transport solutions which the first shopping centre offered, "*I've known three Bullrings. The first one was the best; it was easiest to get around in. The second one was easiest to get to.*"

*The buses stopped right inside it*<sup>8</sup>. Very little of the development in the 1960s exists in the Bullring any more. Only the Rotunda office block remains, now a grade two listed building, converted into flats. However, it was not just the buses that elderly members of the public liked; one lady said “*I liked the old markets better. This new market isn’t as good, but the rest of the Bullring is an improvement.*” The comments that older people made about the two shopping centres are a reminder that, despite its problems, not everything was bad about the old shopping centre.



The Bull Ring 1964, (Bull Ring 104, Warwickshire Photographic Survey (WPS). Birmingham Libraries and Archives)

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<sup>8</sup> The gradient has been rebuilt, and it is a feature of the new shopping centre architecture. The Bullring incorporates a 19.5 metre drop in level from north to south.



## The Second Bullring Shopping Centre



The Bullring, May 2009

The Bullring in the form of the new shopping centre is again at the centre of the city's economic activity. The new Bullring shopping centre opened in 2003. Designed by Benoy-Concept architects, its retail area is 110,000 square meters over three levels. The development has changed the centre of Birmingham. A middle-aged male shopper in the Bullring explained the difference between the old and the new shopping centres: "***I think the old one was a bit bland, and this one is a bit bling.***" It is shiny both inside and out. Another person that I spoke to, this time an elderly lady said, "***It's a pleasant place, very clean. They keep it very clean. I don't come here very often but I've noticed that.***" After more than six years in existence, the shopping centre still has a veneer of newness. The people I spoke to in the Bullring appreciated its brightness and newness.

The outside of the Bullring combines a number of visual and structural elements of different styles and ages, and open spaces help to connect these different elements. The Bull, St. Martin's church, the Rotunda, the Statue of Lord Nelson and the Selfridges department store are the main elements. A man I met in the Bullring described the effect of the combination: "***There is this kind of iconic image, which is Selfridges next to the church, with the Rotunda in the background.***" The combination of the old with the new is eye-catching, but not everyone likes it. I met a middle-aged couple in the Bullring in February 2008 who were not keen. The wife was speaking for both of them when she said, "***We find change difficult and the Bullring is about change. We aren't really modernists. I agree with Prince Charles when he said that it was a carbuncle on the face of the earth.***" They shopped in the Bullring but they did not like its physical and visual form. Prince Charles did not call the Bullring a carbuncle, the woman was referring to the speech by the Prince of Wales to the Royal Institute of Architects in 1984, where he called the planned Sainsbury Wing for the National Gallery in London a "carbuncle". The couple was sceptical of the modern architectural form of the Bullring and Prince Charles is well-known in Britain for his scepticism towards modern architecture.

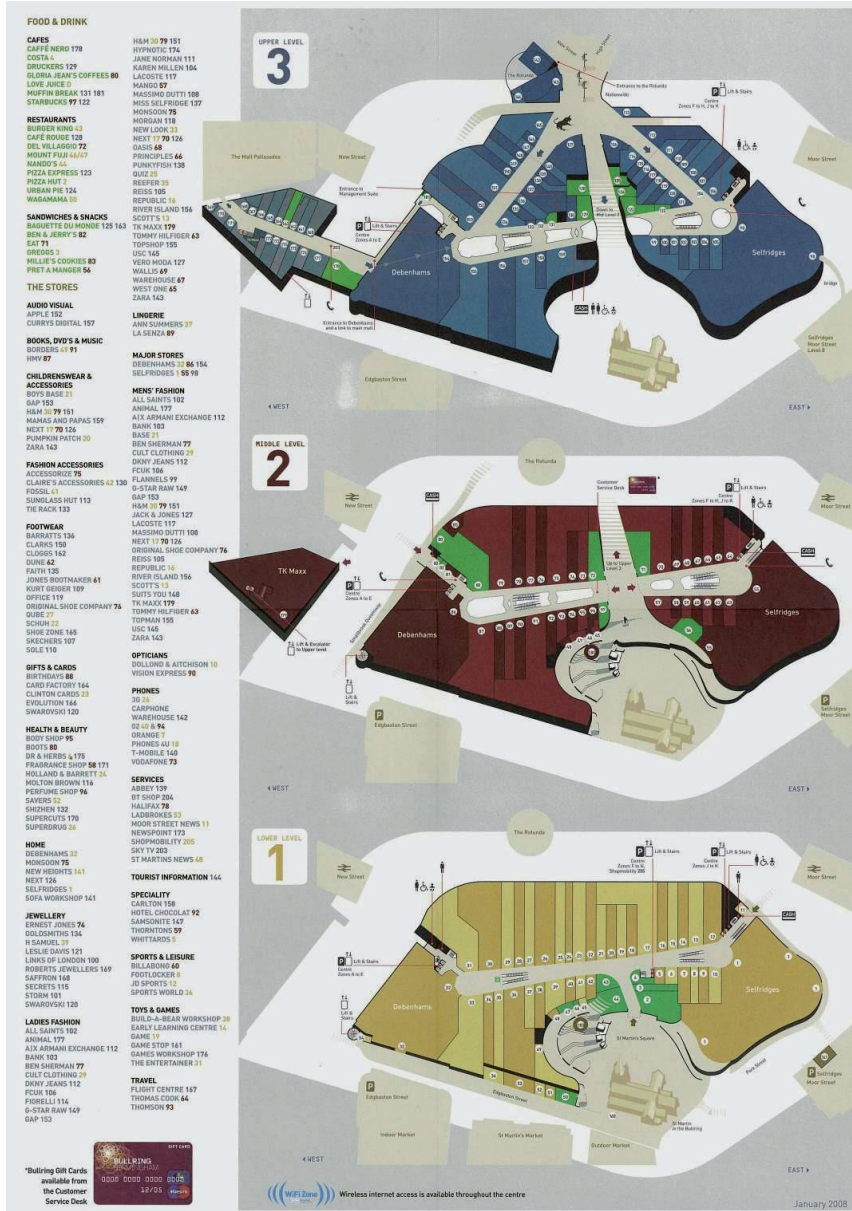
The Bullring is at the centre of the city, and its design aims to make it feel part of the city. It is not intended to function as a separate physical framework. The shopping centre is easily accessible to the city; it can be reached from its multi-storey car parks, or it can be entered on foot from a number of different directions, and is closely linked to bus and train services. The shopping centre is divided into two, which encourages the city centre connection. There is an open air avenue running through the middle, St Martin's Walk. This connects New Street with St. Martin's church and the markets. The Bullring is large but because it is divided into two main sections, the shopper is encouraged to move outside regularly along the open air avenue. A young girl who worked in a café in the shopping centre described the Bullring: "***It's big, it's nice, there are lots of shops. It is also good that you can go outside and sit.***" The outdoor access is therefore not just appreciated by shoppers but the girl's comment points to it encouraging a pleasant working environment.





The Bullring, May 2009

The two different sides of the shopping centre are each linked to a department store, on one side is Debenhams, on the other side is Selfridges. Inside on the underground level, the centre is connected and continuous. Thematically they are kept separate through the use of decorative elements in the open spaces and floors. The Selfridges side has circles as its theme, a theme which is associated with the discs on the outside of the department store. Debenhams uses squares. Once away from the entrances the shopping centre, it is like most shopping centres, basically windowless and the glass roof offers the only contact with the outside world. Although modern, the architecture in the Bullring is not unusual or dramatic, with the exception of the Selfridges building. Selfridges department store has become a Birmingham icon; it appears on numerous images of Birmingham, in the media, in advertising for the city and on postcards.



Map 6: The Bullring map, January 2008<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The three different colours refer to the three different levels in the shopping centre. On levels 2 and 3, the blue and red levels, you can clearly see the open air avenue that divides the shopping centre. The Bull marks the highest level in the shopping centre and St. Martin's church marks the bottom.

A teenage girl I met waiting by the Bull told me that “*People think of Birmingham when they see it. I did this computer game where they showed one of the discs and asked where the building was, and everyone knew it was from Birmingham even those who are not from Birmingham.*” The girl believed that the design of the store was positive for Birmingham.

Selfridges’ Managing Director Vittorio Radice wants Selfridges to be “the best and most exciting department store chain in Europe meeting the needs of (its) customers in a unique and theatrical way” (Parsons, 2004:31)<sup>10</sup>. The architecture found in the Birmingham store is part of this plan. The store was designed by Future Systems Architects and the design for the outside of the store was inspired by the skin of a chameleon and the sequins of a Paco Rabanne dress. Inside the Selfridges store it is a shop, and it is similar to other department stores. On the outside it is an example of unusual retail architecture, which has won prizes and achieved attention outside the UK<sup>11</sup>.

The changes in the Bullring are most apparent to the older generations among the people that I spoke to. Younger people do not really remember the previous shopping centre and certainly not the Bullring before the first shopping centre development. Teenagers sometimes remember the demolition of the old shopping centre, and those in their twenties often recalled it but did not have a relationship with it. They told me that they never went there and their parents never went there. The history of the shopping centre is therefore not so important for younger people in Birmingham; they do not reminisce about how the Bullring was before. The shopping centre as it is today is what is relevant. Many of the younger people I spoke to and observed around the Bull were meeting friends in the Bullring. The shopping centre has a social history for them, and each visit to the shopping centre is providing memories and a social framework with which to understand the place.

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<sup>10</sup> The store is 25,000 square meters and cost sixty million pounds to build.

<sup>11</sup> In 2004, it won the RIBA award for architecture. Prior to my first visit to the Bullring, a marketing director at Steen og Strøm in Norway referred to the Bullring, particularly the Selfridges store during an interview in June 2007.



The Bullring, February 2008

### **Public Place in the Bullring**

Shopping centres are commercial places. Their owners and managers aim to make money and they encourage customers to spend money. The public visits them to shop. They are also spaces where we spend increasingly large amounts of our time. Shopping has become an important leisure activity. Shopping centres are therefore not just physical structures which support commercial activity, they are social places. We do not just shop there, we meet family and friends there not to mention that an increasing number of people work in shopping centres. Shopping centres challenge ideas about what a public place is. They are open, but not all the time. We are encouraged to spend time there, but only if we have the finances to do so or because we provide a service to the shopping centre. The space in and often around shopping centres is privately owned<sup>12</sup>. The Bullring further challenges the concept of public place because it has an open-air space within it,

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<sup>12</sup> The Birmingham Alliance which includes Hammerson Plc owns the Bullring.



one which is open to the public twenty-four hours a day. It provides routes connecting different parts of the city centre, but it is still a privately owned and run place.

The Bull Ring prior to the first shopping centre is described by Holyoak as “a public arena that was open to possibilities, a theatre of spontaneous popular culture” (Holyoak, 2004:14). Prior to the first shopping centre, the Bull Ring market was a public place, one where people could meet and exchange views. Orator’s corner was in front of the statue of Lord Nelson. In 1745, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church, held a sermon in the Bull Ring. Throughout the 1700s and early 1800s there were a number of riots and disturbances in the Bull Ring based on food prices<sup>13</sup>. The market place was also where the colourful characters of city life sold their specialities. An elderly man I met on his way through the Bullring complained that “*You don’t get the characters here. It’s a place to move through, not a place to stop. The old Bull ring had the characters like the blind lady who sold plastic bags, and the Italian I went to school with who was a contortionist.*” Unusual behaviour is not encouraged in the present day Bullring. Security guards actively move people on if they seem to be lingering unnecessarily.

The public place in the centre of Birmingham changed with the arrival of the first shopping centre in 1964. The Bull Ring was privatised, which is the nature of shopping centres. As Holyoak suggests, “indoor malls are not public spaces; they are privately owned space, and they have doors that close at the end of shopping hours” (Holyoak, 2004:16). Holyoak, a Birmingham patriot, is critical of the amount of control which the shopping centre management can exert: “If they wish, they can exclude dogs, casual eating, standing about talking, and any activity which they judge to be incompatible with the retailing experience. Needless to say, any kind of demonstration, or even the selling of The Big Issue, will not take place in Mall City” (2004:21). These limitations make the present Bullring shopping centre a much more controlled public place, activities within it that fall outside the expected shopping related activities must be approved by the shopping centre managers prior to them taking place. Visitors are not allowed to take photographs inside the Bullring, but the shopping centre management has installed cameras all over the shopping centre to monitor the behaviour of the public.

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<sup>13</sup> The Chartist riot in 1839 is the most well-known.

Events which fit with the shopping centre's profile are allowed. For several summers there was a beach in the Bullring in front of St. Martin's church and Gok Wan's *Fashion Road Show* dominated the same area for a day in May 2008<sup>14</sup>.



The Bullring, May 2009

Urban renewal is a gentrification process which can exclude groups who previously had access or were dominant. Public art is sometimes part of this process. Not everyone is welcome in today's Bullring. The situation was different in the previous Bull Ring which had become a shopping centre for people at the lower end of the retail market. By the end of the 1990s, it was the location for the city's cheap shops and cafés. A lady who worked in the shopping centre told me that homeless people lived in the subways that provided access to the shopping centre from the city centre. In May 2008, I met Andrew on the terrace of a café on St Martin's Walk. My usual questions about the Bullring soon

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<sup>14</sup> Gok Wan is a TV fashion consultant, best known for the show *How to Look Good Naked*.



brought us round to the fact that he was homeless. The café where we met sold cheap black coffee, and was therefore somewhere he could enter and sit legitimately. Andrew was critical of the fact that the poor and the homeless were not welcome in the Bullring, they are moved on. He found some of the art in the Bullring provoking because it actually encourages people to sit and rest, but the message is not intended for people like him. He had recently been moved on when he was doing just that.

The process of exclusion or inclusion is subtle; we only become aware of it when we are actually being excluded. The majority of visitors to the Bullring see the shopping possibilities that its glittering form provides. The changes which the development of the two Bullring shopping centres has caused in the city centre are only really visible to older Birmingham residents. The reduction of public space in the city centre is only apparent to those who do not have the finances necessary to involve them in the accepted social activity of shopping. Public art within a shopping centre supports shopping centre activities that take place, both the inclusive and the exclusive.

### **Summary and Reflections**

The social role of the Bullring's shopping centre art is influenced by the social, historical and physical context in which it is located. The context supports the activity of shopping and it provides a background of meaning and value with which to understand the process of planning and production associated with the public art project, and the public understanding of the artworks within their context. The physical context provided by Tiller's landscape and the marshland which was at the centre of it, as well as social and commercial requirements, influenced the physical and social framework of City Syd and the neighbourhood around it. Social and commercial needs also influence the Bullring's context, but the Bullring is also continuing the market traditions that have existed in the centre of Birmingham since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Historical aspects are a part of the context. The new shopping centre also wishes to distance itself from the shopping centre which came before it, because not everything about its commercial history was a success. However, an elderly visitor that I met while she was on her way up St. Martin's Walk with a group of friends suggested that the old Bullring shopping centre was not all bad, especially when it was new, "*This is an improvement. Although we grew up with the*

***Bullring and thought it was great, we remember the old Bullring when it was new.***” To someone who knew the old Bull Ring well, its decline may have seemed like part of a natural ageing process, one which they were also experiencing. Growing old is not all good, but it is not all bad either.

The shopping centre’s combination of old and new architectural and visual elements, and its cleanness and brightness make it a more glamorous structure than City Syd, and contemporary shopping centre solutions make the Bullring a popular place to shop. Younger members of the public are attracted to the bright modern shopping centre, they have few memories of the previous Bull Rings and it is the social experience which they have in the present Bullring that is important. However, its success is also based on the efforts the developers made in retaining a connection with the context’s past. Paul Connerton says that “images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order. It is an implicit rule that participants in any social order must presuppose a shared memory” (Connerton 2002:3). The process of legitimating the shopping centre using the past is a subtle one. The connection is made by reintroducing physical elements like place names and the gradient down to the old market area, also by retaining and restoring architectural elements like the Rotunda, St. Martin’s church and the previously derelict neighbouring Moor Street Station. These physical elements support a connection with the social and the historical. Content associated with the public art in the Bullring also plays a role in retaining contact with the past. It is not suggested that all visitors to the Bullring are conscious of the past or conscious of it all the time. There are also, as I have mentioned in this chapter, both positive and negative associations with the previous shopping centre. The past as part of the physical and social context is open to interpretation.



# Section 3: The Candidacy



Tiller, May 2008

## 6. The Artworld and Shopping Centres



Tiller, August 2007

The intention of this chapter is to present a theoretical framework with which to understand the candidacy of the public works of art at City Syd and the Bullring. The primary focus is the theories that define and support the activities of the artworld, and which define certain objects, installations and events as works of art. The candidacy of an object according to Arjun Appadurai includes the standards and criteria that influence its exchangeability within a context. These provide regimes of value which imply a shared set of standards, although there does not have to be complete agreement about these values within the context (Appadurai, 1986:14,15). The candidacy of a public work of art includes more than one set of standards and values due to the fact that the public, the planners and producers of the art work all have expectations, understandings and values. However, during the planning and production of a public work of art it is not the public understanding of art which is central, but the knowledge, values and practice stemming from those who plan and produce art, the artworld, and it is this group of people who will be presented here. The activities of the public art committee at City Syd and the shopping centre developers in the Bullring are artworld activities, and these two shopping centre artworlds provide expectations, meaning, value and criteria for understanding and

judging the artwork's value, and this influences the social roles of the Dandelion at City Syd and the art in the Bullring.

Within a context such as a shopping centre, it is possible to expect some shared values, but the actual exchange or understanding of an object may be based on divergent perceptions of these values. This is because a context can bring together actors from different cultural systems with only a minimum of shared understandings about the objects in question (Appadurai, 1986:15). The divergent values may not meet all the time but there is a possibility that a conflict in ideas about the public art may exist, or come to exist. There may be disagreement between the public and the artworld about the meaning and value associated with a public work of art, and there can also be disagreement between members of the artworld. Artists, public art consultants and commissioners of public art play different roles within the planning process and they may have different understandings about the role the art will play in its context. The activities of the public art committee and the shopping centre developers were based on an understanding of the shopping centre locations, the requirements of the place, the public and expectations about the role the public art will play. Their intention was to provide art that would work within the place, and have aesthetic, social and physical relevance. While doing this, they considered not only the physical and social context provided by City Syd and the Bullring, but they also acted according to norms and values provided by the artworld. The public, although it is influenced by the artworks and by the shopping centre context, does not always have direct access to the standards and criteria that influenced the production, nor does it often have access to the knowledge and practice of the artworld. The public does influence the candidacy of public art, and the public understanding may be expected to be different from those planning and producing the art. However, the public only plays a minor role in the planning and production of public art. Understanding what the standards and criteria as well as the expectations about the artwork's role were, and what part these play in the artwork's role is a theme that will be developed further in Chapters 8 and 9.

The artworld provides a framework to understand what a work of art is. The theory provided by theorists such as Arthur Danto and George Dickie, whose ideas will be



presented later in this chapter, suggests a way to understand the role art objects play, and what makes them different from other objects that are part of a social context. A work of art is the result of creative, social, practical and knowledge based activities of a loosely associated group of people often described as an artworld. It is the artworld that decides what kind of art objects are made, and where and when they will be presented. The artworld offers an understanding of these objects and often actively influences their success or failure. It is the theory associated with the artworld which encourages the definition of an object, installation or event as a work of art. The artworld is primarily associated with the physical and social structures of museums, galleries and art academies, but it is also active within the processes of planning and producing public art. However, it is less visible within the social structures around public art because the practice of planning a public art project is not often visible to the wider public, and once the art is installed, the artworld disappears from the public place. The artworld is present in some form all the time a work of art is presented within a museum or gallery.

Anthropologists are not known for their interest in the artworld. Sociologists are interested in the institutions of the artworld, but Alfred Gell has criticised their study of the artworld for its inability to understand the relational complexity around a work of art. The first part of this chapter analyses further the reasons for the anthropological criticism associated with the sociological study of the artworld. The next two sections present the established philosophical and theoretical discussion associated with the artworld, which has its origins in the problems that are encountered when defining an object as a work of art. Within this discussion there are two main arguments. The first is associated with Arthur Danto, who proposes that it is the body of knowledge and theory produced by an artworld that defines an object as a work of art. The second argument was first presented by George Dickie and suggests that it is the institution and its practices that encourage the definition of an object as a work of art. There is also a third sociological argument, often associated with the sociologist Howard Becker, which concentrates on the practical institutional practices of the artworld. This will be presented in the final section.

Not everyone on the public art committee or within the group of shopping centre developers considers themselves members of the artworld, but some of the

members are active artworld participants and in association with these individuals, and during the activity of planning and producing a work of art, I believe they are all members of the artworld. While working on a public art project they become a community of common interests (Sullivan 1995:258). I will describe the activities of the public art committee who planned the Dandelion and the shopping centre developers who planned the art for the Bullring in detail in later chapters.

### **Anthropology and the Artworld**

Theory arising from the Western artworld, particularly aesthetic theory, has been used by a number of anthropologists to help define objects within societies outside the West as works of art. The use of artworld theory outside Western contexts allows comparative analysis by placing the objects into a theoretical framework, which is already understood. This was criticised by Alfred Gell for bringing the objects concerned into a frame of reference that does not have much to do with the understanding of the people who made the objects (Gell, 1998:5)<sup>1</sup>. Anthropologists have traditionally analysed the art of non-Western societies, and as a result analysis of the artworld has primarily taken place within art theory and sociology. However, activity associated with the artworld has also played a role within the study of art by anthropologists because, as I mentioned in an earlier presentation of the anthropology of art, the interactions between persons and artworks is the primary focus of the anthropology of art, and art institutions are part of these interactions and interdependencies. The training of an artist is, Anthony Forge suggests, a central subject within the anthropology of art. Taking this activity further by studying the choices or lack of choices imposed by society around the artist and setting art in its social context, viewing it as an essentially social product of which there is a demand from the society as a whole is an obvious anthropological preoccupation (Forge, 1973:xix,xx). The activities of artists are often associated with artworld practice, but seeing it as institutional practice is not something commonly associated with anthropology.

Within the anthropology of art studies of art institutions have concentrated on the market for ethnographic art. Marcus and Myers proposed an in-depth study of the

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<sup>1</sup> Gell was referring particularly to the writing of Price, 1989; Coote, 1992, 1996; and Morphy, 1994, 1996.

association between the anthropology and the artworld. They suggested that the aesthetic sphere cannot be considered independent of the social, but their primary focus was the workings of art markets, both ethnographic and Western (Marcus and Myers, 1995:31).

Art institutions have, as I mentioned earlier, primarily been the study of sociologists. There is, Alfred Gell suggests, continuity between the anthropological-relational perspective and the sociological-institutional perspective, but the sociology of art is, he says, mainly concerned with the production and circulation of art objects within institutions, whereas anthropology is interested in the network of relationships around an art object within a particular setting (Gell, 1998:8). An anthropology of art, Gell says, should not depend upon the presence of institutions of a specifically art related kind (1998:9). The sociological study of the artworld has had a tendency to see the artworld as an abstract conceptual and neutral discourse (Marcus 1995:1). This is problematic because the artworld is not neutral; it is involved in the production, consumption and definition of art, and may therefore be considered a domain of value production (1995:10). On the other hand, the anthropological study of art cannot avoid the history of relations that are associated with a work of art provided by the artworld (1995:2). Artworld activities involve more than just the art market; discourses about art and art-making circulate broadly within the artworld and within other social institutions (1995:10).

The artworld in association with the society around it requires further anthropological investigation. Gell's criticism of institutional theory was primarily directed towards cross-cultural analysis of the artworld, and the study of art institutions in small scale societies that did not have strongly developed institutions (Gell, 1998:8). In Western society where City Syd and the Bullring are located, art institutions have an established position and many have been in existence at least since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. An analysis of the artworld does not have to focus on art markets and the exchange of artworks and money. The artworld is involved in some way in the production and consumption of most works of art, and its activities may be associated with the relational context of everyday life which, Gell suggests, is the primary focus of an anthropologist. In this way, the artworld is not a closed aesthetic sphere but it is part of a wider relational context

providing norms and values that influence the candidacy of an artwork and therefore play a role within its active phase. An analysis of artworld theory and the activities of the artworld within the two shopping centres provide information about the relational trajectory followed by the art installed at City Syd and in the Bullring.

### **Dantoworld: A Body of Theory**

It was Danto who in 1964 first suggested that there was something called an artworld when he said that “To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld” (Danto, 1994:477). Dantoworld is the term used by philosopher Anita Silvers to describe the artworld proposed by Arthur Danto<sup>2</sup>. Danto’s artworld arose at a time of radical innovation in art. It was no longer possible to discern properties in all art objects that were essentially definitive, therefore for some art theorists the solution appeared to be within the context around the work of art (Silvers 1995:21)<sup>3</sup>. In Dantoworld, an art object is defined by how its properties may be seen as connecting with the body of art and art theory which was created before it. By suggesting this, Dantoworld primarily does two things; it helps to discriminate art from other objects, and it makes art possible (1994:471).

An important question for Danto was how do we avoid mistaking an artwork for a real object? This question has particular relevance in shopping centres, where artworks struggle to make their presence known within the visual activity around them. The visual experience in shopping centres is principally concerned with encouraging the consumption of the objects and services on sale there. Artworks are part of this system of encouragement but they are also something else. Danto considered it relevant to ask how we differentiate art objects from other objects because artists had, starting with Dada artists like Marcel Duchamp in 1917, begun using found objects in their art. Artworks could conceivably be real objects, for example Andy Warhol’s *Brillo boxes* look just like

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<sup>2</sup> The terms Dantoworld and Dickieworld both come from Anita Silvers’ article *Artworld* (Silvers, 1995:19,23).

<sup>3</sup> Pop art, conceptual art and land art are just three of the art movements that were imposing radical new ideas upon the artworld during the 1960s.

real Brillo boxes, the ones containing a household cleaning product. If you look closer at Warhol's Brillo Boxes, you can see that they are made of plywood and not cardboard like the Brillo boxes available in shops. However, the Brillo factory could make its boxes out of plywood too, but that would still not make them art (Danto, 1994:478). It is theory, Danto says, which takes a Brillo box into the world of art, but in order to see it as a work of art the viewer must have mastered a lot of art theory (1994:479).

Mastering theory helps because understanding art is a cumulative process; one artistic identification engenders another artistic identification. Danto says that "It is this retroactive enrichment of entities in the artworld which makes it possible to discuss Raphael and De Kooning together, or Lichtenstein and Michelangelo" (Danto, 1994:476). The great variety of artistic examples allows for the complexity of form and understanding which exist in today's artworld and the more one knows, the richer the artistic experience becomes (1994:481). An artistic breakthrough happens when an artist adds the possibility of "a new column to the matrix", but says Danto, for those unfamiliar with the matrix it is hard and even impossible to recognise certain elements as works of art (1994:481).

The Dantoworld has been criticised for requiring highly rhetorical art criticism to define art and for excluding the outsider's view of what defines art (Adajian 2008:webpage). Danto has also been criticised for having a linear view of art history and being inclined to treat works of art made in earlier eras as less immediate and vigorous than contemporary ones (Silvers, 1995:21). There is something very exclusive about an artworld that depends on knowledge that is only thoroughly understood by members of its own community. Another unfortunate side-effect of this knowledge is that it encourages repetition of what has gone before or variations upon a theme, and it limits the entrance of new elements, or "new columns to the matrix." Art in shopping centres is easily excluded from the Dantoworld because it is not intended for a public who is expected to have artworld knowledge or the ability to place a work of art within an artworld context. However the existence of knowledge and theory can still help to support the definition of certain objects within shopping centres as art, and in this way it helps to clarify their role.

### **Dickieworld: A Loosely Associated Group of Individuals**

The connection Danto makes between art objects, atmosphere and history points to a structure around art objects. George Dickie suggests that this indicates the institutional nature of art (Dickie 1974:29). However, the artworld first described by Dickie in 1974 depends less on theory to define works of art and more on the practices of the people who plan and produce them. The institutional definition proposed by Dickie was initially a response to a claim by aesthetician Morris Weitz that art cannot be defined (1974:11). In opposition to this idea, Dickie proposes that a definition of art should focus on the “non-exhibited characteristics that works of art have in virtue of being embedded in an institutional matrix which may be called “the artworld” and argues that these characteristics are essential and defining” (1974:12). Previous attempts to define art are used by Dickie to set the scene for why an institutional theory of art is useful. For example the imitation theory of art, and art as an expression of emotion were seen as possible ingredients that could define some artworks, but which were in general non-essential (1974:20,21). They may be regarded as useful within an institutional definition as aspects of art which have served a function and which may potentially continue to serve a function (1974:51).

A Dickieworld is different from the everyday world because of the behaviour of its inhabitants. Their activities have the ability to give some objects the status of artwork, although Dickie is not definitive about what the actions should be (Silvers, 1995:20). The artworld is called an institution by Dickie because he says that it has “an established practice” (Dickie, 1974:31). A social system of some sort must exist for status to be conferred, but it does not, according to Dickie, require laws or ceremony. The lack of laws and ceremonies makes the conferring of status seem vague but it is the existence of an established practice which defines a social institution, and this Dickie suggests also applies to the artworld. The lack of formality around what kind of practice defines the artworld allows for what Dickie calls the “freshness and exuberance of art” (1974:35). A central practice among all artworld systems such as theatre, music and fine art is that they are each a framework for presenting art (1974:31). An object is defined as a work of art



within the institution because it has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation within a framework for presenting art (1974:34)<sup>4</sup>.

The members of the artworld who are able to confer status on an object are described by Dickie as a “core personnel”, a set of loosely organised but related members of a group including artists, producers, museum directors, museum-goers, reporters, critics, art historians, art theorists, philosophers of art and others. In addition to these specific roles that are often associated with the artworld, Dickie suggests that, “every person who sees himself as a member of the artworld is thereby a member” (1974:35,36). Within the group there is a minimum core or presentation group, whom Dickie describes as artists, presenters and goers. It is the activities of the group or institution in which the object is involved that decides whether an art object is a candidate for appreciation (1974:41). The role of the “goers” or public is not clarified; it is simply suggested as necessary.

Dickieworld has been criticised for not being restrictive enough. It may be assumed that establishing an object as a work of art by an institution must also be restricted by what are considered proper agents and objects, but Dickie requires no distinctive actions, authority or objects (Silver 1995:20). Dickie responded to the criticism in 1981 by suggesting five conditions that form an art circle; (1) an artist is anyone who participates with understanding in the making of an artwork, (2) an artwork is any artefact created to be presented to an artworld public, (3) an artworld public is any group made up of persons prepared to some extent to understand artworks presented to them, (4) the artworld is the totality of all artworld systems, (5) an artworld system is what constitutes a framework for presenting an artist’s work to an artworld public (1995:21). The circle, although it clarifies what is required of the artworld, is static and there is not much room for innovation or the unexpected. It also lacks the historical background of Dantoworld.

It seems unlikely that a shopping centre would be considered appropriate for the presentation of art objects in a Dickieworld and the public visiting the shopping

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<sup>4</sup> Dada artist Marcel Duchamp made ready-mades. These are objects such as a urinal which are inserted into the institution and become art. Ready-mades are, Dickie suggests, valuable to art theory because they highlight the system for conferring the status of art on an object (1974:33).

centre would not be considered an artworld public because they are not there specifically to contemplate the art. The artworld provides norms and values necessary for what it considers is the proper appreciation of an artwork. Being evaluated within an appropriate arena for presentation by a public with the required knowledge and interest supports the definition of an object as a work of art. This does not mean that this cannot happen outside typical artworld contexts amongst a non-typical artworld public, but it does suggest that being defined as an art object or receiving attention due to being defined as an art object will be more difficult. The public in shopping centres is not part of the artworld, but the fieldwork experience suggests that it does have standards for appreciation. These may be based, for example, on what the public knows of the artworld, on their everyday experiences and upon their powers of association. Although these ways of understanding and defining art are not always appreciated by the artworld because they open the art up to what it considers unnecessary criticism and ridicule (Senie, 1992:240). However, by offering art to a shopping centre's public, public art committees are perhaps creating an artworld public, because a public, even one that is not initially interested in art, is within Dickie's understanding of the artworld necessary to define an object as art.

### **Sociological Artworld**

The requirements necessary for defining art in a Dantoworld and a Dickieworld leave little room for a public who does not have particular knowledge or interest in art. However, public art is planned and produced by the artworld for a public who does not fulfil the requirements suggested by Dickie for an artworld public. This challenges artworld understandings of who the public is and the role art is expected to play. The artworlds described by Dickie and Danto do have relevance within shopping centres, but a more practical understanding of artworld activity would perhaps strengthen the connection with shopping centres and its public. Avoiding the exclusion of the public from the relational activity of the artworld requires a closer analysis of the activity of all those involved in defining the object as art.



The Bullring, February 2008

In a sociological analysis, the artworld is defined by Howard Becker as “the network of people whose cooperative activity organised via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that the artworld is noted for” (Becker, 2008:xxiv). The network of people potentially includes a broader understanding of who the public is. The sociological approach reduces the focus on the activities of the artist, and the artistic nature of an artwork is not an intrinsic or inalienable property of the object, instead it is regarded as a label put onto it by interested parties or social groups (Inglis 2005:12). Art is also seen as being bound up with politics and reflecting the conflicts and struggles between different social groups, it is therefore part of the social world and not part of some elevated realm of its own (2005:12). The artworld is here made up of networks of cultural production, distribution and consumption, and its institution includes technologies, distribution and display systems, reward systems, systems of appreciation, criticism and audiences (2005:24).

This understanding of the artworld sees it as more than just a system for the distribution of aesthetic objects and value, and it is aligned with the postmodern critique of the artworld, which regards it as intimately associated with monetary exchange. The postmodern critique was an attempt to break free from the illusion that a work of art has a cultural aesthetic value that is autonomous (Marcus and Myers, 1995:21). The mid-1980s, when the post-modern critique arose, understood the artworld to be centralised around the idea that money was the driving force behind the production and consumption of art (Sullivan, 1995:266). This required an analysis of practices that was not directly associated with aesthetic production.

The understanding of the artworld prescribed by Becker concentrates more on the actual practices of the artworld than Dickie's analysis does. It is anti-elitist, making art is understood as not being so very different from other kinds of work and artists are regarded as not so very different to other kinds of workers (Becker, 2008:xxiii, xxiv). The sociology of the artworld provides a way to understand the processes of production and to some extent consumption of art objects, but it has problems explaining why we value some objects more than others. The local dynamic around individual works of art is missing. Becker's understanding alone is therefore unable to analyse what causes the disparity between the expectations of the planners and producers of public art, and the actual social life of art works after they are installed in our public places. It lacks the detail associated with an ethnographic study and anthropological analysis. The exclusive knowledge and practice associated with Danto and Dickie's artworlds which provide insight into the defining power of the artworld is also missing. It therefore loses sight of the objects that are at the centre of the artworld.

Aesthetic judgements are regarded by Howard Becker as "characteristic phenomena" of the collective activity which take place within the artworld (Becker 2008,:39). The sociological study of artworlds is an analysis of social organisation and not aesthetics (2008:1). The concept of an aesthetic object is regarded as an institutional concept by Dickie, and the practices and conventions of the artworld are seen as locating and isolating the aesthetic features of a work of art (Dickie, 1974:11,12). Dantoworld and Dickieworld both have an object-centred focus; aesthetic objects are what make them go

round. Aesthetic objects are at the centre of the analysis of the role of public art in shopping centres. The knowledge and practice necessary to understand artworks in Danto- and Dickie-worlds encourages the prescription of norms and values in the artworld, and has relevance alongside an analysis of the actual practice of the shopping centre artworlds and the relational situation that exists around the artworks after installation. The knowledge and practice prescribed by the artworld helps to make the art objects active within the social context. Being defined as a work of art is part of what gives an art object its agency.

### **Summary and Reflections**

The candidacy of an object influences the activity that will take place around it within the context because it offers standards and criteria that affect the exchangeability of objects within the context (Appadurai, 1986:14). It offers a way to understand the object. The norms and values provided by the artworld support the candidacy of the public works of art installed in the two shopping centres. The idea that art should be part of its own world, an artworld, is as I have shown a fairly recent idea, and it is one that is very different from a belief stemming from antiquity, which suggests that art was part of everyday life (Silvers, 1995:19). However, a practical role is not enough to make art necessary in our public spaces. The philosophical conception of the artworld suggests that a definition of art lies in the application of a set of practices, which may be organisational, theoretical and/or historical. Being institutionalised in an artworld broadly means that an object operates or is operated upon within a definitive institutional framework, but “institutionalising” an object is also not always enough to define it as a work of art (1995:22).

It is suggested here that the public plays an important role in the definition of an object as a work of art, but this role is not central within artworld theory. The definition of public art presented in the introduction suggests that public art is defined by its relationship with its public. Understanding the role of public art therefore requires a broader perspective than is provided by the artworld. Public art is intended to be appreciated and understood by a broader section of society than is represented by the artworld. The social and physical context provided by shopping centres presented in the

first section of the thesis influences the definition of an art object and its role. The relational situation around the art objects within the shopping centres, which will be presented in the last section, is also influential. However, this does not exclude the artworld from the candidacy of a public work of art; it provides norms, values and expectations that influence the activities and understandings of the planners and producers of public art, and it therefore influences the role that the artworks play. The public also has understandings and expectations associated with objects that come from an artworld and these can influence the role an artwork plays during the active phase.

The artworld theory provided by both Danto- and Dickie-worlds suggests that the objects produced within them and the institutions that produce art objects are both exclusive and different. The artworld has been criticised for this exclusive label, but it is this quality of difference that is essential within the role that art plays, both within established artworld institutions and around public art. The idea that some objects that are produced, mediated and consumed within a world that is both exclusive and different encourages the belief that art provides other qualities, something extra. Placing an object from this world into the physical framework of a shopping centre may encourage the idea that shopping centres are offering something different. An analysis of the role of the artworld within shopping centres sheds light on expectations about the role of public art, and highlights the differences in understanding between those who plan and produce public art, and the public who are relating to the art within a shopping centre environment. The expectations and values of the public art committees and those of the public together provide understandings that influence the role of public art in shopping centres.



## 7. Public Art and Shopping Centre Art



Trafalgar Square, October 2010

This chapter provides an overview of the traditions that have aesthetic, historical and social connections with the art found in and around City Syd and the Bullring. This specialised public art background is part of the standards and criteria that support the candidacy of the art in the two shopping centres. It provides the planners and producers and public with expectations about how public art should look, be located, function and the role it will play in relationship with its public, and its part in the artworld. It offers a background of theory, history and practice which influences the understanding of the role public art plays in public places, and it is therefore active within City Syd and the Bullring. As a result, the chapter follows the efforts of those who made, planned and produced public art to enlighten and involve the public. Starting with the monument tradition, the chapter continues into the 18<sup>th</sup> century when a public for the arts first truly

emerged, and then follows public art through to the contemporary works of art located in shopping centres today.

Art in museums and galleries also depends on a public response, but locating artworks outside these artworld arenas suggests an active relationship with the physical and social context, one which is not entirely defined by the artworld. The term public art is most commonly associated with artworks that are located outside in areas where there is open public access. Placing art outside museums and galleries, the traditional arenas for the presentation of art, provides a different physical and social context, but it does not necessarily provide a different kind of art. The artworks often have a close aesthetic affinity with the art that was created for the museums and galleries in the time periods when they were commissioned. The physically accessible art is, for public art committees and shopping centre developers, expected to play an active role within the contexts in which it is installed. However, according to Massey and Rose it is only possible to define an object within a public place as public art if it is involved in a relationship with its public and can be seen as having agency (Massey and Rose, 2003:18). It is not enough simply to locate a piece of artwork in a place of open public access and call it public art. In addition, agency may be planned for and it may be expected, but it does not always come into effect. Artworks, according to Alfred Gell, achieve agency when they become involved in the “texture of social relationships” (Gell, 1998:17). They do not achieve their effect through physical and visual presence alone; they must also have a social presence. Public art and agency is not a new association; those who plan and produce public art have always expected the art to play an active role within the context in which it was installed. What has changed is the kind of role public art has been expected to play, and how the agency is achieved.

The monument tradition is the first area to be considered when analysing the changes in expectations, form and function of the public art which is found in our towns and cities today. Monuments exist in most towns and cities, and may be considered precursors to the site-specific art developed for public places today. Monuments appeared in towns and squares before the development of a public for the arts during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The

development of a public for the arts will also be considered. The chapter then continues with a presentation of the art which is associated with the monument tradition. Socio-political art is also presented. This kind of public art is ideationally on the other end of the scale from monuments, and was provoked by what some artists considered the social and aesthetic inaccessibility of previous artistic traditions. The chapter also includes an analysis of the contemporary discussion about the role of public art, and finally a presentation of shopping centre art.

## Monuments

The monuments associated with parks and squares in most Western towns and cities appeared after the 18<sup>th</sup> century when a public for the arts was first established. However, monuments celebrating the lives of famous men and famous deeds existed before the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>. Egyptian, Babylonian and Greek temples and public buildings are renowned for their statues of the famous and the powerful, often on a grand scale. Italian streets and piazzas have numerous examples from the Roman period onwards. The equestrian statue of King Charles 1<sup>st</sup> which stands in Trafalgar Square was erected in 1675, long before the monument of Nelson, the most well-known monument in the square, which was commissioned at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>2</sup>. The difference after the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the concern for the moral enlightenment of the public<sup>3</sup>. Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, monuments were intended to present the power of the Gods and their living representatives. They were about control and dominance. The art that was commissioned after the 18<sup>th</sup> century focused on the education of the public and its moral needs. It was assumed that the public's needs would be fulfilled through the provision of an aesthetic object with a moral and/or political content. The public's social requirements and the needs of the location were not primary considerations.

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<sup>1</sup> There are far fewer monuments to famous women, although they do exist. Queen Victoria is a common example in Great Britain.

<sup>2</sup> The statue is by Hubert Le Sueur and was first cast in 1633. Commissioned by the then Lord Treasurer in 1630, it was the first monument of its kind in Great Britain.

<sup>3</sup> Public art also encompasses architectural decoration, but this follows a decorative tradition which is closely linked to the inside and outside of public buildings. It bears some relevance to the discussion which follows but I have chosen to focus on monuments which have a clearer connection with the Dandelion and the Bullring art.

## **A Public for the Arts**

Location is not, as I mentioned earlier, enough to define a work of art as a public work of art. The relationship with the public is important to its definition. The modern understanding of the arts and its relationship with its public was established during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which was a time of enormous industrial and economic change as well as expansion. The general economic growth saw the development of new social groups, amongst these the bourgeoisie and industrial workers, all of whom had access in varying degrees to new wealth. Ideas about who the 'public' was changed. The public began to be conceived as a social entity distinct from uncultivated crowds or mobs. Unlike the mob, the public had the capacity for feeling or sensibility (Craske 1997:13). New publics for visual arts and literature were encouraged through the development of new types of art which appealed strongly to the senses or passions, thus removing the necessity for elite learning. The arts were seen as enhancing the moral condition of public life. Art was good and useful if it inspired sensations which pleased the civilised spirit (1997:26). During this period, public museums and galleries were established and the idea of public funding for the arts was increasingly encouraged.

The historian Matthew Craske suggests that an aspiration towards taste was what helped to define an 18<sup>th</sup> century citizen as part of the polite public. The broadening of the idea of who the public was received encouragement from the increasing accessibility to the arts. The new public had access to public exhibitions and newspaper criticism (Craske, 1997:13). Society became increasingly democratised, individualism was established as a force to be recognised, and taste gradually became common property. Taste was a central theme in discussions about the arts during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and in aesthetic philosophy.

A widely held belief in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century was that the visual arts should be encouraged because they were good for society. The display of visual arts within a public forum was viewed as a way of measuring the quality of civic life within one European nation against another. The kind of exposure to the arts indicated the general tone of civic life in a state, and provided a guide to the level of civilization that an individual could expect to experience (Craske, 1997:24). However, exposure to the arts did not necessarily require a visit to an art institution; works of art could also meet their public in the more

informal locations of streets, squares and public parks. The kind of public art, in the form of monuments and sculptures, which we are familiar with today found its place within our towns and cities during this period.

## The Monument Tradition Continued

### Imposers of Ideology



Hyde Park Corner, London, October 2010<sup>4</sup>

According to cultural theorist Malcolm Miles, there are three different frameworks with which to understand monuments; they may be seen as imposing ideology, as landmarks or signifiers of place, and they may be democratic (Miles 1997:76). These three

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<sup>4</sup> The monument to the Duke of Wellington at Hyde Park Corner in London was commissioned after the allied victory at Waterloo over Napoleon's French army in 1815. The monument would have been a powerful symbol at the time of its installation in 1822. It is a celebration of a British hero and British military and political power. The classical references were a then accepted artistic convention. The monument by the artist Richard Westmacott was commissioned by King George IV.

understandings of monuments will be presented individually although it is suggested here that monuments do not in general represent only one of the frameworks, but instead may be seen as incorporating aspects of all three.

Monuments often tell us something about the period when they were installed, the important people and events of their time, and the individuals or groups of individuals who commissioned them. Monuments are not neutral aesthetic interventions; those who planned and produced them often aimed at a mediation of history (Miles, 1997:61). They present ideals and standards that were central to society during the time of their installation. They give the impression of physical permanence, a permanence which may be seen as standing for social stability, but their solidity of form belies the contradictions that may have been present in society during the time of their conception and production.

The late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of a European monument tradition. British artists and their patrons were particularly engaged in the production of monuments during this period, more so than their European compatriots (Janson, et al. 1985:17). The interest in monuments was inspired by an enthusiasm for classical architecture and landscape gardening. In addition, Britain was at war with Napoleon, which provided numerous commissions celebrating famous battles and/or the death of British heroes. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, monuments were produced to present a reverence for national ideals. The intention was to legitimise recently acquired powers, wealth and independence in young American and European nations.

Monuments provide information or memories in an aesthetic packaging. It is suggested by Miles that putting real life into an aesthetic domain displaces value, and thereby sets up a duality between art and life. This duality allows the impact of power or money on everyday life to go unquestioned. Monuments as public constructions of an event make it seem harmless by packaging it as art. Soldiers, generals and administrators become aestheticised and what they actually did often becomes disembodied from the monuments representing them (Miles, 1997:58). According to Robert Layton, “Monuments are the material realisation of cultural meanings, and contribute to the social construction of future generations’ subjectivities” (Layton 2002:3). Monuments are



therefore, according to Miles and Layton, intended as permanent demonstrations of power and prosperity. On the other hand, I suggest that the social life of public art provides challenges to both physical permanence and stability of meaning. Representation is a dynamic process of multiple signification where objects and images will often be subject to reinterpretation during their life time (Svašek, 2007:47). This will happen in meetings with an intended public and with publics without any expected association with the monuments. For example, the social and political processes that were important in 1843 when the statue of Nelson was installed in Trafalgar Square are now not always central to the impression the monument makes on the public in present day London.

### **Landmarks**

The permanence of their form and the stability of their location over time mean that monuments or sculptures may function as a kind of landmark within a town or city. They are part of what makes a city legible, helping residents or visitors to orientate themselves by making certain parts of the urban structure memorable. The geographer Kevin Lynch refers to landmarks in his list of elements that are useful when trying to understand a city's form. Lynch argues that landmarks are "points of reference which are external to the observer....unique or memorable in their context" (Lynch 1960:78). They are used as clues to identity and structure when an individual makes its way through the city, and they remain points of reference even when a path through the urban environment has become known or established. Monuments also help to differentiate one urban environment from another. Most towns and cities have monuments but some have more than others, and the monuments differ from town to town. The relevance of monuments as part of a city's legibility is supported by a woman I met outside City Syd, who was of the opinion that sculptures such as *Olav Tryggvason* in Trondheim city centre "***Give the town character***"<sup>5</sup>. Monuments therefore participate in the public understanding of what makes Trondheim different from other towns and cities.

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<sup>5</sup> The statue of Olav Tryggvason stands in the centre of Trondheim's town square on a plinth that is 14,5 metres high. It was designed by artist Wilhelm Rasmussen and installed in 1921.

## Democratising Monuments



Meadow Hall, Sheffield, March 2007

Not all monuments are to the famous and the powerful. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, monuments have increasingly represented the people of a town or city. For example, the workers in the case of Rodin's *The Thinker* from 1906 in Paris, or the steelworkers' monument in the middle of the Meadow Hall shopping centre on the outskirts of Sheffield<sup>6</sup>. They represent a group rather than an individual. This kind of monument represents an idea of who is important in the context where they are installed. In the steelworkers' example, the sculpture provides the shopping centre with a historical point of reference. The shopping centre is built on a site which used to be the hub of the British steel industry. Twentieth century monuments use a different kind of iconography but still present the ideology of those who commissioned and produced them; those who plan and produce contemporary monuments operate with a predefined understanding of who the monument will meet and how they will be interpreted.

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<sup>6</sup> The bronze sculpture is by the artist Robin Bell from 1991 is called *Teeming*.

## Plunk

Monuments are not the only artworks that participate in giving our towns and cities character. Public art can take other physical forms and carry with it other kinds of meaning and potential. The Dandelion and the Bull are part of a tradition that began with the presentation of people and events during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, but during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the planners and producers of public art increasingly concentrated on what may be described as aesthetic interventions in the urban space. In some ways, plunk represents a continuation of the monument tradition in a less ideological form. It also largely takes the form of sculptures that were large and made of bronze, but instead of presenting a political or moral message they were intended to primarily be aesthetically pleasing. However, the educational aspect did not disappear completely because the artworks also attempted to use their aesthetic influence to help solve physical and social problems that existed within the urban environment during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



*Ilapiken*, Arne Durban, 1964, Skansen, Trondheim, May 2005

These aesthetic interventions are often called plunk or plop art<sup>7</sup>. Its critics suggest that it often looks like it has been ‘plunked’ or dropped into a public space without much thought to the physical or social qualities of the place; importantly for those who considered the social and political aspects of the art that came afterwards, it was not site-specific. Within the modernist tradition of which plunk was a part, the

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<sup>7</sup> Plunk and plop, both of which are used to describe this kind of public art, are onomatopoeic words, which describes the sound of something being unceremoniously dropped onto the ground.

interests of the artist and the public are in many ways contradictory. The modernist conception of art is one of an autonomous aesthetic realm acting as an alternative to everyday life. Artists are understood as needing freedom of expression if they are to be able to make good art (Miles, 1997:13). The intentions of the artist were dominant rather than the ideological message provided by those doing the commissioning. Public expectations received little focus.

Art theorist Suzy Gablik is critical of the ability of what she called autonomous modern art's ability to meet public needs. "Autonomy, we now see, has condemned art to social impotence by turning it into just another class of objects for marketing and consumption" (Gablik 1995:74). The art that was produced, Gablik implies, fitted the needs of the art market and encouraged the economic survival of artists. Public sculptures were intended to work as aesthetic objects independent of the physical context in which they were placed. They could theoretically have been installed in a museum or a gallery, or any city in the world, and still be aesthetically pleasing. The late 1960s and early 1970s was an era of civic art collecting. The role of art in public places was not really addressed and any debate about the art centred on artistic style rather on its public relevance.

When the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was started in 1967 in the USA, its declared aim was: "to give the best art of our time outside museum walls" (Lacy 1995:22). The aesthetic quality of the public sculptures was a dominant force in their production and consumption, but the aesthetic quality of plunk was also increasingly seen as having a functional aspect during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Post-war European and American cities were under social pressure and public art was understood as having the potential to provide an aesthetic solution to urban problems. It provided a way of revitalising inner cities and of reclaiming and re-humanising urban areas (1995:21). Prior to the 1960s, public art was not commissioned because of a declared public need, but rather because a patron or city council felt the need to place a monument to a person or cause within the public realm. Bodies such as the NEA, although they were often accused of imposing art upon the public realm, did aim to provide art that was suitable for the requirements of the urban environment, and public relevance received increasing focus.

The failure of plunk art to develop a relationship with its public may in part be linked to the modernist traditions which it was part of. Monuments and autonomous aesthetic artworks do have an impact on the urban environment, but if public art is to be public in the way suggested by Massey and Rose at the beginning of this chapter, then the public must be involved more closely in the processes of planning and production, and not just during the consumption of public art. Problems with plunk art point to the fact that a work of art is not always made accessible by location alone. The reception of the art by the intended public needs to be tackled by artists and those commissioning art. In 1974, the NEA suggested that an artwork should be appropriate to the site. This encouraged site-specific art where the needs of the physical location are integral to the production, presentation and reception of the art.

The art theorist Rosalyn Deutsche describes site-specific art as an “urban aesthetic” or “spatial-cultural” discourse, combining “ideas about art, architecture and urban design, on the one hand, with theories of the city, social space, and public space, on the other” (Kwon, 2002:3). Emerging in the 1960s, site-specificity looked at the actual physical attributes of the location, size, scale, texture, topology, climate, traffic and architecture. The most common version of site-specificity involved a design team approach in which artists collaborate with architects in producing or refurbishing public spaces. Site-specificity presumes the humanising influence of art over the inhumanity of urban architecture (2002:5). Site-specific art is regarded by those who plan and produce it to be useful art. It is a visual, physical and aesthetic dimension integrated into the physical framework. The design-team approach is still found in public buildings<sup>8</sup>. Norwegian schools and offices contain numerous examples of integrated site-specific art.

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<sup>8</sup> This kind of public art also has clear links to a decorative tradition that goes all the way back to classical antiquity, and which has experienced several revivals, for example the Victorian period during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Untitled, Terje Roalkvam, 2004, Byåsen High School, Trondheim, 2007

The controversy about Richard Serra's sculpture *Tilted Arc* was a focusing moment for both autonomous and site-specific art. The sculpture, which was installed through a government art for architecture programme in 1981 in the Federal Plaza in downtown Manhattan, was conceived specifically for the site. Richard Serra rejected the widespread tendency for public sculpture to accommodate architectural design. *Tilted Arc* was intended to be an interruption or an intervention. Serra said that he was interested in "sculpture which is non-utilitarian, non-functional...any use is misuse" (Kwon, 2002:72). He therefore worked actively against what may be considered common site-specific values. The sculpture cut the Federal Plaza in two; anyone wanting to cross it had to walk around the sculpture. It effectively hindered public movement within the space. Public opposition to *Tilted Arc* caused the local government to demand its removal. However, Richard Serra felt so strongly about its connection to the location that he sued the government for thirty million dollars for inducing public hostility to the artwork. To



remove the sculpture from the square was, he claimed, to destroy it. In 1987, the Federal District Court ruled against Serra and the sculpture was removed. Although the sculpture fitted NEA specifications that art should be appropriate for the site, apart from the aesthetic implications of having the sculpture on the site, it did not consider public needs and requirements and the public did not consider the sculpture appropriate.

### **Social and Political Art**

By the late 1960s, the relational agency required by Massey and Rose to define an artwork as public art was increasingly experimented with by artists. The art theorist Suzy Gablik suggests that public art will only reach its public if it is “listener-centred.” In listener-centred art, the artist is involved with the community and a dialogue with the audience is an active component in the work (Gablik, 1995:82). Artists like Daniel Buren and Mierle Ukeles added social-political processes to the site-specific equation during the late 60s and early 70s. Art theorist Miwon Kwon called artists including those aspects “cultural-artistic service provider rather than a producer of aesthetic objects” (Kwon, 2002:4). The needs of the public were ideally in focus as was the site, and there was also often an underlying critique of the political establishment. Artist and art theorist Susanne Lacy labelled public- focused public art with a political message, “New genre public art” in the 1995 book of the same name, but its community focus and the collaborative role of the artist has often seen it described as community art.

In their need to find new ways of working and reaching their audience and to reach multiple audiences, artists drew upon models from outside the arts. Forms of public art closely linked to everyday life such as community art, however, have often been marginalised by the art establishment and criticised for lacking aesthetic quality. Those commissioning art often require something more solid and permanent. Community art is not about materials, spaces and artistic media, but instead it is about audience relationships, communication and political intention (Lacy, 1995:28). In some cases, it is that very relationship that is the art work. The intention is to activate the viewer, allowing him or her to become a participant or a collaborator. New genre public art challenges the more monolithic views of the audience found in modern art. Audiences are no longer considered given or singular.

The dialogue desired by Gablik between the artist, art and audience on equal terms is unfortunately not always easy to establish. Even new genre public art with its focus on community and dialogue has been criticised for uneven power relations. Understanding these works of art often requires information about the art or art in general. It also often requires that the public actively engages with it. Public knowledge or engagement cannot be guaranteed even when the community is involved in the planning and production of the art.

### A Contemporary Understanding of Public art



*Hjallis*, Trondheim, 2007



*Studenten i den gamle stad*, Trondheim, 2007<sup>9</sup>

Public art often does well during periods of economic prosperity. The 1980s and the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are periods when public art programmes and the establishment of

<sup>9</sup> *Hjallis* is the work of artist Per Ung and was installed in 1998. *Studenten i den gamle stad* or *The student from the old town* was created by Nils Aas and installed in 1996.

percentage for the arts policies within local councils have flourished. Corporate finance also invests in art during periods of prosperity. Art is used as a marketing strategy, one which exists within a continuing tradition of art collecting. Large corporations decorate the inside and outside of their corporate buildings with art. Statoil and Telenor are two Norwegian companies with well-known art collections. Trondheim has a number of examples of gifts given to the city by individuals or groups from the private sector. Sculptural gifts advertise the public-mindedness of successful companies or businesspeople. The sculptures that they give are often associated historically and materially with the monument tradition. The connection with the social and physical framework is not always immediately obvious. Taste and choice therefore remains within the hands of local authorities or the private commercial sector. Gifts represent conservative interventions in the public space; they circumvent the aesthetic requirements of the artistic community and the social and locational focus of public funding.

The ability of public art to ensure democratic involvement in public places is something Rosalyn Deutsche is sceptical of because she suggests that democracy is a contested area belonging to no single political perspective or group (Deutsche 1992:36). The public place considered for public art is, she claims, often urban redevelopment schemes, and the public space and public is regarded as being a precise site or specific group of people. The presence of aesthetic quality helps to give redevelopment a democratic legitimacy, because like 'public', 'art' is often associated with universality, openness and inclusion, but in fact it may be supporting the exclusionary rights of property control and disciplinary power in the form of the exclusions, curfews and the surveillance necessary to protect it (1992:37). Public space, Deutsche suggests, exists instead within the legitimacy of debate, a debate that includes many voices and does not seek the support of an external and unifying judge (1992:51). Public art within this understanding must meet the challenge of a fluid, dynamic public in public places where ownership and use may be challenged. The assumption of ideological unity implied within the monument tradition in the first part of this chapter is in strong contrast to Deutsche's proposed debate which sees fragmentation as restorative and a precondition for the search for new kinds of common ground (1992:49).

Works of contemporary art in public places are encountered by a diverse public who may have little or no contact with the art found in museums and galleries. This raises questions about the public relationship and understandings; is it really possible to say that the art is for everyone, when only a small percentage of the public meeting the art actually has the background and education to understand the premises upon which the art is based? This is an important discrepancy within the role of public art, one which challenges the expectations of the planners and producers of public art. The knowledge and theory suggested by Arthur Danto as necessary to define an object as a work of art can effectively exclude potential members of its public (Danto, 1994:477). These factors can also hinder its agency and involving the public with public art may be considered one of the main challenges associated with public art. Art does not necessarily derive its public status from where it is located. The process of interpretation and understanding is important to public art. In a museum or gallery, a voluntary audience places the work within an art historical context. An involuntary audience in a public place has the context of daily life as its primary frame of reference. The public, when trying to relate to a public work of art, will therefore compare and associate it with elements existing outside the artworld. Art historian Harriet Senie describes this as a “looks like” or metaphorical process, but she says such efforts to understand the art are not enough. Without the necessary art education, the public is excluded from the art experience that was intended for them, and the same process brings public art within a frame of understanding which is easy to attack and ridicule (Senie 1992:241).

The public is only excluded from the artworld experience, and it is able to experience the art in other ways. This analysis is more interested in what the public’s actual experience is and what provokes it. Connecting works of art with what is already known and understood does not have to be a negative process. It may be an essential part of the social life of public art. In the end it becomes a discussion about acceptable levels of understanding and a disparity between what the artworld expects and how the public reacts. The dialogue mentioned by Gablik and Lacy has the potential to support understanding and to encourage the public to seek more information, and the debate suggested by Deutsche may be the catalyst necessary to provoke public interest. *The Angel of the North* is an example of a public work of art that was planned amid enormous

public protest. The public engagement this caused was a factor which I believe helped the Angel in the beginning to establish a relational position in its location above the A1 outside Gateshead in the UK. The popularity of the *Angel of the North* is however based on more than debate. Aesthetic quality, location, symbolism, socio-economic needs and effective marketing all play a part in making it one of the most well-known public sculptures in the UK, and extremely active within the social and physical context on the outskirts of Gateshead<sup>10</sup>.



*The Angel of the North, Gateshead, June 2008*

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<sup>10</sup> In June and October 2008 I made two short trips to Gateshead to experience the Angel close up and to talk to the public about their understanding of the Angel's role.



## Shopping Centre Art



The County Arcade, Leeds, March 2007

In this section I will be commenting on the background for art in shopping centres, its function and history. Art plays a role in contemporary shopping centres<sup>11</sup>. Shoppers want more than just commercial goods to buy; they want a total experience (Field, M. (1997) in Dennis, 2005:18). Nadine Beddington suggests that successful shopping centres need to be more than functional, “In any shopping area there must be not only a feeling of bustle, excitement, sparkle, competition and variety, but also a sense of familiarity and confidence in where to go and what to look for. Monotony of design, repetition and regularity are the enemies of trade” (Beddington 1982:1). Shopping centre design must

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<sup>11</sup> The actual role of art in shopping centres as understood by public art committees, shopping centre developers and the public in the Bullring and at City Syd will be discussed further in Sections 3 and 4.



be legible, the customer must be able to understand and use the layout effectively and it must not be boring.

Luxury and style are elements that support trade and legibility, and these needs can be encouraged through the use of art. Shopping is something most of us have to do regularly, and if we can choose, then we do not always choose the place with the most bargains to shop in. Shoppers may also choose to shop in the place that offers the most pleasing retail environment. Retail architecture has a tradition for attempting to seduce its public; decoration and art are part of the seduction process. A glance at Selfridges on Oxford Street, London or in the Arcades in Leeds shows that prior to the influence of modernism, retail structures were highly decorative affairs. Department store developers and owners like Gordon Selfridge built their stores around the idea that shoppers want to be offered a world outside their everyday lives. Pleasure, atmosphere and consumption are encouraged through the use of aesthetic elements.

Despite the decorative tradition there is no automatic association between art and shopping centres. This is because art is often associated with autonomy. An artist is expected to rely on their creative powers and not on the power of money. Art gains much of its integrity from being non-commercial. However, this ignores the long history of patronage in art and emphasises the aesthetic qualities of the art object, rather than the functional and relational aspects which are also associated with art. Art does play a role in shopping centres, but the decorative focus, which is primary, has meant that when it has been subject to critical art analysis it has often been found to be lacking in social and aesthetic qualities. Cher Krauss Knight says that there is a lot of art in American shopping centres, but not much of it is any good. It fills in spaces and marks meeting points but it rarely challenges or engages. Not providing shopping centres with “good” art is, Knight suggests, a missed opportunity because shopping centre audiences are so diverse and there is so much potential space. Good art is defined as socially conscious art and Knight concludes by suggesting that shopping centres are unlikely to provide a location for controversial or socially conscious art because they are a commercial conglomerate of private business interests who fear that art that discusses social issues would dampen the public’s enthusiasm for commercial activity (Knight, 2008:76).

Massey and Rose would call the art found in shopping centres described by Knight “weak public art.” This is because it is passive, does not negotiate between the public and the place, and it does not challenge or intervene, it just smoothes or integrates. It is about holding the space together visually. The social effort, Massey and Rose propose, takes place elsewhere (Massey and Rose, 2003:15). Massey, Rose and Knight are therefore suggesting that an aesthetic focus alone does not necessarily provide public places with good art. However, this analysis does not take into account what the public appreciates in public art, and may therefore lose sight of what makes it active within the social and physical context.

The dialogue and debate mentioned earlier is not a central factor in shopping centre art, but aesthetic quality is. The use of art in shopping centres follows the decorative tradition established by department stores and arcades and the decorative tradition is aimed at providing visual qualities that would encourage an atmosphere of luxury. In the County Arcade in Leeds, the decoration is so elaborate that it is challenging to the eye and therefore becomes a noticeable factor. However, few shopping establishments today aim at visual impact that is not directly associated with the commercial activity taking place inside them. Advertising and window displays provide the primary decoration, apart from in December when Christmas decorations appear. Contemporary shopping centres like Meadow Hall outside Sheffield include decorative elements, but many of these have a temporary feel. They are not integral to the architectural structure of the place. The centre is always changing and new shops arrive and old decoration disappears. Art which is primarily decorative must compete with the intense visual experience provided in the rest of the shopping centre, and it will have difficulty winning the competition for attention through the use of purely aesthetic means. The art must therefore provide an intense visual experience, as in the County Arcade in Leeds, or use other methods to reach its public, for example the socially conscious art suggested by Knight. Another possibility is that the art plays a supporting role, encouraging commercial activity but not aiming at making an impact by itself. Several of the artworks in the Bullring primarily play supporting aesthetic roles, helping to create a pleasing atmosphere within the shopping

centre. An active role may be a subtle one and the ability to cause pleasure must not be underestimated.



Meadow Hall, Sheffield, March 2007

Public art is installed in shopping centres not only because it is decorative, but also because the use of art helps to legitimise the act of shopping. It works by association; art is often understood as having aesthetic qualities and therefore the goods on display will be affected by this aesthetic aura. A shopping centre with art may be seen as not just being about commerce and the shopping activity within it, it may also be regarded as something other than commercial. However, there are negative associations with the use of art in shopping centres. An active role does not have to be connected with positive associations. John Goss argues that art in shopping centres is associated with the commercial desire to manipulate the behaviour of shoppers. He suggests that art in shopping centres rarely demands interpretation and that it may simply be recognised as a sign – that it is art that provides the shopping centre with an aura of high culture that encourages shopping (Goss, 1993:38). Public art in shopping centres is also used to guide public behaviour. There are very few spaces in shopping centres that, Goss suggests, may

be claimed by uninvited or unexpected activities. Areas that could potentially arouse activity which could potentially be understood as subversive, such as loitering, playing or taking shortcuts are often filled with plants, sculptures and fountains (1993:35). Public art along with fountains and benches helps to signify traditional urban public spaces. Goss says that these objects, “exude an aura of familiarity” which facilitates consumption (1993:40). Public art points out which way we should go and it also says something about how we should behave when we get there functioning as a kind of moral commandment, symbolising expected behaviour.



The County Arcade, Leeds, March 2007

By acting as a symbol of what is exclusive and luxurious, public art influences behaviour and helps to exclude unwanted elements. It enhances the sense of public place and at the same time shows the management’s commitment to public edification, legitimating their power as owners (Goss, 1993:39). However, the conflict between the management and those who feel themselves to be unwanted is not visible to everybody. Most people only



see the shops and the opportunities to shop, but art as a symbol of luxury may also exclude people who do not have access to this wealth associated with luxury.



St John's shopping centre, Leeds, March 2007

Art is part of the process of seduction, and by encouraging a pleasing aesthetic appearance, art can also encourage consumption, but we may assume that not all members of the shopping public will be seduced. Not everyone notices the art and not everyone is encouraged to shop by an atmosphere of luxury. Another aspect associated with shopping centre art is that its efforts to please the public are not just about being exclusive; they can also help to make the place more inclusive. Beddington suggests that graphics and murals may be used to avoid the depressing effects of “dead areas” (Beddington, 1982:48). The art provides meeting points and is often intended to provide cultural associations with the people and the place. In its effort to encourage the act of shopping, developers and retail managers also create places which many people feel

comfortable in. Shopping centre developers and retail managers are therefore interested in public art that plays an active role in shopping centres. Interpretation of the positive or negative effect of this role may vary, but public art is seen by those who plan and produce it as playing a valuable part in the shopping centre framework, and it is installed because it can be shown (even if it is only through profit margins) that the public appreciates its presence.

### **Summary and Reflections**

Art in general depends on a public response but the location of art outside museums and galleries suggests an active relationship with the physical and social framework, one which is not entirely defined by the artworld. At the same time, the background of theory, history and practice lays the groundwork for the definition of certain aesthetic objects as public works of art, and it is this background which was presented here.

A public for the arts developed during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and an appreciation of the arts was regarded as positive for the moral life of society. Monuments, by expanding the locality of the arts out into a wider public arena, offer moral, political and social guidance to the population at large, but public needs were not at the centre of the commission. During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, public art was still understood as having moral and educational relevance, but it was given a less pronounced ideological content. Public art was increasingly seen as functional, providing necessary aesthetic relief from the urban problems related to the physical and social frameworks of Western cities. Site-specific art which developed during the 1970s provides a solution to the problems associated with the physical framework, but as the *Tilted Arc* example shows, too much site-specificity can be provocative if the artwork does not also consider the social context. New genre public art or community art aimed to include the public actively within the planning and production of the art. Despite its efforts at inclusivity, it still struggles with public relations because the background of artistic theory which it stems from requires a public understanding which is not always easy to achieve.

The inclusion of the public's needs and the desire to achieve active public involvement with the art are the main challenges associated with the planning process today. This does not always result in art with a moral or ideological focus; aesthetic



quality and pleasurable experience are also given attention. This is particularly apparent in shopping centre art. Art adds style and encourages the self-image of shopping centres, and shopping centres with a strong self-image are successful shopping centres. The establishment of an image, particularly one associated with luxury, is a tradition within retail architecture, but it is decoration and not necessarily art which has been most commonly used. Art in shopping centres is available to a wide audience, but public art in shopping centres rarely achieves the potential offered by such active public places. Art in shopping centres has tended to follow a decorative tradition, and therefore concentrates on the aesthetic effect. By supporting the atmosphere of luxury which encourages consumption, and by helping to guide the behaviour of the shoppers, public art often plays a functional role. However, this functional role is often an active one within a shopping centre context. Achieving pleasurable places is both difficult and desirable. The social effect is a subtle one, and not quite as dramatic as critical art analysis suggests is preferable.

Public art has not necessarily become more inclusive since the monuments to heroes were first installed, but the expectations about the role that public art should play within the social and physical framework have changed. Those planning and producing public art often still have a message which they desire will reach its public, but they now plan for art that will exist within a relational context that is both physical and social. The public is not often a unified group. During the active phase of its social life in a public place, a work of art will meet a broad section of society and a variety of responses. Planners and producers must therefore also plan for fragmentation, debate, enthusiasm and critique.

## 8. *Go to Tiller*: The Public Art Committee's Expectations



City Syd, August 2007

The intention of this chapter is to describe and analyse candidacy associated with the planning process which resulted in the Dandelion being installed outside the entrance to the City Syd car park on August 9<sup>th</sup> 2007. The candidacy, although it provides a cultural framework which establishes how an object is used or understood, does not necessarily presuppose a complete sharing of understandings (Appadurai, 1986:14). Candidacy influences exchange within the context, but it may offer more than one suggestion about the value of the object exchanged. The Dandelion is the result of the collaboration between a public art committee, an art academy and a group of art students, all of whom were specialists within their field and had ideas about the role that public art should play.

The chapter therefore presents the standards and criteria that were part of the planning process and the expectations of those who planned and produced the sculpture before the Dandelion became involved in relational activity with the public at City Syd during the active phase.

An analysis of what a public art committee is starts the chapter. The next section considers the original *Go to Tiller* art project, which resulted in the Dandelion being installed in Tiller. Following that, the influence of the physical and social context on the expectations of the public art committee is considered. The fourth section looks at the workings of the public art committee in relation to artworld practices and expectations. The committee's actual expectations and their response to the reality of the situation after the sculpture was installed for a year are considered within the final section.

### **What is a Public Art Committee?**

The public art committee represents the artworld in terms of the Tiller/City Syd location. Within Tiller and City Syd, the artworld specifically refers to a public art committee organised by Trondheim City Council<sup>1</sup>. The term artworld provides a way of describing those involved in the production of artworks, their routines of interaction, and the knowledge which they base their intentions and expectations on. Understanding the role, the intentions and the expectations of the public art committee as representative of the artworld is relevant within the context of City Syd/Tiller because it does not just influence the planning and production of an artwork, it also influences the role that public art plays once it is installed in a public place. An artwork does not arrive in front of its public without meaning and value, some of it is imposed during planning and production.

Analysing the Dandelion within an artworld context offers an understanding of what makes it different from other objects found outside City Syd. Public art is located outside the conventional physical setting provided by galleries and museums and a public artwork may not automatically be defined as a work of art by all members of its public after its installation, but the artworld definition of an object as a work of art exists as part

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<sup>1</sup> The activities of artists are intrinsic to the existence of works of art and their activities will be mentioned, but my main focus is the process of choosing and placing art in Tiller.

of the meaning associated with the sculpture. The artworld therefore supports the understanding of the Dandelion as an art object, and it provides information about the activities of the people who influenced the form of the sculpture and its role. Knowledge and practice establishes who is involved. It is also what the public art committee based its choices and understandings upon. It is from within this field of knowledge and practice that the artworld represented by the public art committee is able to exert its influence over public places like Tiller and City Syd.



Tiller, August 2007

A public art committee plans and produces a public art project. Once the need for a public art commission is established by a local or national governing body, a committee is organised to describe and analyse the physical and social qualities of the location and the aesthetic requirements of the project. The committee is responsible for drawing up a budget in relation to income and expenditure. It is also responsible for the art plan that presents the locations where the art is to be installed; it describes the art or the artist to be given the commission and other information relevant to the execution of the art project.

The plan also relates the artistic requirements of the project to the budget<sup>2</sup>. The art plan must be approved by the local control committee for the public arts (RSU)<sup>3</sup>. Once the art and artist has been chosen, the committee follows up the production of the artworks. The committee's work is over once the artwork is installed.

Within a broader Norwegian context and within the local context of Trondheim, the group that develops a public art project has a standard social form and content. The group includes a representative from the local council, the architect and/or landscape architect involved in developing the physical form of the project, a local representative from what is understood as the main public who will be using the building or area in which the art will be located, and an artistic consultant who provides insight into the aesthetic potential of the project and presents to the rest of the group the work of artists who could complete the suggested commission. The form of the group is based on guidelines administrated by KORO (Public Art Norway)<sup>4</sup>. The principal contractor, usually a local or regional council, is responsible for bringing together and administrating the committee.

The majority of the public art projects in Trondheim follow the social form presented above, although some received closer follow-up than others by the City Council Advisor for Public Art. The social form of the public art committee involved in the Tiller project was different. This was due to the background for the project. It was a collaborative project; in 2004 the Trondheim Academy of Fine Art (KiT) at NTNU invited Trondheim City Council to collaborate on a public art project<sup>5</sup>. The City Council regarded the invitation as an interesting challenge and accepted. The City Council Advisor for Public Art explained their response to the invitation from KiT in this way: "*a student project is*

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<sup>2</sup> The income for a public art commissions comes from a percentage drawn from the building costs associated with a public building, usually 1.5 to 1.7 %. The greater the building costs, the larger the sum set aside for public art. In Trondheim, public art projects are funded differently. In 2002 a motion was carried by the city council to set aside 1.25 % of the city's total investment budget to be used in public art projects. In 2007 this amount was reduced to 0.7 %. The arrangement allows greater flexibility in relation to which buildings and public spaces receive public art.

<sup>3</sup> The RSU or Regional samarbeidsutvalget is composed of two representatives from the local members of the artist's unions TBK and NKM, and one representative from the local branch of the Society of Architects.

<sup>4</sup> The guidelines were drawn up in November 1999 by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

<sup>5</sup> KiT is the acronym used to present the Kunstakademiet i Trondheim or as it is known in English, the Trondheim Academy of Fine Art.

*a completely different process than the usual projects which result in a concrete work of art. It sheds light on the problem in a different way.*” They hoped therefore that the collaboration with KiT would involve the city in a process that was different from the usual public art projects, and develop art that was different in some way from the other art projects that had previously been developed by the city council. In 2002, Trondheim City Council approved a new public art scheme aimed at integrating art to a much greater degree within the urban environment. One of the main challenges was space outside public buildings, particularly in areas outside the city centre<sup>6</sup>. The collaboration with KiT suited the city council’s interest in working with this priority area, although initially they had no specific ideas about where in Trondheim they would develop the public art project. The public art project eventually became known as *Go to Tiller*<sup>7</sup>.

As the collaboration between KiT and Trondheim City Council developed, it moved from being purely a theoretical student project to being an actual public art project. One of the public art consultants described the move from theoretical to concrete: *“The council decided that if they were going to get as much as possible out of it as a research project, then they should find an area in which it would be interesting to see what public art could do for the place.”* Both parties saw that they would gain more benefit, both in experience and art, if they developed an actual public art project<sup>8</sup>. Students were therefore given the opportunity to see their future artistic activity in a realistic study situation.

The public art committee for Tiller developed from the city council’s internal committee for public art in urban spaces and the group from KiT. The internal public art committee works on the overall plan for public art for the city; most of its members do not usually work directly with the public art that is developed. This group was involved in the project

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<sup>6</sup> Public Art Norway (KORO) has a similar interest in urban spaces. The Dandelion received funding from KORO, Trondheim City Council, NTNU and City Syd’s owners at the time, Steen og Strøm. The collaboration is in accordance with the city council’s resolution to encourage outside investment in public art projects.

<sup>7</sup> The production of a public art project takes a long time and has a time plan which is not compatible with student progression which follows a university calendar. In the spring 2007 when the project was still in its planning stages, only two of the six artists involved in the three chosen projects were still students.

<sup>8</sup> The idea of working in Tiller was proposed by a committee member working for the City Planning Department. The council representative had been part of the planning team from the city council who worked with the area around City Syd during the 1980s.



from the beginning and started out by making suggestions about potential locations and the needs of the public within Trondheim. KiT was closely involved at the beginning of the project but later withdrew allowing their artistic consultant to represent their standpoint within the project and to follow-up the students. There was no permanent representative for the local community within the committee. Businesses from the commercial zone in Tiller were invited to take part in the project, but only City Syd became involved, participating in a number of meetings and eventually providing some funding for the project.

The public art committee for the *Go to Tiller* art project had seven members. Two artistic consultants were employed; one was employed by NTNU and one by the City Council. The five other members represented departments or roles within the city council; Urban Planning, Housing, Public Art, Technical Services, and the Department of Public Utilities. The same five people represent their departments on the city's internal public art committee<sup>9</sup>.

The departments mentioned above represent the official roles, and they provide information about the roles the individuals played within the Tiller art project. They also point to what the committee's members do when they are not working with public art, and point to the different standpoints which they use when working with the public places. Despite the slightly unusual form of the public art committee, the group as a whole had the knowledge and practice required to plan and produce a public art project. According to Erving Goffman a social role can be connected to rights and duties, but a role involves more than one part, and these parts may be presented on different occasions to the same audience. In addition, an individual may play a number of different roles during their day-to-day life (Goffman 1990:27). The role that the committee members play within the context of public art is a combination of more than one official role. The private role played outside working hours may also influence work on the public art committee. Each role, whether official or unofficial, adds to the knowledge used to understand the Tiller neighbourhood and plan the public art.

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<sup>9</sup> The City Council Advisor for public art has the main administrative responsibility for the public art scheme.



### ***Go to Tiller***

When the *Go to Tiller* project started in 2004 there was very little art in Tiller. The schools and nursing homes in the area had public art, but not much outside the buildings. The area within the commercial zone had no public art. The intention of the *Go to Tiller* art project presented in the brochure was to look at how art would affect already existing urban spaces.

After participating in a seminar where the neighbourhood's form and history was presented by the member of the public art committee representing Urban Planning, the students were sent out to study the physical and visual form of the Tiller neighbourhood. They also interviewed people they met on the streets of Tiller. The students proposed ten public art projects, of which, three were chosen to be realised: a weed-related project which ended up being the Dandelion; a light project *Den lysende port til Tiller!* or *A Luminous Bridge for Tiller!* which was planned for the pedestrian bridge between City Syd and Tonstad Terrace; and an illusionistic sculptural project called *Pig illusion*<sup>10</sup>.

When asked why the three projects were chosen, several of the committee members pointed to them being the “***most realistic.***” By which I assume that they meant that the projects were the ones that were possible to produce within the practical limitations provided by funding and production methods. Aesthetic considerations also played a role; the committee members were enthusiastic about the form of the projects. One of the public art consultants said, “***I think the three projects are really good. They could turn out to be the best in Trondheim.***” Only one of the three projects was actually realised, the Dandelion. The two other projects proved to be technically challenging and therefore more expensive to realise than was intended. The *Pig illusion* and the light project on the pedestrian bridge are therefore on hold until the technical problems have been satisfactorily resolved, and the necessary funds have been made available. The production of the Dandelion is therefore the focus of this text.

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<sup>10</sup> Students worked in small groups with the three projects.





Three of the ten proposed projects involved plants or flowers. The Dandelion developed from a project originally called *Tillerbyen veksthus* or *The Tiller-town greenhouse*. The project suggested several greenhouses placed around City Syd and the intention was to provide light and colour. The brochure produced to present the Tiller project suggests that the greenhouses would have contained “what most people would consider weeds: our most common flowers”<sup>11</sup>. Nowhere in the brochure is there proposed a colourful nine-metre tall sculpture of a flower made of bronze and steel.

The Dandelion sculpture developed out of the collaboration between the three students, Niklas Mulari, Mikael Nilsson, and Are Blytt and the public art consultant employed by NTNU. None of the members of the public art committee commented on the changing form of what eventually became the Dandelion sculpture. It may be assumed that they saw it as a natural development as the project moved towards its practical completion. When I started studying the project, the Dandelion had already found its form, and the production of the sculpture was already under way in a foundry in Thailand.

### **Tiller through the Eyes of the Public Art Committee**

The physical context provokes a response from those entering a social situation and it provides the context in which social activity can take place; it has no will or intentions but sets the scene for potential social activity and encourages expectations about what will happen (Goffman 1986:22). The Tiller context provides the background for the decisions made by the public art committee and their expectations about the role that the public art will play. The Tiller neighbourhood and its commercial zone have a strong social, physical and visual character. The urban development in Tiller has a history that has helped define the physical form that exists today. This includes the problems associated with the development of the marshland, the plans to build a twin-town and the commercial requirements that eventually led to City Syd’s location close to the E6 motorway<sup>12</sup>. These factors provide a background for the existing social and physical context, but the public art committee did not refer to this background; it was implicit

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<sup>11</sup> Brochure 2005, Kunst i felleskapets rom, (Art in the common room), KiT, NTNU. My translation.

<sup>12</sup> These factors are described in detail in Chapter 4.

information. Only one committee member commented on it and she was involved in the planning process during the 1980s.



Tiller, August 2007

Only one of the seven committee members had an everyday relationship with the shopping centre. The representative from the Department of Public Utilities shops there quite often because she lives in a neighbourhood close to City Syd. Practical considerations hindered most members of the public art committee from visiting the neighbourhood often. The representative from Urban Planning told me, *“I don’t have a car you see, so it’s out of my reach. It’s not about some ideological thing because I love shopping centres, but I can’t get to City Syd.”* Trondheim is a small city and I think it is fair to say that most of its population knows something about the Tiller neighbourhood even if they do not visit it very often. I suggest, therefore, that not having an active relationship with the neighbourhood and the shopping centre does not hinder the members of the public art committee from having an understanding of it, and expectations about the effect public art will have upon it. In addition, for five of the



committee's members, the nature of their work within Trondheim City Council means that they are expected to have a deeper understanding of the physical and demographic situation in Tiller.

The aspect associated with the neighbourhood most commented upon by the members of the public art committee was the commercial dominance found in the area around City Syd. The influence of the commercial needs of the area was associated by the committee members with negative elements within the physical framework found in Tiller. The representative from Housing said, "***Tiller is a very big indistinct area, it hasn't been completely developed and there is a lot of traffic. It is a commercial area which demands large spaces, as opposed to in a town where it is easier to relate to the urban spaces. So it's a challenge to find art or a project which can add something to these large spaces.***" Her comments point to the difficulties associated with both using the space and planning for an area that is large, commercial and traffic filled. Commercial needs are therefore regarded by the committee members as affecting how it feels to be in the neighbourhood, and according to the representative from Technical Services, this is not providing a physical framework which it feels good to be in. "***It is not an area I would call an urban area. It is more of an industrial area. It is very open and wind-swept. There is a large scale to all the structures; there isn't really a human scale to them. It is like people barely spend time in the area, you feel very alienated.***" The existing commercial dominance and the form and scale of the place, through the impression it made on the public art committee, affected the public art project. The public art was intended to have positive agency within this understanding of the place.

It is not just existing qualities that influenced the public art project. The Tiller neighbourhood continues to grow and change. Members of the public art committee saw the continuing development as providing challenges when planning for the area. When asked why Tiller was chosen as a location for the project, the representative from the Department of Public Utilities said, "***Tiller is an area where there is a lot happening. There is a lot of expansion going on and there are plans for more.....At the same time the area is fairly anonymous.....So it has a rather negative image really, and the large commercial buildings are enormous. Therefore working with this area was really***

*exciting.*” This committee member emphasised how interesting it had been working on the project, and that this could be connected to the challenges associated with the physical form of the neighbourhood.

Public art is often seen as a solution to urban problems and not just by Trondheim City Council. There is a post-Second World War tradition for the use of public art in urban redevelopment or renewal<sup>13</sup>. The physical context provided by the Tiller neighbourhood provoked a response from the public art committee members; facts like there being no art in the area, that the spaces are large, indistinct and wind-swept, and that cars and commerce dominate the place required the individuals involved in the public art project to make judgements about the place and the kind of art that is needed there. The *Go to Tiller* art project is therefore not just based on artworld norms and values associated with public art and the artworld in general, it is also based on negative qualities related to the physical context in the neighbourhood; positive qualities were not often mentioned by members of the public art committee. The neighbourhood was not understood as having social problems. Nothing like that was mentioned by the public art committee, but it was suggested that the social context would be improved by the presence of public art because the artworks would make the place easier to relate to.

### **Public Art Worlds**

The public art committee who worked on the *Go to Tiller* project worked within an established practice for public art projects, one that has developed over time through numerous public art projects in Trondheim<sup>14</sup>. The committee is therefore a performance team, a set of individuals who cooperate in supporting an institution. A performance team works within the light of internal and external expectations about what befits the group (Goffman, 1990:84). The artworld is part of the internal and external expectations of the committee because its members have access to a background of art theory and history and there is an established practice.

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<sup>13</sup> See references to public art as part of gentrification processes in chapter 7.

<sup>14</sup> This practice has been in place at least since 2002 when the present public art scheme was established.



Tiller, August 2007

None of the public art committee members who worked with the *Go to Tiller* project referred to the artworld, but their practices are associated with the production and definition of public art, and this is central artworld practice. For the majority of the *Go to Tiller* committee members, being part of committee that was potentially part of the artworld was only one role among many roles they played during their working day. At least four of the committee's members were members, not because of their artistic knowledge, but because of their knowledge about urban planning and its needs. Public art has the potential to affect their specialist area within the City Council; their knowledge was therefore a requirement when planning the public art. For example, the representative for Housing considered public art in relation to increasing urban density: "*it is important where density is in focus, to create nice outdoor spaces for people. Apartments are getting smaller, and communal areas are getting smaller, so urban spaces are getting more and more important for people in the city centre.*" The use of public art therefore

has a positive effect within the urban environment; there is a relationship between function, aesthetic quality and urban design. Artworld knowledge and practice is therefore not the only set of norms and values that influence the activities of the public art committee, and for some members of the committee it may not even be the primary set of knowledge and values.

For the public art consultants, artworld knowledge and practice was primary within their activities within the committee. The artworld as an institution has members who act for it, and within the broad membership described by Dickie there is also a core personnel (Dickie, 1974:35). Public art consultants are not mentioned by Dickie in his description of the core personnel, but I suggest that the two public art consultants are core members. They are individuals with arts backgrounds who are conscious of their knowledge about the arts, and within their activities outside the public art committee they both work with art practices.

When asked about his role within the production process, NTNU's consultant said, "***The consultant's role in this kind of project is really important. A consultant should have an idea about what he wants to see, a vision about what the art can do that is actually just as important as the artists.***" The consultant does not see his role as purely organisational; the creative process is an important part of what he does. Public art consultants are also defenders of the role of public art within public spaces. For example, the city council's public art consultant had particular expectations about the role that public art should play within public places. "***A mission I think is to give even more people direct access to the art so that you don't have to come from a family or a group which actively visits art by going to galleries or museums. In this way, taking art out into public places means that you and I almost said as a citizen of Norway, come in contact with and develop a relationship with the art.***" Both consultants see their role as involving specific knowledge and practice<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> The first public art consultant was appointed by NTNU because of the art academy's involvement in the project. Trondheim City Council felt the need for additional artistic experience in relation to practical needs of the group and therefore appointed another consultant. The normal procedure requires public art consultants to be appointed in collaboration with RSU.

The public art consultants were conscious of their roles in guiding the aesthetic choices made by the committee. Their experience as artists working both in the gallery situation and with public art provides them with the professional skills to guide the progression of a public art project. The city council's consultant expressed it in this way: ***“Public art is another way of working. It's not very different to other ways of working with art, but it's a different way of thinking, relating to problems and possibilities that are different... It's a different way to use ones skills. Equivalent but different, because you can't do the same things in public space that you do in a gallery. They are different settings.”*** Due to their access to particular knowledge and skills, they represent the artworld within the committee and provide it with its status. Without a public art consultant, the committee would not have been recognised as a part of the artworld by the artistic community in Trondheim. This, I suggest, would have made it more difficult for the object installed to be accepted as art within the context of Tiller.

It was not just the public art consultants who believed in the importance of their role in producing good public art. The representative for the Department of Public Utilities pointed to the public art committee making decisions based on its combined experience. ***“It's about, is it accessible, who will enjoy it, who will make use of it? It is a total consideration. A small place has to fulfil a lot of functions. So we have to be very careful about what we put into it. That is the kind of judgement we make in the group.”*** The decisions that were made were based on professional experience, which included both practical and aesthetic competence. For example, Technical Services look after public art after its installation; they keep it clean, make general repairs, and tidy up after vandalism. Their representative therefore required specific elements of a piece of public art, ***“We were interested in it being something which had a quality in its execution which would mean that it was something that would stand the test of time. Not all the suggestions were realistic in relation to this.”*** The role that committee members played outside the public art committee within the City Council was what defined them as members of the committee. It also influenced the choices that they made on the committee and their expectations about the role the public art would play in Tiller. This was combined with the artworld knowledge and practice of the two public art consultants

ensuring that a breath of knowledge and experience was available to the committee and helping to encourage an achievable outcome.

### **The Public Art Committee's Expectations**

The Dandelion was expected to play an active role to have agency by its planners and producers. This expectation may be associated with the active definition of public art suggested by Massey and Rose at the beginning of the thesis. An object or artwork may only be defined as a public work of art if it has agency (Massey and Rose, 2003:18). Agency is associated with people and objects that initiate causal sequences of events. These are the kind of events caused by intent rather than accidents or natural occurrences (Gell, 1998:16). Within Gell's agency theory, artworks are not understood as working alone, they have agency in relationship with their public.



Tiller, August 2007

It appears there was a general consensus within the committee about the expected impact of the public art on the neighbourhood, and within the consensus there



were three main expectations. The first is that the art would cause debate; the next expectation was that art would challenge ideas about the place, and finally that it was expected to have an aesthetic influence on the neighbourhood. All three required the response of a public and suggest an active role for the art. The three expectations will be used to structure the following part of the chapter. I will also present what happened to the expectations after the Dandelion's installation on the roundabout. The role of the expectations in relation to the public response is associated with the active phase of the Dandelion outside City Syd, but is presented here to allow continuity in the analysis of the expectations and their effect. It also allows focus on the public art committee's influence rather than the public's response. These aspects will also be mentioned during the analysis of the active phase during the social life of the Dandelion in Tiller.

#### **The First Expectation: The Art Will Cause Debate**

Agency is relational (Gell, 1998:22). The public art committee expected the Dandelion sculpture to make contact with the public outside City Syd. The concept of agency when associated with art objects is, suggests Alfred Gell, about overcoming resistance or inertia. "Art objects are characteristically 'difficult'. They are difficult to make, difficult to 'think', difficult to transact. They fascinate, compel, and entrap as well as delight the spectator. Their peculiarity, intransigence, and oddness is a key factor in their efficacy as social agents" (1998:23). Art objects, by being attractive or provoking, can involve us in a social relationship. The classic anthropological example of the Kula trade between a network of islands in Melanesia provides insight into the potential for social engagement, entrapment and magic provoked by objects such as the shell necklaces and canoe prow boards (Gell, 1992:44). In addition, art objects have the potential to clarify an existing social situation because by being peculiar or intransigent, they often exist outside what is the accepted norm and therefore highlight what is accepted or not accepted, and in this way they can activate debate.

By stimulating debate, public art is involved in an active role within the social context and has the potential to highlight different aspects within the social and physical context. The public art committee members expected the planned public art to provoke a reaction

from the public in Tiller. This was due in part to there being no art in the area previously, and also because of the kind of art to be installed. As a result of anticipating debate, the public art committee was prescribing an active role for the public art within the neighbourhood.

The public art consultant from NTNU said: *“There will be some discussion but not controversy, people won’t be angry. I can’t imagine that, but it will certainly provoke people. Why a dandelion eh? Perhaps if it had been a rose. You realise that it’s a junk flower? The students chose it because they think that the area is a little bit like that.”* The consultant is referring to the form and the meaning associated with the sculpture. The Dandelion’s agency is expected to provoke, but not a lot. No one expected the public to dislike the Dandelion. The size of the sculpture was also expected to make an impact: *“The Dandelion is big, nine metres. It’s bound to cause a reaction.”* Something that big cannot, it is implied, just be ignored. The City Council Advisor for Public Art suggested that *“Art should arouse curiosity. Communication is important, it is important to create a process. I hope that it causes debate.”* Debate is therefore regarded as a good thing and a response, even if it is negative, does prove that the sculpture has a public, and it is useful because it is good for the public well-being in Tiller. The public art committee was following an established tradition within the visual arts, where the arts were seen as helping to improve the moral tone of public life (Craske, 1997:24). This was confirmed by the representative from Technical Services, who suggested that an interest in art in Tiller would help to make people more interested in public art in general. *“It will perhaps contribute to increasing the focus on art and may make people interested in there being more projects like it.”* Public art’s role in Trondheim is established, but the use of money on public art still causes debate on occasion. Debate is, as I have already suggested, considered healthy but the representative from Technical Services is also implying that the more people who believe in the role of public art the better.

### **What Happened to the Debate?**

The Dandelion has so far not become a source of debate. After installation during the active phase, it was discussed in the local paper, but there have been few comments and

very little temperature to the debate. The city council's public art consultant described it as "*an amusing exchange*." She did not regard the discussion in the paper as a debate.

<h2>Plukke løvetann?</h2> <p>Hvem er hjernen bak dette mindre pene kunstverket ved City syd? Er det bare meg, eller har jeg flere med meg, når jeg mener at dette burde plukkes opp med roten?</p> <p>Plukkeren</p> <p>Adressavisa 01.02.2008</p>	<h2>Skjønn natur ved City syd</h2> <p>Løvetannskulpturen ved City Syd er kjempefin! Vakker symbolikk som forteller at selv om akkurat dette stedet er overrepresentert av betong, stål, trafikkforurensning og pengemakt, så finnes det skjønn natur for de som har øynene åpne for det. Feks i grøftekanter ved City Syd.</p> <p>Frue fra Tiller</p>  <p>Publikum er stort sett fornøyd med den ni meter høye løvetannen i rundkjøringen ved City Syd. Foto: STEINAR FUGELSDØY</p> <p>Adressavisa 04.02.2008</p>
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Adressavisa, Trondheim's local paper 2008

The public art committee had not expected enormous controversy, but they had certainly initially expected more response than they got. During the second round of interviews that I did with the public art committee, that took place after the sculpture had been installed for a year, there was agreement among the committee members that there was very little about the sculpture to provoke the public. The representative from Housing said: "*There is nothing that you can criticise about it because there is nothing about it which provokes. It is just an enormous Dandelion growing out of the tarmac.*" This is different from the expectations prior to the Dandelion's installation, where the sculpture was expected, among other things, to be thought-provoking. The acceptance of the lack of debate is, I suggest, a response to the Dandelion as it actually appears on the roundabout, no one had really known exactly how the artwork would look prior to its installation.

It is still possible that the Dandelion may instigate a debate; agency may lie dormant in a work of art and come to the fore when circumstances allow it. The agent/patient relationship involving art objects which Gell describes is one he says, of

“fleeting contexts and predicaments of social life”, moments when we do actually attribute agency to non-human things (Gell, 1998:22). This is a description that suits the context of shopping centres, where connections with the place and the art are rapid and incidental, influenced by the fluid social nature of the place. The relationship with the Dandelion is a fleeting one, taking place as the public arrives or leaves the area. However, the large number of people visiting the area around the Dandelion everyday suggests that there will be a large number of these fleeting relationships. The potential for debate remains because numerous chances for a fleeting relationship exist, but the initial response to the Dandelion points to it not being a central element within the sculpture’s role. Size, colour and being defined as a work of art do not necessarily cause debate. The easy acceptance of the Dandelion by the public was unexpected, but it is not necessarily a negative quality and it suggests that the Dandelion exerts its influence in other ways.

#### **The Second Expectation: The Dandelion will Challenge Ideas about the Place**

The expectation that the *Go to Tiller* public art project would cause debate ascribes agency to the Dandelion which influences the second expectation; that the art will challenge ideas about the place. The public art committee expected the Dandelion to encourage a more critical attitude to the commercial zone around City Syd. The installation of a giant Dandelion in the middle of Tiller’s commercial district was to have a defamiliarising effect. Literature theorist Viktor Shklovsky suggests that art’s purpose is to allow us to see things as they really are, rather than as we expect them to be, “as perceived and not as they are known” (Shklovsky 1965). Habitual activities encourage us to lose sight of what exists in the physical and social context around us. Art can, according to Shklovsky, cause a reawakening of perception.

The Dandelion was intended to make people think beyond their usual ideas about the Tiller neighbourhood, and perhaps beyond their usual ideas about art. The representative from the Department of Public Utilities suggested meaning for the Dandelion: “*You can put something into the objects. A dandelion can force its way through the tarmac, force its way through the stone desert. I think there is something playful and thought-provoking about it.*” Her comments suggest a symbolic content for the sculpture and they also suggest function. The sculpture may act as an object of

thought; its role is intended to make us look and think. By challenging conventional ideas about the neighbourhood, the art installed would affect Tiller in a positive way. The City Council Staff Advisor for Public Art put it this way: “*A public space should not just represent one side of things. Art can highlight an urban space in different ways. It will do this at City Syd, give new and different experiences. Highlight how it was there before.*” The Dandelion was intended to function as an unusual form within Tiller, to be a form that says something obvious and perhaps not so obvious about its location.

The Dandelion could also have a more practical role. It was suggested by the representative from Technical Services that “*If you have elements like art, and other things which contribute positive aesthetics, such as flowers, and pleasant waiting areas, benches where you can sit and talk to people the area will be given a whole different quality.*” The sculpture, in collaboration with other practical and visual elements, would cause necessary visual and social improvements to the area around City Syd.

There were also worries about the impact of the Dandelion sculpture on the neighbourhood. Although the Dandelion was designed with the environment outside City Syd in mind, no one really knew if it would work before it was actually installed. There were fears that it might not be big enough or stand out within the active visual context around the roundabout. There was also a danger that the sculpture would be a little too much visually and instead of being an aesthetic improvement, it might contribute to making the visual experience worse. The representative from Urban Planning expressed these ideas, saying “*I hope that it can be enrichment, and I hope that it doesn’t just drown in the advertising chaos. That it stands out as something other than advertising. I think that is important, and it will be interesting to see if it does... because I wonder if they will add to the chaos, the visual chaos. It is a very large open space, and there is all this happening around it with things, traffic lights, advertisements and cars. It would be a shame on the one hand if it wasn’t strong enough, and on the other hand just became a part of the chaos.*” Despite these doubts, the public art committee believed in general that the art would have a positive effect on the neighbourhood and on the public’s understanding of public art in general.

### **Does the Dandelion Challenge Ideas about the Place?**

The members of the public art committee believed that the Dandelion had made an impact on the physical framework outside City Syd. They all liked the sculpture, and this encouraged their belief in the sculpture's effect. The representative from Technical Services suggests that the sculpture provides something that was not there before. His relationship with the place is primarily a working relationship and he admits to not visiting the area often, but his understanding of the physical context is a negative one. He said that the Dandelion "*helps to give the place an identity, one which is more positive than the one it had before.*" He was positive about the form of the sculpture within the physical context outside City Syd. Several committee members said that the sculpture had become a landmark, but City Syd is still seen as the "*number one landmark.*" At the same time, the committee members each in their own way expressed an opinion that the Dandelion alone was not enough to meet the physical and visual challenges presented by the framework around it. The city council's public art consultant said "*It has given the place something by being there, obviously it does that. But I'm not sure that such a small intervention in such a big area has a strong enough dynamic that it solves any of the problems or challenges. You need to make more than one intervention in such a large area to be able to do something with the place.*" This was a reference to the two other art projects that still have not been completed, and an acknowledgement that public art alone cannot solve urban problems.

Public art works in association with other factors, such as urban planning, active communication of the art project to the public and collaboration with the community. The City Council Advisor for Public Art acknowledges the difficulties associated with the role that public art is expected to play: "*Society needs visual and intellectual stimuli. It has so much from before; art must be allowed to try even though it can't change the world.*" Placing art within the framework outside City Syd is a start; other factors are also involved from the start, for example the roads around City Syd have been improved to allow better traffic flow and to encourage the presence of pedestrians. The traffic island on which the Dandelion stands is one of the changes to the road system. These factors alone cannot change the visual appearance of Tiller's commercial zone, but the Dandelion is a visually pronounced effort to do something with the aesthetic



appearance of the area, something which has not been attempted in Tiller before. During the active phase, some members of the public considered the sculpture's defamiliarising effect to be part of the role that it plays. However, a public work of art's role will change over time and familiarity comes with experience; the public art committee was also conscious of the sculptures exposure to familiarity.

### **The Third Expectation: The Dandelion will have an Aesthetic Influence**

Aesthetic qualities were important during the planning of the *Go to Tiller* public art project. The art was intended to be visually pleasing, have the correct scale in relation to its surroundings and, because of its form and colour, make a visual impact on the physical framework around it. The sculpture's aesthetic qualities were, I suggest, intended to support its role within the neighbourhood, but aesthetic qualities are not necessarily associated with agency and an active role for public art (Gell, 1998:3). They are often understood as being in contrast with practical and moral qualities (Dickie, 1992:113). However, the tradition for using art to achieve a positive moral effect also associates aesthetic quality with this effect because aesthetic quality has been closely associated with the arts since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The committee member from Technical Services said that, "*Aesthetically it will be a plus for the whole area. In relation to the shopping centre's needs I think it will be an investment which will pay for itself many, many times. It will be something which creates an impression and cause customers to come back.*" The aesthetic influence of the sculpture is therefore expected to affect the physical and visual quality of the neighbourhood. This effect is social because the public is expected to like being there more. In this, way aesthetic quality has an active agency. The representative from Urban Planning also expected the art to play an active social role: "*I think that what is planned has a kind of honour about it, which means that I personally expect that looking at it will make people happier.*" Happiness should come from contemplating art objects. An aesthetic role within a public place therefore does not have to be a passive role; it may be suggestive and provoke a social connection. Artworks, through the use of aesthetic qualities, have the ability to present meanings by visual means (Danto, 2005:10).

Aesthetic qualities are a visual means by which the work of art makes contact with its public and can be part of its agency.

### **Does the Dandelion have Aesthetic Influence?**

I mentioned earlier that the public art committee members all liked the sculpture, therefore on a personal level, the sculpture works well and has achieved an aesthetic role. The representative from the Department of Public Utilities said “*Personally I think that it is really nice. I’m really pleased with it. It makes me glad when I encounter it.*” This committee member visits City Syd regularly.

The Dandelion is a decorative element within the physical structure around it. It is a work of art within the accepted sense; it has aesthetic qualities and is non-functional. The aesthetic expectations may be seen as being fulfilled, but initially this expectation suggested that as an aesthetic intervention the sculpture would challenge understandings of the neighbourhood. The sculpture is not seen by the public art committee as challenging understandings of the place, but by being installed on the roundabout outside City Syd, it has changed the way the area looks, and the starting point for this are the aesthetic qualities associated with it. The sculpture has aesthetic agency because the potential to attract relational contact with the public at City Syd lies within the visual qualities that it offers, and it may in this way influence how the area is used and understood.

### **Summary and Reflections**

The intention of this chapter was to describe and analyse the activities of the public art committee who planned the Dandelion project, and the norms and values associated with these activities. The public art committee’s expectations were the first to impose an idea of the value of the Dandelion and started the process of encoding the sculpture with significance. This provides a description of the candidacy of the Dandelion, and offers a background to understand the role that the sculpture plays outside City Syd. When I first spoke to the public art committee, the Dandelion was still under production. No one really knew how the sculpture would function on the roundabout, but there were expectations. These expectations were based on their activities in Tiller’s artworld, their

knowledge about public art in general and their understanding of the physical and social context in Tiller. They also brought with them knowledge associated with the other roles that they play.



The Dandelion, June 2007

The defining of an object's value and role may be based on deeply divergent perceptions of the value of the object (Appadurai, 1986:14). The members of the public art committee were involved with the public art project because of the knowledge and understandings associated with their work outside the committee, which in turn influenced their role within the public art committee. In addition, their knowledge about art varied, but there was a general consensus in their expectations towards the role that they saw the Dandelion playing on the roundabout outside City Syd. There were three main expectations; that the sculpture would cause debate, would challenge ideas about the place and would play an aesthetic role. The public art committee believed that debate

would be healthy for the public and for the understanding of the neighbourhood in general. This is associated with the next expectation which was that the art would challenge existing ideas about the place. It was believed that the Dandelion would have a defamiliarising effect on the neighbourhood allowing the public to become more aware of its actual physical form and content, and to look beyond the practical commercial aspect. The sculpture has inspired very little debate, and after seeing the sculpture on the roundabout, the public art committee decided that the Dandelion was alone not visually challenging enough.

The Dandelion's aesthetic qualities were important during the planning of the sculpture and aesthetic qualities are important to the role the sculpture plays on the roundabout. However, an aesthetic role is not obviously an active one and the public art committee expected the Dandelion to play an active role within the context outside City Syd. Conversely, I would argue that it is through the Dandelion's aesthetic role that its potential to make contact with its public is located. The relational activity often exists in fleeting moments, and at City Syd there is the potential for numerous moments. Being a very large colourful Dandelion is what gets it noticed and starts the relational contact. The candidacy of the Dandelion is based on the planning process and the expectations that arose from this. The role that the sculpture plays at City Syd is a collaboration between these initial expectations and the public response to the physical form of the sculpture after installation. The Dandelion has not completely lived up to the public art committee's expectations, but this does not mean that it does not play a role within the neighbourhood. The Dandelion's candidacy laid the foundations for the role that it plays by considering the context, and by providing a specific physical and visual form. In meeting with its public, the unexpected plays a central part in the role that the Dandelion plays, and this will be presented in Chapters 10 and 11.

## 9. Shopping Centre Developers and the Bullring



The Bullring, May 2009

The candidacy of the public art at the Bullring is the focus of this chapter, and it offers an insight into the process of signification, which influences the role the public art plays in the Bullring. This insight can be achieved by providing an analysis of the expectations of the shopping centre developers who were pivotal in the planning of the Bullring's public art project and a description of the norms and values that supported the planning process. The intention is to analyse the meaning and value associated with the art in the Bullring by the three shopping centre developers, and to consider whether their roles within the public art project influenced their expectations about the role that art would play in the Bullring. Three individuals are central in this description: a representative from Hammerson plc, one of the companies who own and developed the Bullring; a public art consultant from a design agency called Freeform; and an urban designer employed by

Birmingham City Council. This group within the context of the public art project represents the artworld in the Bullring, and was central within the candidacy of the public art in the Bullring offering standards and criteria which are symbolic, classificatory and moral, providing the background for what Appadurai calls the “exchangeability of an object” (Appadurai, 1986: 14).

Public art is found in eight different locations around the Bullring<sup>1</sup>. The art was planned and designed with the new shopping centre complex in mind, and it was unveiled on the same day as the Bullring shopping centre opened. Public art is therefore an intrinsic part of the Bullring’s shopping centre framework. The Bull has received most attention from the shopping centre developers, the public and from me, but although it is the Bull that plays the most obviously active role in the shopping centre, during the planning phase, it was only one part of the public art project. The other seven works of art were important to the shopping centre developers during planning and their expectations for the public art did not just focus on the Bull. All eight artworks provide information about the shopping centre developer’s understanding of public art and their expectations about the role art would play in the Bullring. Together, they also help to clarify what it is about the Bull that encourages its active role in the shopping centre.

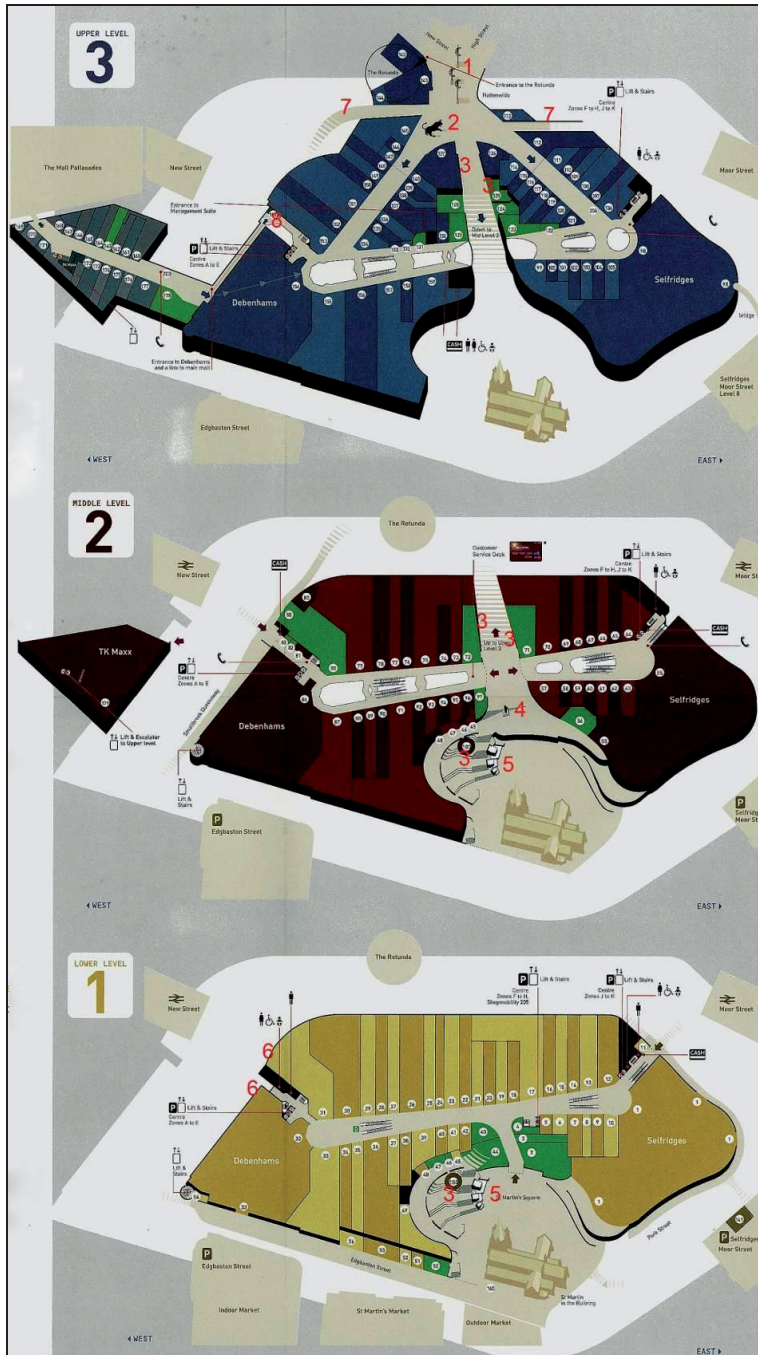
The shopping centre’s relationship with public art is different from City Syd’s, which only has the Dandelion within its vicinity. At City Syd, I was able to follow the public art project from six months before the Dandelion’s installation until a year after its completion. This was not possible at the Bullring. When I started my fieldwork at the Bullring in 2007, the shopping centre and its art had already been in place for four years. It is therefore difficult to separate the shopping centre developer’s expectations about the role of the art from what they saw taking place after installation. What is presented here is therefore a combination of expected significance and what they understood as the role of the art during the fieldwork period.

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<sup>1</sup> There also exists a memorial to the 2,241 victims of the bombing raids between 9<sup>th</sup> August 1940 and 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1943. The sculpture was designed by Lorenzo Quinn, and was unveiled in 2005, two years after the shopping centre opened. It was not part of the original public art plan described here and was rarely mentioned by people who I spoke to in the Bullring. It will therefore not be further discussed in this chapter.



The Candidacy: Shopping Centre Developers and the Bullring



Map 7. Bullring Shopping Centre Guide 2008. Public art locations are marked with red numbers. The numbers refer to the numbers used in the text.

The chapter starts with a presentation of the roles of the three shopping centre developers and an overview of the theory used to provide insight into the roles and expectations. The next section looks at aspects that were central in the shopping centre developer's descriptions of their activities and expectations. The eight works of art are presented in the last section.

### **The Shopping Centre Developers**

The information presented here is based on individual interviews which I did with the three shopping centre developers at the beginning of the fieldwork in Birmingham. The idea that they were working with a public art project informed the activity within the group of shopping centre developers and their understanding of their roles. All three shopping centre developers play other roles, but my questions focused on their description of the role they played within the planning of the art at the Bullring. The production of works of art is characteristic practice within the artworld. The use of artworld theory and terminology to describe the activities of the group clarifies that these activities were primarily about the production and presentation of works of art. As in the *Go to Tiller* public art project, none of the shopping centre developers mentioned the artworld, but it provides a background of theory, knowledge, and an established practice with which to understand the activities of the shopping centre developers in the Bullring<sup>2</sup>. The background of knowledge and theory is implicit rather than explicit in the activities of the shopping centre developers. It influenced choices and expectations, but what the group focused on during the interviews was the practice that encouraged the production of the eight works of art and their opinions of the eight works of art.

Their practice produced what the group understood as works of art, but the public did not always understand the objects presented to them as works of art. This points to the existing different standards and criteria with which to understand the artworks during the active phase. The role that the artworks played did not depend on them being defined as works of art, but the shopping centre developers aimed to produce

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<sup>2</sup> The questions that I asked during the fieldwork did not refer to the artworld. The artworld is a concept I used to analyse the information gathered during fieldwork.

works of art that would play a social role that was connected to their definition as works of art.

The title 'shopping centre developer' was chosen to distinguish the activities of the group working with the Bullring from the activities of the public art committee in Tiller. The form of the group who worked on the Bullring public art project was decided by Hammerson plc who funded the project along with the rest of the Birmingham Alliance<sup>3</sup>. The group that worked on the planning and production of the art in the Bullring involved a lot more people than are described here<sup>4</sup>. The three shopping centre developers were interviewed because they suggested each other. The form of the group is therefore slightly artificial and developed out of the path of suggestions that I followed when I first became interested in the Bullring. Birmingham City Council recommended that I spoke to the urban designer, and he recommended the two other members of the group. They became established as a group because they all referred to and/or recommended each other. The networks of people developing the public art projects were different in the two shopping centre examples. One reason for this is that the Dandelion is a publicly financed project developed by Trondheim City Council, NTNU and Public Art Norway. The Bullring is a commercial project, financed by the Birmingham Alliance without any public funding. Another main reason for the difference is that in Tiller, the public art committee was planning public art which would be placed within an already established physical framework. At the Bullring, the group was working with a shopping centre that was developing at the same pace as the public art.

The first member of the group of shopping centre developers that I interviewed was the urban designer. The urban designer often represents Birmingham City Council on public art projects associated with the city council, and he represented the city council during the development of the Bullring. There were other council representatives involved in the development of the shopping centre, both on a practical and on a political level, but the

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<sup>3</sup> Hammerson plc is an owner-manager and developer of retail and office property in the UK and Europe.

<sup>4</sup> There were a number of meetings during the planning and production of the public art, and the group who attended these meetings varied. Among others, the group included at different times the architect, the site manager, city councillors and other Hammerson's employees.

urban designer with his background in fine art and architecture has a specialist role within the field of public art in Birmingham. His understanding of public art's usefulness within the shopping centre is affected by how he views his wider role within the planning of the city's urban design.

The representative from Hammerson plc may be described as the leader of the group. He represented the owners of the shopping centre development and he really was a shopping centre developer. He has worked on the development of several shopping centres, both before and after the Bullring, and he does not just work with public art within shopping centre developments, he works with many aspects involved in shopping centre design and development<sup>5</sup>. The shopping centre developer believes in the power of art in shopping centres. This means spending money on art to make money from shopping centres, but at the same time doing it because he personally believes it to be the right thing. The shopping centre developer and the company he works for would not ordinarily be described as members of the artworld outside the realms of the public art project. Supplying funding for an art project does not automatically provide artworld membership.

The public art consultant has an arts background and may be described as a member of the artworld. The public art consultant has worked on large projects before, and he knows what is required to keep the production of the public art running at the same time schedule as the shopping centre. He had previously worked on the Oracle shopping centre in Reading, UK, along with Hammerson plc and the shopping centre developer. The Oracle won the 2001 award for the best European shopping centre. The consultant emphasises that both practical and creative skills are necessary in his work as a public art consultant.

Within Hammerson plc there is, I suggest, an established practice for the development of public art in shopping centres. Hammerson used art in the development of the Oracle shopping centre in Reading prior to developing the Bullring, and they continued with this policy after the Bullring was completed. Two of the members of the group of shopping centre developers for the Bullring had worked on shopping centre art before; the public

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<sup>5</sup> The shopping centre developer also develops other commercial projects, including office complexes.

art consultant and the shopping centre developer. This practice may be associated with the artworld, but the established practice of the artworld is not, Dickie suggests, formalised and there are no rules or lines of authority, because a social institution need not have a formally established constitution, officers or bylaws (Dickie 1974:35). The openness of the definition of the artworld institution suggested by Dickie allows both the public art committee in Tiller and the shopping centre developers at the Bullring to be described as artworlds even though not all of their members have the background of knowledge theory and practice often used to define membership. It is possible to formalise the social institution, but this, Dickie suggests, would not really serve the artworld because “such formality would threaten the freshness and exuberance of art” (1974:35). This lack of formality is part of what the shopping centre developer aspires to when he encourages the use of art to enliven the development process, avoiding what he describes as the “*mundane*” in shopping centre development. Developing a public art project is, the shopping centre developer suggests, more immediately rewarding in relation to the everyday activities of planning, organising and building. The production of objects within an artworld, which is understood as being both exclusive and different, provides something out of the ordinary for those not usually part of artworld practice, and placing such objects within the everyday framework of a shopping centre encourages the idea that the shopping centre is also exclusive and different.

Public art consultants are, as I suggested in my description of the Tiller’s artworld, one of the core members within the artworld. The artworld described by Dickie is informal, where even the activities of the core members are not clarified. On the other hand, Howard Becker suggests characteristic tasks separate artworld activities from other activities (Becker, 2008:9) and I therefore would argue that the planning of a public art project is a characteristic task. Becker also suggests that within the artworld there are characteristic kinds of workers, each of whom has developed a traditional “bundle of tasks” which help during the production of a work of art (2008:9). This supports the public art consultant’s understanding of his role within the group.

The consultant working on the Bullring had a practical understanding of his work. At the same time, he knew that a lot depended on the aesthetic choices and

suggestions that he made: *“I’m offering my eye really.”* He was providing knowledge and taste which he suggests the other members of the group do not have. Public art consultants have a greater understanding of the knowledge and practice expected within artworlds and can connect the group of shopping centre developers with artists who have the necessary creative skills. The need for a consultant points to a difference of roles within the group, because although all the members of the group of shopping centre developers are involved in the definition of objects as art, some of the group’s members have a closer connection to the artworld outside their involvement with the shopping centre project than others.

The process of planning and production, which aimed to encourage agency, followed established artworld practice. Artworld practice is not necessary to establish the agency of an artwork. An artwork can be produced outside an artworld context, for example non-Western societies produce art objects outside the artworld<sup>6</sup>. The shopping centre contexts presented here exist within Western society where the artworld is actively involved in defining objects as works of art through the use of the theory and practice mentioned earlier. Part of the agency an art object achieves may be associated with its definition as a work of art by those who plan and produce it and by its public. However, a problem with the established practice is that the following of it may inhibit the creative process. It is suggested by Becker that a work of art that is done only according to convention may bore everyone involved: “By definition it would contain nothing novel, unique, or attention getting, nothing that would violate anyone’s expectations. It would create no tension and arouse no emotion” (Becker, 2008:228). The agency and exuberance of art is threatened by formality. The consultant emphasised the complexity of the problem, saying: *“we’re obviously very keen on the aspect of art and architecture, so that the work is integrated wherever possible. It’s got to be. It’s good if it is contemporary, it’s great if it’s accessible, it’s got to be long-lasting and it’s got to be high artistic merit, it’s got to be quality.”* The consultant is suggesting that he is not the only one who must master a bundle of tasks; the art is also expected to do so. Fulfilling a bundle of tasks within in the physical and social frameworks requires careful planning and production.

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<sup>6</sup> This is the basis of Alfred Gell’s criticism of artworld theory, see Chapter 6.



Expectations towards an artwork depend on them being produced by a skilful artist. At the same time, production pressures require the artist to have practical skills not always associated with the activities of the artist. Fulfilling all these requirements is a challenge, and this can affect the quality of the art produced. This challenge was mentioned by the urban designer: “*Issues were raised ten years ago by Nicholas Serota who was the director of the Tate Gallery. He once made a statement that public art is just bad art*”<sup>7</sup>. The urban designer is pointing to a general criticism of public art existing within the artworld outside the Bullring, one that Arthur Danto made explicit when he said that what might be good public art may not always be “good art” (1987:91, in Knight, 2008:85). It is therefore not easy to make public art because of the bundle of tasks required of it by the planners, public and critics like Danto.

The urban designer does not totally agree with the criticism; he is using the reference to make a point about the problems related to making good public art, but it is part of his job to rise to the challenge. Evaluating the art in shopping centres like the Bullring within a traditional art critical framework is difficult because although the art is expected to have meaning and aesthetic quality, the other roles it plays within the shopping centre may dominate. According to Alfred Gell, within anthropology evaluative schemes are only relevant in so far as they play a part in the social context (Gell 1998:3). The value and significance of the art within the Bullring cannot therefore only be understood in the light of the artworld’s criticism. Critical art analysis may miss the point, which is not just whether the art is aesthetically pleasing or makes a social comment, but also whether it plays a role within the physical and social context.

## **Expectations**

The expectations of the shopping centre developers rely ultimately on the activities of the artists chosen to produce the artworks. George Dickie suggests that the artworld depends on the role of the artist (Dickie 2001:61). The artist is someone who makes a work of art and controls the necessary creative skills<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Sir Nicholas Serota was the director of the Tate Galleries between 1988 and 2011.

<sup>8</sup> The notion of skill is not an established standard; it may vary according to social group and be subject to historical changes.

The importance of the artist's skill is pointed out by Alfred Gell in his description of the technical enchantment encouraged by a work of art. "Art, as a kind of technical activity, only carries further, through a kind of involution, the enchantment which is immanent in all kinds of technical activity" (Gell 1992:44). Gell argues that all kinds of technical activity can enchant, but art, because it requires skills which only a few individuals have access to, is special and particularly enchanting. The shopping centre developer suggested that the public art project enriches and enlivens the development of a shopping centre; other activities involved in shopping centre development become a little more enchanted because they are associated with the production of art, and a shopping centre with art has the potential to be a more enthralling social place than a shopping centre without art. The success of the art in fulfilling this role depends on the choices made by the shopping centre developers and the skills of the artist chosen to make the art.

The art in the Bullring has to do more than enchant or fulfil aesthetic expectations, it is expected to fulfil a bundle of tasks, as suggested earlier in the chapter. Howard Becker uses the term "integrated professionals" to describe artists who have the knowledge and skill that makes it "easy" for them to make art. It is easy for these artists because they know, understand and habitually use the conventions on which their world runs (Becker, 2008:229). The public art consultant suggests that practical aspects like knowing that the artist will be able to deliver what is asked of him or her are important: "***To some extent you are looking for people who have got a proven track record within that field.***" Within the Bullring, there was therefore a desire to use artists who could in the light of Becker's definition be regarded as integrated professionals, but finding an artist who fitted the requirements of the commission was not always easy. The consultant suggested that the artist Peter Fink, who designed the Light Wands, was successful because "***it's about delivery. Artists you know need to be highly professional, highly skilled, who can come up with the goods.***" The commercial development of the shopping centre meant that an artist had to be capable of delivering their work within a tight schedule. In this case, it was the professionalism of the production which was most valued.

The shopping centre developer believed that having art in shopping centres helped to make them something more than just shopping centres. He expected public art to help them become a place. *“Where millions of people come together in a city...where when your sister or your mum, or your son comes to visit, you want to show off your city by taking them there.”* Art helped the Bullring to achieve this and by encouraging the use of art, the shopping centre developer suggested that he was helping to connect the shopping centre with the people who use it. The art, he said, encourages *“community involvement and ownership of the project through an art policy combined with other activities.”* The art is there because the public appreciates it, but as the shopping centre developer goes on to point out, what is good for the public is also good for the company, *“We believe in it. We certainly shape it to make it appropriate. We are not prescriptive, but it’s a huge tool for a very little sum of money and it has immense power.”* The agency that the developer ascribes to the public art has, he believes, helped Hammerson to develop successful shopping centres. The shopping centre that Hammerson developed before the Bullring, the Oracle in Reading, won prizes for its design and the public art was, the shopping centre developer said, part of its success.

Art in the Bullring is expected to add to the shopping experience, but it is not required to be uplifting or educational. It encourages the public to shop and it helps to guide them through the shopping centre; it aims to please but not to civilise. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century when art became available to a wider public, the basic belief in art was that it should be both good and useful, and inspire sensations which pleased and civilised the spirit (Craske, 1997:26). The moral commandment which is traditionally associated with public art is, I suggest, lacking within the expectations and understandings of the shopping centre developers in the Bullring. On the other hand, Cher Krause Knight suggests that entertaining the public, providing opportunities for enjoyment, amusement, and relaxation is “no meagre goal” (Knight, 2008:85). In an analysis of art within themed environments, Knight suggests that the proactive site-specific environments that they provide may be understood as offering art experiences, ones which are more welcoming to the public than traditional art institutions (2008:84,85). Themed environments have a long tradition in the USA dating back to the ‘golden age’ of urban entertainments at the

end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Such environments were seen as discouraging social tension and helping to reinvigorate struggling regional economies. The Bullring falls within this category of welcoming themed environments. It is also an urban redevelopment and a source of economic renewal. The art in the Bullring seeks to please and attract within the environment of a shopping centre.

The art installed in shopping centres, theme parks and casinos, Knight suggests, is not expected to be “enlightening” at every turn, and she suggests that some of “the least satisfying art experiences are those with a heavy-handed didactic or moralising tone” (Knight, 2008:85). The art in the Bullring lacks a moralising tone. It is intended to make the Bullring a pleasing place to be, one everyone wants to visit. When asked what kind of shopping centre the Bullring is, the shopping centre developer answered: “*A big one, a successful one. We actually think that it is the most visited place in the whole of the UK, more than any airport or anything else.*” The art is part of the shopping centre’s success.

The urban designer regards public art as a tool to increase legibility within the city centre as a whole. When it works well, public art according to the urban designer not only helps legibility, but it also “*attracts, it enlivens and it kind of involves.*” Public art, he suggests, can be used to “*enrich spaces and actually make marks which are legible, which will draw people from one end to another. I have always been involved in public art as a way of actually manipulating the public for the benefit of the public.*” The positive manipulation which the urban designer suggests has been criticised by art theorists such as Malcolm Miles, who sees public art as complicit in the gentrification processes, which although they help to clean up and make areas more attractive, may also make these areas more exclusive and effectively exclude social groups that were previously dominant (Miles, 1997:106).

Including all members of the public is a complex problem. The exclusion of social groups through the use of public art, which Miles warns of, does happen. A homeless man called Andrew whom I met in a café in the Bullring told me that the Bullring was not for poor people. The public art which encourages the Bullring’s air of luxury helps to make it exclusive. The agency of the public art expected by the shopping

centre developers requires relational activity between the art and the public. The art is, as I will show later in the chapter, intended to include different groups within the community through its use of history, cultural elements and local interaction. However, art will always have problems in appealing to everyone because taste, knowledge, and social and economic position vary.

### **The Art in the Bullring**

The Bullring shopping centre within Birmingham city centre provides the context for the eight works of art. When the shopping centre developers began planning the public art project, the old Bull Ring shopping centre had been demolished, and what existed in the space was a large hole in the ground. Birmingham at the end of the 1990s was in need of economic and urban renewal, particularly the area in and around the first Bull Ring shopping centre<sup>9</sup>. The shopping centre developers therefore had a different starting point compared with the public art committee in Tiller. The shopping centre developers in Birmingham were planning art that would become part of a new physical structure.

The shopping centre developer described the present Bullring shopping centre as a major source of regeneration in the city. The previous shopping centre was, he said *“really bad. It was so iconic that it dragged down the whole of Birmingham’s reputation. You know what we always used to say is a bad Bull Ring is a bad Birmingham, and what has happened is that we have created a new icon and Birmingham has risen out of the ashes as well. You know we have created the icon of Selfridges and the icon of the Bull and that’s adding to all the other things that Birmingham has done, just giving it another lift which is great. It’s what we aspired to.”* The Bullring with its shops, its architecture and its art has added something positive to the city in general, but at the same time the previous Bull Rings are not forgotten. Birmingham’s market history provided background information for the shopping centre developers, which was used in the planning of the public art and provided meaning for some of the artworks produced.

The development of a new Bullring shopping centre established a link between the old city centre prior to the first shopping centre and a new city centre. The activities

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<sup>9</sup> This has been described in more detail in Chapter 5.

of the shopping centre developers within the public art project aimed at bringing in the new and reinforcing the old at the same time.

In this section, I will describe the artworks and their locations. The location of each of the eight artworks is presented in the shopping centre map at the beginning of the chapter (see page 187).

### 1. *The Light Wands*



The Light Wands, May 2009

The Light Wands mark the entrance to the Bullring from the New Street side of the shopping centre. Designed by Peter Fink, the three wands, or masts as they are otherwise known, are twenty, twenty-five and thirty metres in height, and are the tallest of the shopping centre artworks. They are made of flexible carbon fibre which allows them to bend with the wind and stainless steel metal leaves near the tops of the wands interact with the wind. The wands are lit at night and the tallest wand is aligned with the spire of St. Martin's church at the other end of the shopping centre complex.



The wands' role is primarily spatial; they mark the entrances to the Bullring and locate it within the city centre. The urban designer said, "*You know the arches of light on the floor actually emphasise the routes that the pedestrians used to take pre-Bullring. You know almost when New Street went directly down to St. Martin's Square.*" The wands, importantly for the urban designer, are intended to help increase city legibility.

## 2. The Bull



The Bull, May 2009

The Bull is not the first work of art to be seen when entering the shopping centre nor is it the biggest, but it is perhaps the most well-known. Its image is to be found on numerous postcards and visitors to Birmingham and the Bullring can often be seen taking their photographs next to it. The Bull is understood as a successful work of art by the

shopping centre developers, and it is difficult to separate its candidacy from the active phase because the public's positive response meant their expectations had become associated with the Bull as it existed in the Bullring during the period when the interviews took place.

The artist Laurence Broderick designed the Bull, which is cast in bronze and weighs two tons. The sculpture, which does have physical similarities to the Wall Street Bull, was designed for the Bullring; the Bullring Bull has a much less aggressive stance and gaze. The Bull was designed to be popular. The shopping centre developer said they wanted it to be "*a Disney bull.*" The shopping centre developer was initially sceptical to this idea of a Disney bull as it did not really fit with his idea of good public art: "*it just so went against everything I thought about art and we did it.*" However, he changed his mind after seeing how popular the Bull was, and he said "*I love the fact that people love it.*" All three members of the group were pleased with how the Bull worked within the physical framework; it was the work of art they all had most to say about and the shopping centre developer chose it as his favourite artwork within the Bullring.

The public art consultant was clear in his opinion that the sculpture had fulfilled expectations. "*It really became everything that we wanted it to be... it was a place to meet, people had their photographs taken on it etc. I mean there's a wonderful photograph of it being absolutely mobbed on the first day. Laurence Broderick signing autographs. I mean come on it has worked like a dream.*" It was the public response that encouraged their appreciation of the Bull. They all had doubts about making a work of art that was so obviously a bull, but they all saw the necessity of having a bull in the Bullring. The Bull seems like a simple form, but creating something that could represent all bulls simply and effectively was quite a complex process. There was always the danger that it could have become too much of a Disney bull.

The Bull works aesthetically; it is a good representation of a bull and it provides meaning by being associated with the shopping centre's history and the name, Bullring. In addition, the role it plays is also intimately associated with its location. The Bull marks the entrance to the Debenhams side of the shopping centre. The location of the Bull was

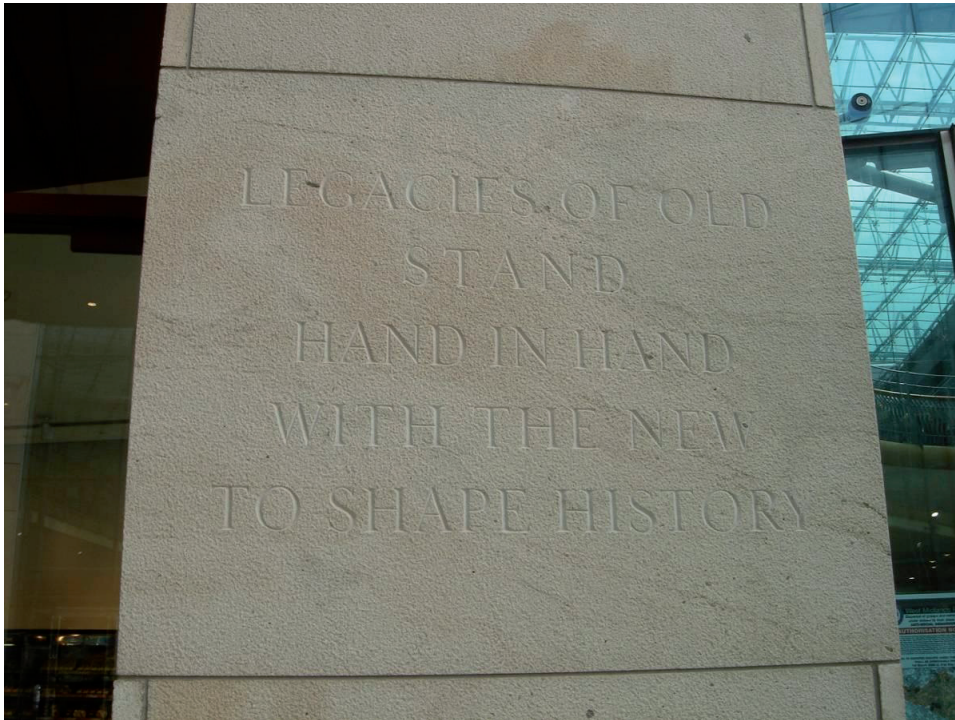
carefully planned and according to the shopping centre developer, the placement outside the entrance to the Debenhams section was the only suitable location, but it was also a source of debate, "*We did a life size cardboard cut-out because I was worried about the dynamics of shopping, one of these site lines... And one of the retailers had a chief executive visiting that day... And we had this blazing argument because he was worried about the fact that the Bull was going to block the view.*" The owners of the shop are now, according to the shopping centre developer, pleased with the location of the Bull. "*Every time I see him he's got a smile on his face and they're making lots of money.*" The location is a great success for the Bullring. People meet there and the Bull has become a landmark in the Bullring and in Birmingham.

The Bull is the artwork that can be seen as being involved in relational activity with the public. The urban designer pointed out that "*The Bull is fantastically popular. For the rest I think that unless you are a public art tourist it's wallpaper. I don't know if anybody's done any real research but I think people appreciate it. They appreciate that it's there. It's one of those things that work in a subversive way.*" The other seven works of art have, it is suggested by the urban designer, less agency. There is less relational activity associated with them, but as the urban designer also suggests, this does not mean that they do not play a role.

### 3. Texts

The poems of Alison Solomon and Simon Pitt are inscribed in stone pilasters along both sides of the out-of-doors pedestrian street, St. Martin's Walk, which runs down the centre of the shopping centre from New Street to the Statue of the Admiral Lord Nelson. The two poets were the winners of an artist and writers' competition that was part of a community art programme which aimed to involve Birmingham residents in the development of the shopping centre. The project also encouraged the involvement of local artists in the Bullring development, but according to the public art consultant, it did not inspire much interest from local artists. The lack of interest from local artists points to unsuccessful commonality (Kwon, 2002:151). The shopping centre developers assumed that the project's theme would inspire local interest because it was about Birmingham,

but writing poems about Birmingham or the shopping centre did not have obvious links with existing activity within the local writers' community.



Text, May 2008

The poems are short. They contain references to activity in the shopping centre and Birmingham's history and characteristics. For example:

LEGACIES OF THE OLD  
STAND  
HAND IN HAND  
WITH THE NEW  
TO SHAPE HISTORY

The area with the texts links the New Street shops with St. Martin's church and the market halls below<sup>10</sup>. The pedestrian street is lined with cafés each with their own outdoor terraces. Several of the shopping centre restaurants open out onto St. Martin's square; this area also contains some public benches and tables. The public art consultant questioned the texts' effectiveness within the physical framework. He thought in retrospect that they were visually a bit too subtle. The texts are located within an area of the shopping centre where people are given the opportunity to take a break from shopping or working, where people can pause and relax, which is what numerous people do every day but very few of the people I spoke to in the Bullring mentioned them. Their impact on the place is limited.

#### 4. *Admiral Lord Nelson*



Admiral Lord Nelson, November 2007 and May 2008

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<sup>10</sup> On one of the larger steps which go down the right-hand side of St. Martin's square, a verse from the UB40 song, *Sing our own song* is inscribed. UB40 is a band from Birmingham who had its heyday during the 1980s.



At the end of St. Martin's Walk, on a pedestal close to the centre of the mid-level terrace overlooking the open area in front of St. Martin's church, is Richard Westmacott's statue of Admiral Lord Nelson from 1809. The statue was Birmingham's first public memorial. The public art consultant was sceptical about retaining the sculpture within the Bullring. He did not feel that the statue of Nelson was in keeping with the modern feel of the rest of the shopping centre, but the statue is one of four historical elements including the Rotunda, St. Martin's church and the newly restored Moor Street Station, all of which are part of the Bullring's physical framework. The statue of Nelson communicates with the architectural elements within the shopping centre, and it helps to connect the shopping centre with the Bullring as it was prior to the development of the first shopping centre.

#### *5. The Water Feature*

The water feature was designed by the landscape architect Gross Max. It is made up of three boxes with stacked glass walls standing in slate stone pools. The right-hand side of the water feature borders with the steps leading up out of the right hand side of St. Martin's Square. The urban designer appreciated the design that Gross Max had produced and he felt that it complemented the appearance of St. Martin's square. "***They took a really interesting take on the space, which was making it, you know getting a feel for that lower space by the church, as being more of a European style square than a formal British square.***" He suggested that the feature helps the legibility of the space and encourages public involvement with it. The glass boxes lead the eye down the steps towards the church, or up from the traditional market area into the modern shopping centre. The public art consultant suggests that the contemporary form of the water feature alongside the historical form of the church is very effective visually: "***The idea of the contemporary sitting next to heritage I think was very powerful.***" The water feature does not, however, provide meaning within the shopping centre. The water feature encourages legibility and helps to connect the lower half of the Bullring with St. Martin's walk. There are no layers of meaning for the public to uncover. In this way its role is similar to The Light Wands.





The Water Feature, May 2008

#### *6. A Small Scale Community Art Project*

The small scale community artwork includes 650 bricks and covers a line of brickwork stretching several metres on either side of the entrance to one of the Bullring's three lower level entrances. This entrance looks towards the New Street Railway Station and several bus stops. The designs for the bricks were made by school children and students at a local college. The idea, in a similar way to the texts mentioned earlier, was to connect the local population with the shopping centre during the process of it being built. The project was coordinated by artists Leonora Minto and Isabella Lockett.



The Bricks, February 2008

The bricks contain words and images and have two main themes. The first is the history of Birmingham; this includes elements from mediaeval Birmingham, the industrial revolution and factory production. These bricks are to be found on the right-hand side of the doorway as you leave the shopping centre. On the left-hand side is the second theme; the building of the present day Bullring. The cranes, the materials, the number of people who constructed the shopping centre and the noise made are all mentioned. According to the public art consultant, the community involvement worked well and was a positive process. The actual production of the bricks was more problematic and challenged his skills as a public art consultant because the bricks were not ready to go into the walls of the shopping centre when they were needed.

The fact that they were on a small scale was important to the public art consultant, because they were intended to be subtle. He believed that any artwork would have problems making itself known within the physical framework of the Bullring, particularly up against architecture like the Selfridges department store, which he said *“blows the rest of the retail away really. But yeah an amazing signature building right next to what’s extraordinary really, right next to St. Martin’s church which is fantastic, absolutely fantastic. And I think that in my thinking too, that was why I sort of went for the small scale artworks really because you can’t compete with something on that scale, you have to have another thing to say really to be a part of it.”* The meaning contained in the bricks is therefore important to the role they play; it is more important than their visual impact. The bricks are difficult to find, to the extent that I had to be

shown where they were, although I may have found them eventually. The urban designer also thought that the bricks were difficult to find: “*They are set into the walls around the edges of the site. They are not easy to find, but having said that, when you do find them, you do question what’s this all about?*” However, he did think that they made a relevant comment on what kind of space the Bullring is, highlighting again that the meaning associated with the shopping centre is seen as central within the role that the artwork plays.

A community art project is required within a development on the scale of the Bullring, but it is difficult to assess the depth of the involvement of the community in this analysis, because I arrived after the project was installed and never met any of the people involved in the making or designing of the bricks. Community art is, Miwon Kwon suggests, “typically understood as a descriptive practice in which the community functions as a referential social entity” (Kwon, 2002:154). The community identity is seen as something available and expressible, but the success of a community project is often judged in relation to how the local identity is affirmed rather than questioned (2002:154). The two themes that the bricks represent, the history of the place and its future, are themes that the shopping centre developers referred to in relation to several of the art projects and I suggest that they are important to their idea of the Bullring’s identity. The lack of response from the public which I experienced in relation to the historical theme suggests that it has only limited resonance within the local public. The Bull was the artwork most actively associated with historical meaning.

### *7. The 24-Hour Railings*

The 24-Hour Railings were designed by artist Anu Patel and run the length of the pedestrian walkway, Swan Passage, which connects Moor Street Station with New Street Station<sup>11</sup>. The railings are made of metal and painted in bright colours. The images wrought into the metal present different historical elements. Bulls and the deer park owned by the Birmingham lords of the manor are both visualised, as are cogwheels and industrial symbols. Anu Patel in the context of the Bullring is not only an artist; she is a

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<sup>11</sup> Swan Passage is a mediaeval street name which disappeared during the development of the first Bull Ring shopping centre and which was reinstated during the development of the present Bullring.

local artist and therefore represents the local community<sup>12</sup>. However, she is not just a local artist, she is also originally from India, and within the Bullring represents the multicultural dimension connected to the city of Birmingham. The public art consultant whilst praising her work as an artist also emphasised her role as a cultural representative within the public art project. “*Anu Patel of course who’s a local artist who did a fantastic job on the 24-hour route, because part of the brief was you know to reflect the current multicultural nature of Birmingham and I think that was done brilliantly within the 24-hour route.*” The public art programme had to include at least one artist from an ethnic background, which was different from the white background most commonly represented within the British artworld and which also dominates the Bullring.



The 24-Hour Railings, February 2008

The urban designer commented on the visual cultural influence which he suggests is represented in the bulls that are incorporated into the railings. He said “*she brings a sort of Asian cultural influence. So you’ll see that the bull’s that are in her railings are Indian bulls.*” Laurence Broderick’s Bull represents all kinds of bulls; Anu Patel’s bulls are particularly Indian. The assumption is that the artist’s work will help to include the large Asian population in the Bullring. I suggest that the cultural content associated with the railings has an implicit meaning, because it is artworld knowledge which is only available if you know who the artist is. This information is not readily

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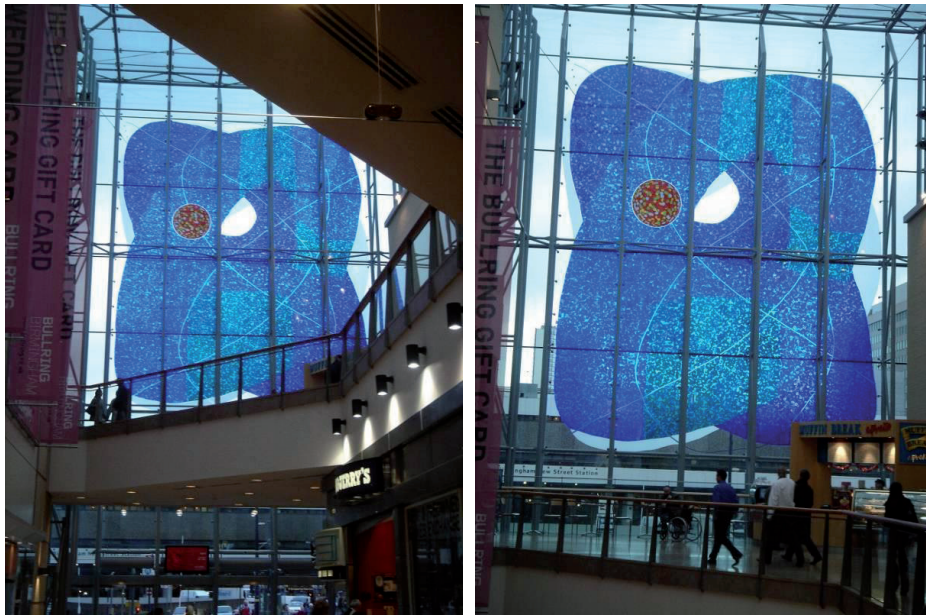
<sup>12</sup> Anu Patel’s home town is Coventry, just over 37 km (23 miles) from Birmingham.



available as it is not presented beside the artworks. None of the people I met in the Bullring mentioned the railings. The 24-Hour Railings are not explicitly Indian.

### 8. *Glass Window*

The glass window is the only artwork planned by the shopping centre developers which is on the inside of the Bullring, although it can be clearly seen from the outside. The 120 square metre glass mural was designed by glass artist Martin Donlin. The image which is made of bright colours is basically abstract in form, though it is said to represent the Bullring in some way. The window is at the end of the walkway that joins the Pallasades shopping centre and New Street Station with the Bullring and it towers above a muffin shop.



The Glass Window, November 2007

Despite its size, the window did not cause much discussion with the group of shopping centre developers, which may suggest that the lack of discussion among the shopping centre developers refers to a lack of controversy regarding the window. Its production went smoothly and it has not been criticised by the public. Had there been

criticism or particular public fondness for the window, this would, I believe, have given the group more to talk about. The window therefore works well within the requirements of the physical framework; it does not do more or less than was expected.

### **Summary and Reflections**

The roles of the three different shopping centre developers within the planning process along with their expectations provide candidacy for the public art project in the Bullring. The candidacy of the public art in the Bullring provides meaning and value which influences the role the art plays after installation. The planning and production of public art is established practice within Hammerson plc. It is also characteristic artworld practice involving core members of the artworld like the public art consultant. The public art consultant sees the challenge of producing art within shopping centres in relation to what was required of him and the artists who he worked with. He aims to produce good public art, which he expects will fulfil practical and aesthetic requirements. The shopping centre developer expects the art to help to create a sense of place; one where millions of people will want to visit. Art is therefore good for the public, and what is good for the public is also good for business. The urban designer requires that public art should help to increase urban legibility. He also expects it to help to create a place that the public understands and feels comfortable in.

Five years after the opening, the Bullring was regarded as a successful shopping centre and the art was understood as being part of the success although some works were understood as being more successful than others. I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter that the shopping centre developers planned the Bull as one of eight public works of art. They had, I suggest, active expectations about all of the artworks, and the strength of the public's response to the Bull took them by surprise. The eight works of art have been given different roles within the physical and social context. Some of the works of art like the Light Wands and the water feature are primarily aesthetic and functional, intended to encourage shopping centre movement and legibility. In works of art like the Bull and the bricks, the meaning associated with the history of the shopping centre is important, although the Bull also plays an important spatial function. In the rest of the



artworks, meaning and legibility are aspects that exist but are not always obviously apparent. The planning process starts the process of encoding the art with significance, but it is the artworks in motion, their relationships with the public “that illuminate their human and social context” (Appadurai, 1986:5). The relational activity after the artworks’ installation is what proposes their actual significance within the context of the Bullring. Relational activity was, I suggest, what the shopping centre developers planned for; they expected the art to have agency within the physical framework of the shopping centre.

A successful shopping centre was what the shopping centre developers planned for and they used public art to achieve this aim. The actual effect of the public art upon the public and the role it plays within the shopping centre context is part of the active phase which will be presented during section three, but I would like to make the point here that the fieldwork experience shows that the public agreed that the shopping centre was successful and that public art plays a role in the public’s positive impression of the Bullring.

A lady who worked in a clothes store in the Bullring had this to say about the art: *“Yes, I think it’s important that there is art in shopping centres. It helps to make the place look good, which is important. It draws people in and anything that helps to keep me in a job is a good thing.”* Expectations have therefore in many ways been fulfilled. However, six of the artworks made little impact on the fieldwork experience because they rarely made their presence known within the public’s response.

All three of the shopping centre developers suggest that the art adds something to the physical and social frameworks of the Bullring, but none of them require the art to be morally uplifting. To be active in the shopping centre, the art must fulfil a bundle of tasks; it must have aesthetic quality, be functional, be relevant to the place, have meaning, and be something other than commercial. Achieving all this within the parameters of a large commercial project may limit a work of art’s ability to enchant and to have agency. This is reflected in the varying degrees of engagement with the public art in the Bullring. Agency is relational; it does not passively exist within the art but develops through an active relationship with the public, nor does it exist all the time. The

public is positive to the art in the Bullring. They do not always notice that it is there, but they appreciate its presence. There is a discrepancy between the expectations of the shopping centre developers and the actual roles of seven of the artworks because they are less active than expected. However, their limited impact is seen within a context that contains the Bull, which plays an unexpectedly active role. In the shadow of such an active work of art, the other artworks seem passive in comparison. The role of a public work of art may be subtle, and it does not have to be active all the time to have relevance within the social context. Meaning and value can make their presence known on personal contemplative levels and legibility may only be valued socially when the context unexpectedly becomes confusing. However, during an analysis of the active phase, I have chosen to focus on the artworks that made most impact on the public, and therefore on the fieldwork experience, the Bull and Lord Nelson.



# Section 4:

## The Active Phase



The Bullring, May 2009

## 10. A Nice Dandelion: Agency and Aesthetic Quality



City Syd, September 2008

The active phase of the Dandelion's career in Tiller is the focus in this chapter. The active phase is the term used instead of Appadurai's commodity phase to describe the activity between the public and the public art. It is during the commodity (active) phase that the biographical aspect of an object becomes most apparent, and it is where objects can be seen in motion within the social context. It is also changeable; objects can be seen to move in and out of the commodity state (Appadurai, 1986:13,16). Public works of art are not commodities, but they are expected to play an active role within the social

context, hence the name of this section, the active phase. However, objects, both commodities and art objects, do not simply remain active; the role that they play depends on their place within the social context.

The active phase completes the analysis of the Dandelion within the timeframe provided by the fieldwork period. It is during the active phase that the object planned by the public art committee in Tiller can be seen to function as a work of art within the social and physical context and it is here that the artwork's agency in relationship with its public makes itself apparent. It is during the active phase that the sculpture becomes public art in the way suggested by the definition of public art presented earlier. The intention of this chapter is to look at how an artwork is defined within the context of City Syd, and how aesthetic quality influences the development of relationships between the Dandelion and its public.

The aesthetic quality of the sculpture is part of what defines it as a work of art, and it is part of what gives the sculpture agency and encourages an active role within its total biographical trajectory or career. The first part of the chapter will therefore analyse the local understanding of what art is in Tiller, starting with the artworld's definitions and continuing with local definitions of art. An analysis of the active role of aesthetic qualities in Tiller comes next. Finally, I will consider how 'niceness' has become an aesthetic quality in the Tiller neighbourhood.

### **Defining Art**

The visual and physical form of the Dandelion is a result of Western art's historical traditions which guide the production of sculpture within Europe and North America. It is representational, its colourful form has visual links with the pop art of the 1960s, and the roundabout manages to make it look like the sculpture is standing on a large green plinth. The trajectory which has been presented in this thesis so far has analysed the background for the public art project within the shopping centre context and the candidacy provided by the planning process, and the aforementioned qualities are a result of these two aspects. An influential factor within the candidacy was that it was a work of art that was planned and produced, and that the public would be relating to an object defined as a work of art within the shopping centre's location. During the active phase, an object



engages in relationships with its public. The idea that the object is a work of art is an active part of the relationship. It is the public's understanding of what a work of art is that becomes active, but the public definition of art has a background within the artworld's definitions.



City Syd, December 2008

The definition of art stemming from Dantoworld and Dickieworld imply exclusive knowledge and membership of an exclusive group (Danto, 1994:477; Dickie, 1974:31). Shopping at City Syd does not require artworld knowledge and the Dandelion was not planned as an exclusive work of art. The expectations of the public art committee were that the sculpture would be seen by a broad, variable public every day, and would have the ability to excite interest among this public. Interest and understanding varied; some of the people I spoke to at City Syd had knowledge about art and the artworld, some claimed to know nothing about art or not to be interested in it, and a large number fell in

the middle of the two extremes. Defining art in Tiller is therefore a more inclusive process and less dependent on knowledge and practice than Danto's and Dickie's theories suggest. The intention here is to provide insight into qualities connected to the Dandelion sculpture that allow it to be defined as art by the public in Tiller. The shoppers and workers who I spoke to in Tiller have different ideas about what defines a work of art, but all the definitional suggestions are relevant in establishing the Dandelion's status as a work of art or not (not everyone defines the sculpture as art) within its location outside City Syd, and this description affects the role that it plays<sup>1</sup>.

Defining art at City Syd can also be placed within the candidacy of the sculpture because it relates to the information used by the public art committee when planning the public art project. However, the definitions presented here were inspired by the interaction with the Dandelion, and are therefore understood as part of the active relationship with the art in its social context. The local definitions that I will be presenting here are spontaneous responses to what I suggest is a difficult question; "*What is art?*" This was a question I often asked the people I spoke to at the shopping centre at the end of our conversations about art at City Syd. According to Pierre Bourdieu, cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education and taste function as markers of class (Bourdieu 1984:1,2). A work of art, therefore, only has meaning and interest for someone who possesses the correct cultural competence. Using a survey carried out in 1963 and 1967-8 on a sample of 1,217 people, Bourdieu sought to determine how "the cultivated disposition and cultural competence that are revealed in the nature of the cultural goods consumed, and in the way they are consumed, vary according to the category of agents and the area to which they applied" (1984:13). Using this survey as a basis, Bourdieu suggests that the rate of non-response to the question on favourite painters or pieces of music was closely connected to the level of education and to class (1984:14). In my experience at City Syd, class and education played very little role in the willingness of people to define art and to tell me who their favourite artist was (a question I also asked

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<sup>1</sup> The main focus is what defines it as art, and not, why it is not defined as art.

during the first fieldwork period in an attempt to establish a broader understanding of the shopping centre public's relationship with art)<sup>2</sup>.

The majority of people in and around City Syd who agreed to talk to me gave me an answer to all of my art-related questions<sup>3</sup>. Most people struggled to answer those questions, but answering questions about art at City Syd had in my experience little to do with having the correct cultural competence, and more about being given the time and encouragement to talk about art.

Defining art has traditionally meant that theoreticians have asked what the necessary and sufficient conditions for defining an object as art are (Dickie 1992:109). Traditional definitions of art such as imitation theory, which suggests that art is an imitation of reality, and expression theory, where art is regarded as the expression of emotion, provide guidelines for artists and critics but only offer a narrow definition of art. The two theories each provide only one criterion for defining an object as a work of art, and the two criteria they suggest may not be considered universal properties (1992:111). Art is generally understood to be comprised of many qualities and a useful definition of art should take this into account. During the 1950s, Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblance caused many theorists to despair of the possibility of defining art. Family resemblance theory suggests that class membership does not necessarily require the sharing of defining features. Objects become members of a class purely because there are overlapping resemblances among members. A number of philosophers had come to see art as a family resemblance concept and therefore art could not be defined in terms of necessary conditions because artworks could not be said to share any common or

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<sup>2</sup> A large number of the people I spoke to struggled to answer this question. It did not matter what their background was or how interested in art they claimed to be. The majority answered it in the end, but it was not information that easily sprang to mind. I asked almost everyone I spoke with to define art, the only reason not to ask was related to if there was not enough time to answer all my questions, and occasionally I forgot to ask the question. I asked people where they lived and what their profession was, but I did not ask about education or class. Norwegian society has few obvious social divisions and it was therefore not considered relevant to ask about class at City Syd. A broad cross section of society in Trondheim shops at City Syd. This covers age, gender, economic situation and geographical association, and a broad group was interviewed. I have also asked colleagues who are artists and architects to define art and to tell me who their favourite artist is. They all found these difficult questions and they were reluctant to answer. This was because these ideas define who they are as artists and they therefore require careful consideration.

<sup>3</sup> It was my experience that getting them to talk to me in general was more problematic than actually answering my questions about art.

universal properties. During the 1960s, artworld theory instigated by Danto suggested that art should be defined due to the context in which it was established as an artwork and this made it possible for theorists to give up their search for “easy-to-notice characteristics” and to concentrate instead on the knowledge and practice associated with a work of art (1992:111).

Two main definitional directions have, according to George Dickie, prevailed since the 1960s; the functional or procedural definitions. The functional definition regards works of art as things created to realise a particular end. One understanding of the functional definition of art is that the creation of an artwork should afford its public an aesthetic experience. The procedural definition of art defines art in terms of the procedures by which it is created, and is often associated with institutional or artworld theory. Dickie’s institutional definition is that “A work of art is an artefact created to be presented to an artworld public.” Dickie suggests that this is a value neutral definition of art because it says nothing about the aesthetic experience, what the point of art is, or anything about expression or representation (1992:112)<sup>4</sup>. Critics of procedural definitions have complained that they do not include commonly associated characteristics such as aesthetics, expression and representation. Dickie suggests that although aesthetics, expression and representation do not define art, an artwork may have them as characteristics. A work of art may have many qualities or characteristics, but they may not in themselves necessarily be the point of art (1992:113).

The definition provided by Dickie attempts to exclude objects produced and presented outside the artworld because it specifies that for an artefact to be defined as art, it should be made to be presented to an artworld public. It is the need for an artworld public which causes the definition to be less relevant in relation to public art, because public art is often intended for a non-artworld public. This public, although it may have knowledge about art, does not necessarily have the knowledge required by Dickie’s artworld. The public’s definitions of art that will be presented here may be associated with the artworld suggestions provided by Danto and Dickie. However, I suggest that despite this lack of contact with the artworld, a non-artworld public may be within certain

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<sup>4</sup> A criticism of the definition is that it is circular because it suggests production of the object and the understanding of it within an existing system of knowledge; the system, objects and ideas therefore reproduce themselves.

contexts actively involved in defining objects as art. The people I spoke to in Tiller were involved in defining the Dandelion as a work of art. Their definitions and understandings support its role as a work of art in the neighbourhood. If the public had not defined it as art, then its role would have been different. Limiting the definition of who the public is to just include an artworld public limits the agency of a public work of art. A public work of art requires a public to be active and an artworld public is a small group, and it would have difficulty activating all public works of art on its own<sup>5</sup>.

### A Tiller Definition of Art



Tiller, August 2008

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<sup>5</sup> Being defined as a member of an artworld public requires knowledge about the theory and history of art, and an interest in being a public for the arts. Their relationship with an artwork is not accidental (Senie, 1992:240). A non-artworld public in the context of a shopping centre has an accidental relationship with the art.

The public in Tiller provided four main definitional suggestions. The first was connected to the making of the art object, the process and skill. The second suggestion was associated with difference; art objects were suggested should provide a contrast to everyday life. A third suggestion was that art should be attractive. The fourth suggestion, and possibly the most common answer that I received, was that “*everything is art these days*.” All four suggestions rely on artefactuality meaning there must be an object involved when discussing art. Even the suggestion that everything is art has an artefact in mind. None of the people I spoke to in Tiller mentioned performance or installation, although one woman mentioned striptease to emphasise her point that art is a broad category.

### **Process and creativity**

The Dandelion, a teenage girl suggested, is art because “*It really is made by an artist*.” Another girl suggested that “*art is something creative*.” The process is dominant within this first suggested definition of art.

How the sculpture was made and who made it helped to define the Dandelion as a work of art. In the aesthetic theories of the enlightenment, philosopher Lord Shaftesbury proposed that it is not the object or its contemplation which is of central importance, but it is the creative process. By this, Shaftesbury is referring to the ability to be totally immersed in the process of making the artwork and to contemplate it from this standpoint. This is, according to Shaftesbury, the real nature and mystery of genius (Cassirer, 1955:317). The idea of genius stemming from Shaftesbury’s theory played an important role within 18<sup>th</sup> century aesthetic theory, and it is from here that the Western understanding of the artistic genius stems<sup>6</sup>. The artist is often regarded as the embodiment of the creative genius<sup>7</sup>. A non-artworld public also has access to this idea of the artistic genius, and the public at Tiller therefore expected an artist to be the controller of special skills.

How an object is made and who it is made by plays a role within the Dandelion’s definition as a work of art. A woman who works at City Syd had this to say

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<sup>6</sup> Shaftesbury was not the first theorist to use the term genius. He adopted it from common aesthetic terminology and gave it a specifically philosophical meaning (Cassirer, 1955:318).

<sup>7</sup> This idea has been used by art theorists such as Clement Greenberg, 1939, *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*.



when I asked her if the Dandelion was art: “*Yes it is in the heads of those who have made it* (But not for you?). *No, but art can be so many things. I like art which is minimalistic; I like black and white paintings. I think anyone could have made the Dandelion. Art should be more creative than that.*” The woman did not regard the Dandelion as art because she did not like it. She also thought the physical form of the sculpture lacked complexity, and it therefore lacked the ability to entrap and engage her as a member of its public. As a result of his failure to appeal to her taste and to her understanding of creativity, the artist was not skilful enough.

Our belief in the art object, Alfred Gell says, is based on our understanding of the object’s relationship with the technology and with the artist who produced it. Technical mastery fascinates and impresses the public. According to Gell, all societies have a technical base, and art as a separate type of particularly skilful technical activity carries further the enchantment that exists as a potential in all kinds of technical activity (Gell 1992:44). In his analysis of the artworld, Howard Becker suggests that participants in the creation of artworks and society in general believe that making art requires special skills and that only a few individuals have these skills (Becker, 2008:14). A skilful artist has the ability to create objects that attract appreciation and attention. It may therefore be assumed that a skilfully produced artwork will have more agency than an object that is not produced by an artist. A man I met outside City Syd, who was an engineer by profession, explained the Dandelion’s definition as a work of art in this way: “*Yes it is because someone must have made it. They had the idea and they had the technical skills to complete it. I couldn’t have managed it.*” The engineer’s understanding of his own everyday skills and the links between them and artistic skills encourage his understanding of the sculpture as a work of art. Skill is therefore understood to be a requirement during the production of a work of art. The existence of skill encourages the public to engage with the Dandelion and supports its role as a work of art on the roundabout outside City Syd.

### **Difference**

The second reason for defining the Dandelion as a work of art, suggested by some members of the public at City Syd, was that an artistic experience should be different

from other everyday experiences. A man who worked in one of the businesses on the edge of the shopping centre had this to say when asked if the Dandelion was art: ***“What is not art? (Laughs) Well for me it is art, that is, it is something which gives me an experience of something different really. From my point of view it should preferably be a positive experience. There is a lot of art which I don’t get anything positive out of and I don’t think it offers me anything.”*** During a previous interview, the man had expressed negative opinions about the physical environment around City Syd which the commercial demands of the area had provided. The Dandelion therefore provides a positive aesthetic experience, one which is different from the rest of the visual experience around City Syd. The Dandelion provides the public in Tiller with a contrast to the rest of the physical framework in the area outside City Syd. A teenage boy who was a pupil at a local high school said this when I asked if the Dandelion was art: ***“It is art because it creates a contrast. Suddenly there is this great big flower right in front of people’s eyes.”*** The school pupil was not negative about the area around the roundabout; he thought City Syd was a great place to hang-out between classes, but contrast, the boy is implying, is something we need as it creates a necessary social dynamic.

The quality of difference was important to literature theorist Viktor Shklovsky and he explains that “The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” (Shklovsky 1965:12). The public, Shklovsky suggests, becomes familiar with an object when it is seen regularly, then they stop seeing it and cannot say anything significant about it (1965:13). This expectation of contrast and difference suggested by members of the Dandelion’s public may be linked to an expectation suggested by the public art committee. They believed before its installation that the Dandelion would challenge ideas about the place. The sculpture, by being a large and perhaps unexpected aesthetic object within the commercial space around City Syd, was intended during the sculpture’s candidacy to encourage people to think beyond their usual ideas about the place. The public art committee suggested after the Dandelion’s installation that although the sculpture did have a positive effect on the context around City Syd, they did not believe

that it alone enough to challenge ideas about the place. The public's ideas about what defines a work of art suggest that the Dandelion in the year after its installation did defamiliarise the place for some members of its public.



City Syd, August 2008

A woman employed at City Syd expressed the belief that art can cause discussion and encourage meaning to develop. The Dandelion has the potential to do this while standing on its roundabout. She said because people “*perhaps become more aware of things around them, rather than just driving straight ahead and not thinking. I think it does that. And you often end up waiting in traffic up here and then you notice it, and*

*it may be more fun to talk about than that red light in front is a bit slow isn't it?"* A work of art like the Dandelion in an active location has the ability to add difference, and it can encourage the public to see familiar forms in an unfamiliar way. It also offers them an object for discussion and debate.

The defamiliarisation process through the use of public art allows the public to transfer its understandings and perception of an object or place from an accepted sphere into new spheres of perception (Shklovsky, 1965:21). For example, the Dandelion as a work of art on a giant scale reawakens the consciousness of the perception of dandelions already existing on a natural level in the rest of Tiller. A young father I met waiting on a bench inside City Syd alongside his toddler, said this when asked if the Dandelion was art: *"Yes it is, you wouldn't get such a big Dandelion for any other reason."* The sculptures made by the pop artist Claes Oldenburg during the 1960s are similarly oversized<sup>8</sup>. An art historical reading of them by Ellen Johnson suggests that contradicting the properties of the original emphasises the qualities of the created object (Johnson 1971:28). This contradiction is present in the Dandelion sculpture, but the public response shows that the sculpture also allows new readings of the plant, encouraging associations beyond the normal perception of dandelions<sup>9</sup>. It is the aesthetic experience which sets this associative process in motion.

How long the defamiliarisation process lasts in relation to public works of art is uncertain. There will always be new members of the Dandelion's public and people who are not familiar with the Tiller neighbourhood so the potential for unfamiliarity will continue to exist. In the last two phases of the fieldwork when the sculpture had been installed for over a year, the people I spoke to would often answer my question about what they thought of the Dandelion sculpture in this way: *"It's nice, but I don't really see it anymore."* Art has to do more than defamiliarise because after a while, whether you like the piece in question or not, a work of art, particularly one within a public place where the artwork is potentially seen several times every day, becomes familiar. The

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<sup>8</sup> Outsized sculptural examples include *Lipstick on Caterpillar tracks*, 1969 Yale University, *The Giant Icebag*, 1969-70 a non-permanent installation which included 100 yards of vinyl, and *(Giant) Ice Cream Cone*, 1962.

<sup>9</sup> This idea is discussed further in Chapter 11.

definitional process is complex. Defamiliarisation is therefore one suggestion within a group of suggestions which all encourage the definition of the Dandelion sculpture as art.

### **Attractive**

A woman working at City Syd said this when asked what she thought of the Dandelion: ***“I think it’s nice, it’s a little bit unusual. It’s colourful, fresh, a bit out of place in the winter but it’s great during the spring and summer.”*** Her answer sums up many of the ideas about the Dandelion which I encountered during the fieldwork period; ideas that were generally positive and based on the visual appearance of the sculpture. I also asked her if the Dandelion was art: ***“Yes it’s art. Art is so many different things. So I have to say yes. Art is beautiful to look at.”*** Her answer points to beauty being a requirement when defining an object as a work of art.

When the arts as an institution developed during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an idea of art as a unitary enterprise also progressed, encompassing theatre, music, poetry and the visual arts. An essential characteristic of the arts was the idea that a work of art is beautiful (Mothersill 1992:48). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century theory of genres, beauty was separated from the sublime and the picturesque, but non-experts have, according to philosopher Mary Mothersill, always applied the term beautiful “across the board” (1992:45)<sup>10</sup>. The idea of beauty is part of everyday life and it is good, or a value that everyone desires access to. It is a concept that is not just associated with art, and there are no universally accepted rules as to what may be defined as beautiful<sup>11</sup>. The judgement of taste that decrees that an object or person is beautiful is an empirical one (1992:47).

The idea that art should be attractive is well-established among shoppers at City Syd. They expressed a preference for art that is beautiful or nice, although they were often aware that art is not always expected to be beautiful. A young woman I met rushing out of City Syd had this to say about the Dandelion a year after its installation: ***“I think it is beautiful.”*** I asked her why she thought it was beautiful and she said ***“Because it is***

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<sup>10</sup> Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* (1790) was the first work to offer a systematic theory of beauty, but he pays more attention to natural phenomena than to works of art (Mothersill, 1992:48).

<sup>11</sup> Hegel suggested that although people generally characterise as beautiful things which happen to please them, such as animals or landscapes, this is only a loose way of speaking about beauty. True beauty is “born again of the mind” and is only found in human beings and in the works of art that they create (Mothersill, 1992:49).

*different.*” I also asked her if the Dandelion was art and she answered: “*Yes, absolutely.*” I asked her why she thought it was art, and she replied, “*Because it is beautiful.*” The woman therefore liked the Dandelion because it was beautiful and defined it as art because of its beauty.



City Syd, October 2008



City Syd, November 2008

When Marcel Duchamp exhibited *The Fountain* in 1917, he exposed the idea that aesthetic quality is not essential to art (Dickie, 1992:111). An object no longer had to be pleasing to look at to be defined as a work of art. Arthur Danto supports this when he says that “It is false to say that aesthetics is the point of visual art. It is not the point of the Brillo Box. Nor is it the point of most of the world’s art” (Danto, 2005:7). However, in contemporary art, even though aesthetic quality is no longer what defines art, where there exists an aesthetic component it is the means to whatever the point of art may be (2005:8). Beauty or aesthetic quality encourages public access to the work of art and it is the starting point for their interest and understanding. The Dandelion is, however, more than just an attractive object. It is, as my examples show, also a source of difference and a



source of meaning, but being attractive or even beautiful importantly encourages contact with the Dandelion's less explicit qualities. When aesthetic qualities or sensual experiences exist in a work of art they are often the means by which the artwork initiates contact with its public (Danto, 2005:8). These ideas may be associated with how the Dandelion develops a relationship with its public.

### **“Everything is Art”**

Earlier in the chapter, I mentioned that art theoreticians no longer just search for necessary and sufficient conditions, or easy to notice characteristics, and aesthetic quality is not necessary for an object to be defined as art. The artworld definition of art has become more open, and this has not gone unnoticed by the public in Tiller. At City Syd a common reply to the question, “*Is it art?*” was that “*everything is art these days.*” The suggestion is that the Dandelion is easily defined as art within such an open category. Some members of the shopping centre public struggled with defining the Dandelion as art, but accepted that it could be art because as one young woman said to me, “*Art can be so many things.*” I also asked her what she thought of as art and she answered “*Pictures.*” A woman I met on a break from her job in City Syd said that “*Art can be such a lot of things, everything from striptease to painting.*” She personally preferred paintings, the ones with a bit of history connected to them such as the paintings in Trondheim Art Museum. The public is implying that the artworld has opened up the boundaries of the definition quite dramatically; form and beauty are not important anymore within the artworld's definition of art, but form and beauty are still important to the public at City Syd.

A female shopper that I met just inside the entrance to City Syd said this when I asked her if the Dandelion was art: “*It's decorative. Almost anything can be art now. I once saw a typewriter displayed as art, but it wasn't art for me.*” Opening up the definition so that everything can be art allows for the inclusion of different kinds of objects, even those that initially had a specific and non-art related function. For the lady I spoke to, this was not a positive experience. However, it is possible for the public to respond to an artwork even if they do not like the way it looks. A woman working at City Syd said this when asked what she thought of the Dandelion: “*I am starting to think that*

*it is a little vulgar because it has very garish colours. I think it is a little out place with what is around it. I understand that it is a point that we should notice it because of the colour, but it looks like something they would make in China. It was as well and that's the way it looks. They are fond of colour*"<sup>12</sup>. The sculpture is intended to be visible within the active visual environment outside City Syd. One of the members of the public art committee commented on the danger of the sculpture adding to the visual chaos. For the woman who works in administration at City Syd, the sculpture is too much for the visual environment outside the shopping centre, and it is therefore "*vulgar.*"

Artworks do not have to be aesthetically pleasing. It is possible for an object to be art even if we do not like the colours it is painted in. I asked the same City Syd employee if the Dandelion was art and although she did not appreciate the way it looks she could not quite say it was not art: "*The art police would probably say no, because it has such garish colours and is vulgar. Those not involved with the art police would say yes it is art. Who has the right to define themselves as the "art police"? I think it's vulgar, and define it more as a sort of street art.*" The way an object looks influences how it is evaluated and defined. Some artists do try to get their message across without resorting to aesthetics (Danto, 2005:5). However, getting away from the way a piece of artwork looks is not easy due to the fact that as soon as an object is involved, its visual qualities will be discussed even when it is felt that the object does not fulfil qualities expected in a work of art. Only in genres like performance art, where there is most often no object involved, is the way the art looks not central. At City Syd, the sculpture's visual qualities were evaluated by its public.

The breadth of answers I received to my question "What is art?" shows that art is a broad concept, and a public work of art must therefore encompass a number of qualities if it is going to be possible for it to function as a work of art within its location. The four definitional suggestions, individually and together, support the definition of the Dandelion as a work of art, and also help to define its role outside City Syd. A consequence of this is that we can expect the sculpture to play different roles on the

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<sup>12</sup> The production of the sculpture took place in a foundry in Thailand and a metal workshop in China. It was cheaper to make it in these locations, even when including the costs of transporting the finished sculpture back to Trondheim.

roundabout. Not everyone will agree that the Dandelion fulfils all the four suggestions, but if the Dandelion is defined as art according to only one of the suggestions, it is still on its way to playing a social role on the roundabout and its definition as a work of art may be the starting point for a relationship with a member of the public. The definitional suggestions also link in to comments about the role of aesthetics, which will be mentioned later in the section.

### **Aesthetics, Anthropology and Agency**

The Dandelion's attractiveness encourages its definition as art. This happens even though the public is aware that this criterion is no longer always important within the artworld. Aesthetic quality is understood here as encouraging relational activity between a work of art and its public. However, aesthetic quality is traditionally understood as encouraging contemplation and evaluation when the public meets a work of art rather than social interaction. The aesthetic theory, which has its origins in Alexander Baumgarten's doctrine of sensibility, is a body of theory that incorporates elements such as beauty, taste, the picturesque and the sublime (Baumgarten 1988:3). In relation to an analysis of works of art, aesthetic theory depends on a history and knowledge associated with philosophical and historical art theory, but because it is both sensory and intuitive, there is room for responses that are personal. It is often assumed, George Dickie tells us, that there is an aesthetic attitude which is the foundation for an aesthetic response, and this aesthetic attitude is in contrast with practical, moral, scientific and economic factors (Dickie, 1974:9). This understanding of the aesthetic experience isolates it from the social and physical contexts around it. Art historian Robert Goldwater suggests that in both art history and anthropology, aesthetic theory has often been used to understand the aspects of art that are left after "function, ritual or otherwise, iconography and meaning – if these can be distinguished – are separated out" (Goldwater 1973:6). Those interested in aesthetic quality have therefore often concentrated on the skill of the artist, the admiration of that skill and/or the distribution of formal elements. The problem with many of these studies is that they tended to reduce the material studied, particularly with primitive art, to terms made familiar by Western art historians and to limit the understanding of the role of these objects within the wider society (Forge 1973:xv).

Formal and decorative elements are often about more than the evaluation of aesthetic quality. The world around us is full of decorated objects. Alfred Gell suggests that decoration is often essential to the psychological function of these objects, and that the formal qualities of an object cannot easily be separated from their practical and social functions. For example, any bamboo holder can function as a container for lime, but Gell says that among the Iatmul of New Guinea, a plain container would not be as functional. This is because a man's lime-container is an important index of the owner's personhood and decoration binds it to its owner (Gell, 1998:74). The recommendation by Gell that the anthropology of art should abandon the study of aesthetics is based on the idea that aesthetic quality no longer defines even Western works of art as art, and that the study of aesthetic qualities alone cannot explain the role and function of art objects (Gell 1999:210).

The anthropology of art described by Gell has the social context of art production, circulation and reception as its focus, rather than the evaluation of art objects. In the theory of agency, Gell defines art as a system of action "intended to change the world, rather than encode symbolic propositions about it" (Gell, 1998:6). Aesthetic judgements were considered by Gell to be interior mental acts, whereas art objects are part of an active social context (1998:3)<sup>13</sup>. A painting of a smiling person, Gell says, triggers a response in a way that is similar to the way that a smiling face provokes a friendly response from the person it greets (1998:15). The painting is therefore the outcome and/or the instrument of social agency. It was the cognitive effect of artworks that interested Gell and the way works of art actively influence the people using or looking at them (Gell, 1992:43).

However, the process of enchantment which Gell is referring to when he talks about the cognitive influence of artworks does, he admits, have an effect which is similar to an aesthetic effect, but he goes on to suggest that aesthetic pleasure is never the sole focus of interest (Gell, 1998:75). The lime-containers of Melanesian "big-men" are not self-sufficient sources of delight; they are vehicles of personhood which their owners exchange and display (Gell, 1998:81). However, in line with what Danto said, I suggest

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<sup>13</sup>The use of aesthetic theory to study art within an anthropological analysis has a long history of scepticism. In 1973, Anthony Forge suggested, that "belief in the existence of a universal human aesthetic remained a matter of faith" (Forge, 1973:xxi).

that, although the aesthetic quality of an object may only be one aspect associated with its effect and not always necessary for a work of art to be defined as art, when aesthetic quality does exist it may be, as I mentioned earlier, the means by which the artwork makes contact or communicates meaning with its public (Danto, 2005:8). Gell's criticism of aesthetic theory associates the aesthetic experience closely with the art object and its evaluation, but the aesthetic experience is also sensory and may be related to a broader experience of the world around us. Jeremy Coote suggests that the aesthetic experiences in the West are often associated with aspects of everyday popular culture, such as gardening and sport and not with art objects at all (Coote, 1992:246).

The recognition of the visual qualities valued by society which Coote suggests does have relevance with the public's response at City Syd. An aesthetic experience does not have to be associated with art objects and this, I argue, encourages the associative power of an object like the Dandelion in Tiller. This is because when attempting to explain the role of the sculpture, the public perceives it in the light of other elements or experiences that have no obvious artistic connection with the likes of shopping centres, such as the weather and weeds. This is the "*look alike*" or metaphorical process that Harriet Senie warns public art is exposed to, but which I suggest is one of the aspects that encourages relational activity between a public work of art and its public (Senie, 1992:241). For example, the aesthetic experience of seeing a dandelion plant in the Norwegian landscape during the spring and summer is one of the things that encourage contact between the public and the Dandelion sculpture and provides it with agency.

### **Aesthetic Association at City Syd**

An elderly woman I met shopping at City Syd with her husband told me: "*It's a beautiful plant which lights up. It is also a weed which pushes itself forward everywhere; at the same time it is a useful plant...There are a lot of people who make wine from it and it is a nice wine.....We used to live here on one of the first housing estates, although we remember it when it was just marshland.*" The comments start with a description of the plant associated with the sculpture and then develop into a list of personal connections with the flower. During her efforts to answer my questions about the role of the

Dandelion in Tiller, the woman used a wider field of association than ones directly connected to the aesthetic qualities of the sculpture, but it is the sculpture's physical form that triggers the associations and allows it as a work of art to have agency. The physical and visual form is central to the process of building relationships between the sculpture and its public.

The sculpture's ability to appeal to the public's everyday experiences and taste was central to the fieldwork experience. The first question I always asked the people I spoke to at City Syd was "What do you think of the sculpture/Dandelion?" I did not ask directly if they liked it or not, but apart from the occasional response such as "*It's big*", most people at City Syd said something like "*I think it's nice*", or, "*I don't like it at all.*" Their replies point to whether they value the sculpture or not, but public evaluation of the Dandelion was not simply internal judgements that were separate from their other activities at City Syd as Gell suggests aesthetic evaluations often are (Gell, 1998:3). We make value judgements about many of the objects around us in day-to-day life and the judgement of form is a constant preoccupation (Weiner, 2001:16). This does not mean we are necessarily being seduced by the way objects look. The public at City Syd is doing what they often do when faced with many everyday objects.

The enlightenment philosopher David Hume considered aesthetic judgements to be value judgements which were not universal, but ones which depended on subjective experience (Cassirer, 1955:306)<sup>14</sup>. These value judgements are often associated with personal taste. When Hume was writing his theories, taste helped to define the 18<sup>th</sup> century citizen as part of polite society. By the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, taste was regarded largely as a matter of good sense mixed with a little education and was available to any ordinary private person (Craske, 1997:15). Our ability to appreciate and to understand the objects in the world around us is therefore based on value judgements or judgements of taste, which are initially inspired by feelings of pleasure or displeasure. However, taste is not just based on subjective responses or feelings, it is also influenced by knowledge and understandings provided by the social and physical context.

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<sup>14</sup> Hume did not reject universal tendencies in value judgements completely. Man's nature he said prevented diversities in judgements from being infinitely great (Cassirer 1955:308).





Tiller, May 2008

A retired couple who live in Tiller, who grew up in the Heimdal/Tiller area, both thought the Dandelion was really nice<sup>15</sup>. The woman said: “*Some people don’t like it, but I think it is really nice, it’s so bright.*” When asked why they thought the Dandelion had been installed on the roundabout, the woman said: “*To brighten things up in the middle of all the greyness here.*” The man said: “*Because it is practical. It is easy to see. You know where you are.*” Their answers may be seen in association with an

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<sup>15</sup> Heimdal is a small town ca. 3 km from City Syd.

understanding of the place which has been established over a long period of time. The woman described her relationship with the Tiller neighbourhood in this way: *“It is practical. We live here. I worked at City Syd for over twenty years, from when it opened... There have been big changes. We grew up in Heimdal. In the beginning there was just the hotel sticking up. We used to go skiing here... If my parents rose up from the grave and came to visit us they wouldn’t be able to find their way around. But it is very practical for us. We have everything we need. Maybe that is a little bit egotistical?”* It’s clear that the couple likes Tiller and City Syd, but at the same time they know that the place has its faults. Tiller has provided them with a good place to live and work, but it is not visually pleasing. They have accepted the changes that have taken place in the neighbourhood, and enjoy the results of the changes. The Dandelion is valued as a good thing visually. Their judgement of the sculpture is associated with their longstanding relationship with the neighbourhood, and with the usefulness of the visual and physical form of the sculpture in association with their understanding of the needs of the locality.

A longstanding relationship with the neighbourhood provided a mother who I met on her way into the shopping centre with ideas about the role and the meaning of the sculpture, but her response was different from the response of the retired couple mentioned above. The woman told me that she was originally from Tiller, but had moved to a community outside Trondheim. She had this to say when I asked her what she thought of the Dandelion: *“My kids like it, but I think it’s a bit too crude, a bit too big and a bit too naturalistic.”* I also asked why she thought a dandelion had been chosen for the roundabout, and she said: *“I have thought a lot about it and what it says about the neighbourhood, because I am from here. The area has become rather ugly. It says perhaps that the area is a kind of weed which has grown too fast, but even so is viable.”* Her opinion is based on the same physical and visual factors as the retired couple, but this did not mean that all three of them ended up liking the sculpture or saw it playing the same role on the roundabout. The Dandelion provides visitors to the shopping centre and local residents with something with which to judge or consider other elements in the area. It is likely that they would have done this anyway, but the Dandelion provides the public with an aesthetic standard to do so.

Liking or disliking the Dandelion is part of what establishes a relational connection, and liking or disliking it may be connected to the everyday lives of the public. The response of the public is various but it is not without similarities; common ground is found within the perception of the physical form of the Dandelion and its aesthetic qualities. The colourful and naturalistic form of the Dandelion is active in the physical and social framework, and it is this which “habitates and prompts us” (Miller, 2005:5). The agency of the Dandelion is based on a complex independency between what the public sees, what it knows and what it associates with the sculpture. Aesthetic quality is therefore part of this independency. It is the aesthetic qualities of the sculpture that initiate the response.

### “Nice Art”

Local aesthetic terminology is the focus of this section. The intention is to explain how ‘niceness’ has become an aesthetic standard in the Tiller neighbourhood. The Norwegian word *fin* which translates as *nice* was a word I heard a lot during the fieldwork period. After the Dandelion was installed in August 2007, I generally opened my conversations with shoppers and workers I met at City Syd by asking what they thought about the sculpture on the roundabout. There were some people who did not like the Dandelion, some who liked it a lot and many who simply said “*it’s nice.*” From this primarily positive starting point I tried to get people to elaborate; one lady said it was nice because of the colour, another that it brightens things up. Another reply was that it was “*quite nice but a bit odd during the winter.*” Further elaboration was difficult.

The problem was not that people did not like the Dandelion. I suggest that the majority were positive, but few were really engaged with it and this was exacerbated by art objects being, as Clifford Geertz suggests, generally difficult to talk about (Geertz, 1983:94). The shopping centre environment is not a place traditionally associated with the contemplation of art. The public’s lack of interest in talking about art was understandable; the members of the shopping centre public who I spoke to were there because of the services City Syd provides or because they lived or worked in the area, they were not there to look at or talk about art. The impact of the sculpture, aside from during its first days on the roundabout, is subtle rather than dynamic. The public is aware

of its presence if it stops to think about it, but it may only become aware of it when something happens within the relational complexity around the Dandelion, for example a particular need, a change in the physical context, or if they are having a good or bad day.



Tiller, May 2008

One grey morning in August 2008 I met a lady who was pleased to talk about the Dandelion. This was, she said, because she had written a poem about dandelions and she was fond of that poem<sup>16</sup>. The Dandelion sculpture at City Syd was for her a prime

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<sup>16</sup> *Forbilde* or *Role model* a poem by Jorunn is presented in Norwegian and in translation in the appendix.

example of what she liked about dandelions. According to her, the dandelion “*Is a nice flower. It makes you feel happy. The yellow colour is like the sun, it makes you wake up. It would not have been the same with a red or blue flower.*” I asked her why she thought they had placed the Dandelion here and she said it was because “*it is nice, and because so many people come here* (City Syd).” I also asked her if the Dandelion was art and to this question she replied: “*Yes it’s art. To me it is nice art. Art can be so many things, a lot of it is ugly but this is nice art.*” Finally I asked her what she thought of City Syd and Tiller: “*It’s alright being here. My car is going to be at the garage over there for three hours and I can stay here and wait. I can get what I need here without having to go into town. I go to town as rarely as possible. But it’s not nice here. I don’t come here to go for walks.*” The conversation effectively sums up the niceness of the Dandelion. The woman liked the Dandelion. I would even say she was enthusiastic about it but she repeatedly used the word nice when answering my questions. The Dandelion is nice, it’s a nice flower and nice art, but City Syd is not nice, although City Syd’s practical qualities make up for its lack of niceness. The repeated use of the word nice leads me to ask what the poet meant by nice, and how this is connected to the Western aesthetic tradition mentioned earlier.

The properties most commonly associated with aesthetic quality are beauty, elegance, grace, daintiness, sweetness of sound, balance, design, unity, harmony, expressiveness, depth, movement, texture and atmosphere (Whewell, 1995:7). The people I spoke to at City Syd did not often use words like beauty or harmony to describe the Dandelion, they said “*nice.*” It is everyday or commonplace terminology that makes sense within the Tiller neighbourhood. The anthropologist Anthony Shelton referred to Wittgenstein when he pointed out that “beautiful” is a word rarely used in language as an expression of pure taste, and if it is used it usually means that something is “good” (Shelton, 1992:210). Thus even when the word beautiful is used, it is not necessarily referring to something extraordinary. Some members of the shopping centre public did, as I mentioned earlier, use the term beautiful, but many of them could be seen as skipping a stage and going directly to the point, they do not say beautiful and mean good. They say “*nice*”, and mean something positive, something good. Although the lady poet values both the plant and the

sculpture, and responds to it on a personal level, the sculpture does not lift her on an emotional level that could take her beyond other experiences she has in the area around City Syd. She therefore describes it and its qualities as “*nice*.”

The Dandelion has become part of the everyday environment and is therefore described with words useful to describe daily life. Clifford Geertz was critical to the claim among anthropologists studying primitive art that the peoples of such cultures do not talk about art much. This, Geertz claimed, was not necessarily true. He maintained that people talk about art as they would talk about anything striking or suggestive that passes through their lives and this may make it seem like they are talking about something else (Geertz, 1983:97). This may be the case within the societies Geertz was referring to, but it really seems to be the case at City Syd that people do not talk about art much. They are there to shop and the Dandelion is not often associated with shopping related activities. What is interesting about Geertz’s comment in relation to City Syd is that he points to people talking about art in the same way that they talk about other things in their lives. The Dandelion’s public is not an artworld public, and it was therefore not prepared to talk about the Dandelion using artworld terminology. They talk about it using everyday terminology and a word like nice is everyday descriptive terminology useful within the physical and social context found around the Dandelion.

The evaluation of the Dandelion by its public starts with perception. The way the sculpture looks inspires a response and its aesthetic quality is important, because liking or disliking the way the sculpture looks often starts the process of thinking about what it means. It is where the active relationship starts between the Dandelion and its public. However, the answers I received from the public also relate to traditions within the arts. Beauty is a traditional requirement for the arts and the Dandelion is generally regarded as attractive. Alfred Gell was sceptical of evaluative systems; they were, he suggested, only of interest when they played a part within the context of social interaction (Campbell, 2001:119). The Dandelion has become part of the physical and social context found in the Tiller neighbourhood. It is suggested here that the evaluation of the Dandelion takes place within a wider everyday evaluative context, one that is not always directly associated with the sculpture. Its niceness shows that the understanding of it is also linked



to the everyday lives of the public and it therefore plays a part in the context of social interaction.

### **Summary and Reflections**

The intention of this chapter was to describe and analyse the qualities and values associated with the sculpture that enabled it to be defined as a work of art. The intention was also to look at the role aesthetic quality played in this definitional process, and also how aesthetic qualities encourage relational involvement with the public within the active phase of the Dandelion's social life on the roundabout. The role of aesthetic quality was prescribed by the public art committee and supported by the public response at Tiller, but analysis of the art in the Bullring shows that other qualities are primary. Aesthetic quality is often associated with public art but it is not necessarily the quality that defines its social role.

The definition of the Dandelion as a work of art is part of the role it plays on the roundabout, and defining it as a work of art in Tiller is based on more than one factor. There are links to artworld knowledge within public understandings. Artworld practice through the production of the sculpture helped to define it as a work of art. Skill was understood as a necessary requirement for the production of a work of art, and this is associated with exclusive artistic practice. The Dandelion was also defined as a work of art because it offered something different from the context outside City Syd; a work of art in the form of a giant Dandelion defamiliarised the area around it. The public at City Syd was also aware that defining art was difficult and that even the artworld struggled with its definition. They also understood that beauty is no longer a necessary condition for defining an object as a work of art, and that a wide variety of objects can be defined as art. At City Syd though, there existed a preference for art that looked like a work of art in the traditional sense and was in some way attractive. Attractiveness is a definitional requirement at City Syd and this may be associated with aesthetic quality. Within Gell's theory of agency, a work of art is understood as playing an active role within the texture of social relationships. This active understanding of the role of art opposes the traditional contemplative understanding associated with works of art and aesthetic quality. However,

it is suggested here that agency and aesthetic quality are closely associated within the candidacy and active phase of the Dandelion.

A work of art does not have to be beautiful to be defined as art anymore, but it is suggested here that when it is attractive, its appearance is often the means by which the object gains contact with its public. The public art committee expected the sculpture to play an active aesthetic role within the context outside City Syd, and aesthetic quality is part of the visual impression that the sculpture makes upon its public. What the public sees when they look at the sculpture may be the start of a relationship; it may, at least initially, be as important as what they know about the Dandelion sculpture. A wide variety of everyday objects and activities are seen by a Western public as having aesthetic quality. The breadth of the potential aesthetic experience encourages the associative power of the Dandelion, but the physical and visual form of the sculpture remains at the centre of the associative process. The Dandelion has a fixed physical form but the response of the public to this form varies. The combination of perception, knowledge and taste inspires the difference in response. The Dandelion at City Syd provides the public with an aesthetic standard with which to judge other elements within the area around the shopping centre.

In the Bullring, when I asked people about the Bull, several members of its public told me that they loved it. Nice was not a word often used in the Bullring, but nice is a word often used by people that I spoke to at City Syd to describe the attractiveness of the Dandelion. I suggest that nice is local aesthetic vocabulary associated with everyday terminology often used within the practical, physical and social environment outside City Syd. When evaluating the sculpture, the public is acting outside the artworld and the Dandelion's niceness encourages association with the everyday lives of the public. The Dandelion's niceness is a primary means of instigating contact with its public in the neighbourhood.

## 11. Classification of the Natural: The Associative Quality of Weeds



Tiller, May 2008

It is during the active phase that objects can be seen to be in motion within the social context (Appadurai, 1986: 13). This chapter will analyse associations with the sculptural Dandelion and the dandelion plant by the shopping centre public during the active phase. The Dandelion sculpture is a representation of real dandelions; it therefore connects with an already existing system of classification. The dandelion plant is often described as a weed, and a weed is defined as “a wild plant growing where it is not wanted.” (Hornby, et

al. 2005:1730). On the other hand, dandelions were also often described by the people I met in Tiller as attractive yellow flowers. The previous chapter described the understandings directly associated with the Dandelion's definition as a work of art and its aesthetic quality. The focus of this chapter is the classificatory structure that develops from the representational form of the sculpture in collaboration with the dandelion plant, which may be understood as a system of classification and can be used to understand the social role and agency of the Dandelion at City Syd.

The Dandelion is a local aesthetic construction. The combination of the sculptural form, the planner's expectations and dandelion plants suggests that the meaning that developed around dandelions outside City Syd could only have appeared in this location. This is despite the fact that the dandelion plant was not previously specifically associated with the Tiller/City Syd area. It is a plant that is extremely common in the region around Trondheim and in much of the Norwegian landscape. A man I met on the roundabout on the day of the sculpture's installation was of the opinion that the dandelion ought to be designated the Norwegian national flower because it is so common<sup>1</sup>. During the first months of its life on the roundabout, I received very few negative responses to my questions about the Dandelion. There was a general belief in the positive impact of the sculpture. Society is in flux, the social situation in and around City Syd changes, as do attitudes and opinions connected to the context, and this includes attitudes to the Dandelion sculpture. As the sculpture became established in its location, the public's enthusiasm waned and they had a little less to say about it. This does not mean that the sculpture stopped being active within the social context, but that its agency became more contemplative and less obvious. As the seasons changed the weather conditions also affected opinions about the Dandelion. In the previous chapter I focused on the effect of positive aesthetic qualities, but agency does not have to be connected with positive qualities or experiences, and the Dandelion's agency is characterised by more than one quality. Despite the changes in the social and physical context certain themes and

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<sup>1</sup> Norway already has two national flowers. The first bergfrue (saxifrage) was elected at an international botanical conference in 1935. The second flower røsslyng or Scotch/common heather, was voted for by listeners to a Norwegian radio programme *Nitimen* in 1976.

understandings do stand out, and these provide the basis for classification of the sculpture which I will go on to suggest.



Tiller, May 2008

The chapter will be divided into three parts. The first part will focus on the public's response to the way the sculpture looks. What Claude Lévi-Strauss describes as the "sensible level", where the response is provoked by what we perceive (Lévi-Strauss 1966:63). The second section will consider knowledge about dandelions. Lévi-Strauss describes this as the "intelligible level", where classification is provoked by how we know or understand the object (1966:63). There is not, I suggest, a clear division between

the sensible and intelligible levels. They are closely connected. However, separating the response into the two categories allows focus upon different aspects of the classification process. Finally, I will consider the role of the Dandelion, its agency within the physical and social context outside City Syd and how this is related to the classification process.

### **The Sensible Level**

Sensible properties are properties that are sensory; they exist on an external level (Lévi-Strauss, 1966:63)<sup>2</sup>. These properties can be seen to refer to a sculpture's aesthetic qualities. We respond instinctively to sensible properties without much internal analysis. A visual system starts with sensible properties, particularly those that can be seen. However, although there may not necessarily be a connection between sensible qualities and the physical or botanical properties of an object or plant, according to Lévi-Strauss, there is often an empirical connection between them, one that is proposed as existing and seen as working even if there would seem to be no other foundation for classifying them together. Referring particularly to biology, Lévi-Strauss goes on to suggest that species possessing some remarkable characteristics of shape, colour or smell may give the observer "Right pending disproof" to claim that visible characteristics are the sign of concealed properties (1966:16)<sup>3</sup>.

Classification is a means by which we create order; it is one of the methods used by our society and others to help us understand the world. According to Lévi-Strauss, "Any classification is superior to chaos and even a classification at the level of sensible properties is a step towards rational ordering" (Lévi-Strauss, 1966:15). Therefore even the simplest classifications according to colour and shape are helpful, and by classifying we are putting people or objects into an order or class that has meaning and value. Durkheim and Mauss proposed that a society's system of classification is connected to a wider natural and social order (Hylland Eriksen 2004:146). Mary Douglas suggested that the classification of nature and the body reflect a society's ideology about itself, and that societies do not only use classification to understand the world, but it may

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<sup>2</sup> The 1966 translation which is referred to here uses the term sensible. Sensible in English also often refers to behaviour and points to practical reasonable behaviour. Lévi-Strauss's sensible is associated with sensitivity, which often refers to how easily a person reacts to things and how much they are aware of them.

<sup>3</sup> The majority of the examples used by Lévi-Strauss start by referring to the way things look.



also help to keep society in check. The whole universe is, according to Douglas, “harnessed to men’s attempts to force one another into good citizenship” (Douglas 1995:3)<sup>4</sup>. The creation of order through classification is therefore useful in different ways.



Dandelions, May 2008

Classification is not always about the satisfaction of needs. The classification of the Dandelion sculpture outside City Syd is not about needs. Lévi-Strauss pointed out that “animals and plants are not known as a result of their usefulness; they are deemed to be useful or interesting because they are first known” (Lévi-Strauss, 1966:9). In Lévi-Strauss’s view, the main purpose of the classification process is the meeting of

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Douglas based her ideas on classification on the dangers of pollution and contagion. Some pollution is used as an analogy for expressing a general view of social order. Dangerous things carry a symbolic load (Douglas, 1995:3). Transgressing the symbolic order highlights the classificatory system and helps to prove or disprove the validity of the dominant mode of thought.

intellectual requirements. The universe is therefore as much an object of thought as it is the means of satisfying everyday needs (1966:3)<sup>5</sup>. He also suggests that the necessity of organisation is a need common to both art and science. Aesthetic judgements can open the way to taxonomy, and even anticipate some of the results (1966:13)<sup>6</sup>. The classification of objects, plants or people into groups is therefore both empirical and aesthetic; it is not associative madness which sometimes succeeds through chance.

During the first few days after the Dandelion sculpture was installed in Tiller, several people who commented on the attractiveness of the sculpture gave its association with the plant a humorous twist. An elderly lady said: "*It's nice of them to decorate the area. Dandelions are very suitable. This is Dandelion-land; it's full of dandelions in the spring.*" The sculpture is therefore attractive enough to receive a positive response, and the associations with the large number of dandelions that appear every year in the area are also positive. Looking like a real dandelion makes the sculpture seem amusing and relevant. Michael Taussig suggests that the imagination has the capacity to be lifted into other worlds with help from representational media (Taussig, 1993:16). The Dandelion has not lifted the shopping centre public into another world, perhaps because despite its size, it is a close representation of real dandelions and does not encourage imaginative leaps, although it has in many cases provided a positive visual lift. The Dandelion has allowed them to see Tiller in a different way; in visual association with the sculpture and the plant, it has become Dandelion-land.

This process of classification according to the way things look may be connected to representation both in anthropology and art. Michael Taussig suggests that the anthropologist in his or her analysis, often begins with representation and how an object looks, because in some way or other the making or existence of an artefact that portrays something is often seen as giving power over that which is portrayed (Taussig 1993:13). I am not suggesting that the Dandelion sculpture has power over its natural counterparts, not even in Tiller. If it did, all gardeners would want one to help limit the

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<sup>5</sup> This may be seen as a reference to Malinowski and the discussion about the usefulness of classificatory systems. Lévi-Strauss said that Malinowski made a mistake when he claimed that "primitive people's interest in totemic plants and animals was inspired by nothing but the rumbling of their stomachs" (1966:3).

<sup>6</sup> Refers to Simpson and his taxonomy of animals (Simpson, 1961:4 in Lévi-Strauss, 1966:13).

plant's vigorous growth in their gardens, but the sculpture does have a close connection with the plant because of its physical likeness. This close association is part of its agency. The connection between the sculpture and real life works on several levels but starts on a visual level because as one of the men I spoke to at City Syd pointed out, "*It's a flower that everyone knows. Everyone has experienced it if they have a garden.*" The commonness of the plant has given it an easily recognisable visual appearance, and the power of association connects the sculpture to the properties of the dandelion plant.



Tiller, May 2008

In Western art theory, representation is commonly associated with pictorial representation, and it is therefore often referred to as the “relation of a picture to the thing of which it is a picture” (Sartwell 1995:364). For example, a painting and its model may

have the same recognisable visual qualities because they display similarities in colour and shape. Representational art, Alfred Gell says, is “the production, circulation, and practical use of indexes that have relevant prototypes” (Gell 1998:96)<sup>7</sup>. He goes on to say that most Western art is of this type. It is an exaggeration to suggest that all Western art is representational, but until the invention of photography, artists aimed to imitate reality and representational art was the norm. After photography, this kind of mimesis or copying reality was no longer regarded as a sufficient condition for defining an object as art.

After the sculpture had been in place for almost six months, there was a change in the emphasis within the responses and it was much less positive. One afternoon in January 2008, I was particularly struck by the change. Of the six people I spoke to that day, none expressed any enthusiasm for the sculpture; at best they pronounced it as “*OK*”, and none of the six men and women was willing to define the Dandelion as art. The response of a man I met shopping on that day provides an example of the negative tone. I first asked if he liked the sculpture, to which he answered: “*It’s OK*.” I then asked why he thought the City Council had installed it on the roundabout to which he replied the council thought it would be “*decorative*.” I also asked if the sculpture aroused any associations but he said that it did not, and that it was “*just a flower and that’s it*.” I also asked him if he thought that the sculpture was art, to which he answered no, “*it’s just a blueprint of that kind of flower*.” He also had no special thoughts about the area around the Dandelion. The Tiller/City Syd area was “*OK*.” The majority of the people I spoke to knew what kind of flower the sculpture represents, and even if they were more positive about it than the previous example shows, it was not uncommon for them to struggle to associate the sculpture with anything beyond its own physical presence on the roundabout.

This, I suggest, relates to what the public expect from works of art in general, because on this particular day in January, several of the people I spoke to suggested that art should be required to do more than represent something. A woman who was a florist

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<sup>7</sup> Index is the term Gell used instead of the word art. The term art was he said already loaded with meaning in Western art theoretical terms and was therefore not entirely relevant within anthropology.

said that the sculpture was too “*plastic-like, you can see it’s artificial.*” It reminded her of the artificial flowers that she worked with every day. A man shopping in City Syd when asked if the Dandelion was art said, “*No definitely not.*” When asked why, he replied, “*I suppose art has to do more, be more.*” A representation of a dandelion was not enough to inspire interest from this man during his visits to City Syd.

It is suggested by Arthur Danto that abstract art created by artists like Wassily Kandinsky during the early 20th century has so successfully encouraged our belief in non-representational art that art that mimics the real world has been “relegated to the periphery of critical concern” (Danto, 1994:471)<sup>8</sup>. Representational art still exists, and some examples like the *Brillo Boxes* created by Andy Warhol in 1964, are so life-like that the public who first viewed them in a gallery had problems accepting them as artworks. Theory and knowledge existing in the artworld, Danto suggests, allows objects to be accepted as works of art within the artworld (1994:479). This means that understanding art is about more than what we see; what we know is also important. Danto’s intention was to separate art from reality in a way that would allow us to establish if there were differences between the real world and the artworld that were not just perceptual differences. In a later article, Danto also suggested that the difference was more than an institutional definition because an object is an artwork when there is meaning connected to the artwork. Objects like the *Brillo Boxes* become a work of art when they are about something and when that meaning is embodied in them (Danto, 2005:7).

Meaning is therefore important in Danto’s definition of art, but he also points out in this later article that aesthetic qualities help art to present meanings by visual means (Danto, 2005:8). Qualities like beauty and pleasure allow an art object to gain contact with its public. Aesthetic quality encourages access to meaning, which Danto suggests is embodied in a work of art, but some members of the public at City Syd seem to be suggesting that an art object should make them work harder to gain access to its meaning (2005:7). The lack of opposition means that some members of the shopping centre public, like the two men I met shopping at City Syd in January, only associate the

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<sup>8</sup> Art critics like Danto are often less interested in representational art, although the public outside the artworld is often still interested in it. Some members of the public at City Syd expressed a preference for art that at least looked like art. This was mentioned in Chapter 10.



sculpture with limited meaning and to a certain extent this meaning lacks value. I suggest that the Dandelion does have meaningful potential, but that it works through an associative structure and not all members of the Dandelion's public connect with this structure. The Dandelion's associative power therefore does not work all the time, and it perhaps works better under certain conditions. Agency is not a permanent quality in works of art; changes in the social and physical context will affect it.

### The Intelligible Level



City Syd, January 2008

The Dandelion sculpture is denotative of dandelion plants, therefore the way it looks affects how it is categorised. The aesthetic form created by the three artists Are Blytt, Niklas Mulari and Mikael Nilsson and planned and produced by the public art committee employed by the Trondheim City Council was the starting point for the classification



process. Resemblance, Lévi-Strauss says, plays a fundamental part in the process of classification (Lévi-Strauss 1966:63). Resemblance does not require membership of the same system but is based on objects possessing one or more characteristics in common, ones which are visible, such as colour and shape. The connotative process where meaningful associations arise is set in motion because the Dandelion sculpture is visually linked with dandelion plants. Its colour and shape also allows associations with other things connected with the plant and those colours, for example spring and summer. I suggest that something happens when this chain of association is disturbed. In the case of the Dandelion, weather conditions can affect how the sculpture is understood. The Dandelion was not so popular with the people I spoke to when it was covered in snow.

The January day when I first noticed a change in attitude towards the sculpture was a snowy one; none of the six people I spoke to on that day commented particularly on the snow, but later in the year when asked what they thought of the sculpture, several people suggested that they did not think that the sculpture worked so well during the winter. A man shopping at City Syd described his relationship with the sculpture in this way: *“It’s nice, looking at it makes me happy.... It’s different; you don’t see much of this kind of art. It works much better than the CD-rack next to Bakke bru (Bakke bridge)<sup>9</sup>. It doesn’t work quite so well during the winter; it seems a little bit misplaced.”* It may be assumed that looking at the Dandelion in the snow did not make the man as happy. The climate had an impact on the physical structure around the sculpture and influenced how the sculpture looked, but I suggest that this influence is about more than the Dandelion not looking so nice in the snow. Changes in the appearance of the Dandelion because of the climate can affect the classification process. Form, colour and botany are part of associative structure that has the potential to connect the sculpture with its public outside City Syd. Snow, heavy rain and grey days disrupt the structure around the sculpture making it more difficult to connect with the usual associations. Positive associations, for example spring, summer, nature and even weeds can be affected by the weather.

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<sup>9</sup> This is a reference to a sculpture called *Kammen* or *The Comb* by artist Jorun Kraft Mo which stands on a roundabout next to Bakke Bridge close to Trondheim city centre.

It is suggested here that classification works on two levels. Starting with classification on the sensible level, for example a yellow flower may be classified along with other plants with yellow flowers<sup>10</sup>. The similarities described on the sensible level provoke associations with objects that have comparative physical qualities. The next step is when a member of the Dandelion's public connects visual or physical qualities with what he or she knows about the plant. By combining the visual and intelligible levels it is possible to see the associations connected to the Dandelion as an associative structure.

The dandelion plant has visual attributes that are often considered positive. This provides a direct visible link between the sculpture and the plant, but there are other qualities connected to the plant, some of which are positive, others are negative. These are qualities that are not necessarily seen but they are often qualities that are known. Contiguity and resemblance, Lévi-Strauss says, both play fundamental parts in the process of classification (Lévi-Strauss, 1966:63). They allow us to find things that belong together structurally and functionally, these are things or ideas that can be placed alongside each other, but the process does not stop there. Classifying the Dandelion sculpture along with the dandelion plant allows the sculpture to be associated with known qualities connected to the plant, and it therefore contains both positive and negative merits. Representation initiates the contact, but the relational power of an object also comes from what is known about it.

To understand the Dandelion sculpture's role on the roundabout outside City Syd, we need to know something about the dandelion plant. The qualities that the nine-metre tall sculpture make explicit are implicit within its much smaller prototype. Dandelions are, it is suggested by the public at City Syd, among other things; beautiful, weeds, attractive, they grow everywhere, are useful, nice, strong, willing, common and yellow. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the unity of an object does not lie behind its different qualities but it is emphasised by each of them where "each of its qualities is the whole" (Merleau-Ponty 2008:48). A dandelion is also a combination of many qualities, but a shopper may concentrate on one of the qualities when describing their response to the sculpture. I suggest that a member of the sculpture's public at City Syd is not missing something if they do not associate it with a complete set of qualities, and understanding

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<sup>10</sup> All the five senses influence classification on the sensible level.

the Dandelion does not mean that it is necessary to provide a complete and unequivocal list of qualities. Each of the Dandelion's qualities provides meaning about the whole sculpture or plant. The qualities are connected and describe the whole, but individually they also provide meaning. The qualities that are mentioned here were mentioned by people I spoke to in the neighbourhood, and are therefore relevant in relation to the actual social situation around the Dandelion sculpture.

The social situation influences the objects associated with it. Objects are rarely neutral awaiting our contemplation without any pre-existing form of influence. Each one of them symbolises or reveals particular qualities, provoking in us reactions that are either favourable or unfavourable (Merleau-Ponty, 2008:48). Some members of the sculpture's public focus on what makes dandelions attractive while others focus on what is not so positive about the flower. Often both qualities were commented on during a single description of the plant. A young man who worked at City Syd said: "***I think it's nice. I associate it with the poppies which you see in Italy. They have big meadows full of poppies. We think that is a beautiful flower, but in Italy it's a weed. In Norway you get big meadows full of dandelions and we think they are weeds, but it is a beautiful flower.***" A meadow full of dandelions is a wonderful sight, but often as the young man points out, we forget what is wonderful about wild flowers and only see the problems associated with weeds. The young man sees both possibilities in a meadow full of dandelions; this is because a perceived object is made up of a number of qualities that are not absolutely separate. Each of the qualities associated with the object has its own meaning, and this meaning establishes a correspondence between it and qualities associated with other senses connected to the object (2008:46). It may be assumed that because an object like the Dandelion sculpture is associated with distinctive qualities, these qualities will provoke a similar response in all members of the public at City Syd, but this is not what happened. The meaning connected to being a weed was not always as positive as this example suggests.

An elderly man who was visiting City Syd not long after the sculpture was installed had not made up his mind about it. He thought that it was positive that it was there because it livened up an otherwise fairly unattractive area, but he wondered if it might disturb people driving around the roundabout. I asked him why he thought a

dandelion had been chosen, and he said it was so that “*as many as possible would get something out of looking at it.*” He also said that he personally had a slightly negative attitude towards dandelions because “*I have a farm with a fair bit of cultivated land and I try and keep dandelions under control, it’s the same on my lawn.*” He was also of the opinion that it is a flower that a lot of people have a relationship with because it is “*widespread in Norway.*” Both of the men that I just referred to associate the Dandelion sculpture to experiences related to the dandelion plant out in the Norwegian landscape and both of them classified the plant and sculpture as weeds, but the first man also saw dandelions as a beautiful plant. The second man saw the plant as a problem that needed controlling. The relationship to the landscape is different in the two examples; the first man is just travelling through, the second one has a day-to-day relationship with land that is his own.

I have met other farmers at City Syd, and although they all associated the Dandelion sculpture with weeds, they did not just associate weeds with negative qualities. They also responded to its aesthetic qualities. It is therefore not possible to assume that being a farmer or the owner of some land automatically makes a person less positive towards the Dandelion, but it does point to the multivocality of dandelions, and this highlights the potential within the associative structure that the Dandelion sculpture offers. Multivocality means that an object can contain several ideas or associations simultaneously. There may be a correspondence between the different meanings associated with the Dandelion, but it does not mean that they all have to make their presence known at the same time. We are not necessarily aware of the existence of other interpretations until we need them.

We experience the world around us in a context that Paul Connerton suggests is “causally connected with past events and objects” (Connerton, 2002:2). We therefore often refer to events and objects that are not present within the situation we are actually experiencing; they provide internal references and a wider context. They do not have to be events or objects from the distant past. For example, the young man who liked poppies and dandelions referred to an Italian holiday, but the trip may only have taken place the week before and the farmer may have been weeding only days or hours earlier. These past

events provide a background to understanding the sculpture, and as the farmer pointed out the “*widespread*” quality of dandelions means many people are able to place the sculpture within this kind of personal context. The widespread quality may also work against the sculpture. I pointed out earlier some members of the Dandelion’s public have criticised the sculpture for being too realistic, for not offering them more than an everyday object, but I suggest that being widespread and multivocal allows for the fleeting relationships between the sculpture and its public which Alfred Gell says encourage a work of art to have agency (Gell, 1998:22).

These fleeting associative connections caused an elderly lady, whom I met several times at City Syd, to tell me that she drinks dandelion tea every day. It is supposed to be a purgative. She even had a packet of dandelion tea in her shopping bag. It caused several other people to mention making wine from dandelions. Daniel Miller suggests that objects talk, and that things may be regarded as an expression of a person or household (Miller 2008:2). The majority of the people I spoke to at City Syd did not have a close relationship with the Dandelion sculpture, but the conversations that I had with them about the Dandelion often linked into aspects connected to their daily lives, which in turn helps to explain the role that the sculpture plays in its location in Tiller. Talking about art in Tiller is not talking about art within a background of art history and theory. The knowledge that the sculpture embodies in Tiller, although it has links to an artworld established by the artists and public art committee who planned its installation during its candidacy, has as much, and often more, to do with the social lives of the people visiting, working or living in the neighbourhood. This is where its agency lies. In the case of the Dandelion, the active phase encourages meaning to be established whereas the artworld only has a limited impact.

### **Agency and the Associative Structure**

There is agency in the associative structure found in the relationship between the Dandelion, its public and the physical framework around it. The meaning provided by the associations provoked by the sculpture allows the Dandelion to establish an active relationship with its public. For some of the people I spoke to in the Tiller/ City Syd neighbourhood, the Dandelion has become a symbol. They perceive the sculpture in

terms of the social and physical situation around them in Tiller, linking the literal meaning associated with the sculpture's form with a figurative meaning, which must be interpreted or reached through the literal meaning (Lübcke 2010:419). This relates particularly to examples where the public at City Syd compare people or buildings to weeds.



Tiller, January 2008

The process of classifying the Dandelion as a weed provokes combinations that are locally specific, for example, people living in the area are on occasion classified alongside weeds. The idea that individuals or a group of people can be associated with



dandelions is not unheard of. The term 'løvetannbarn' or 'dandelion-children' is used by psychologists<sup>11</sup>. A small number of people said that they associated the sculptural plant with "*dandelion-children*." The plant's life force is referred to here; it has become a metaphor for the ability to survive. Similar qualities were used by the public to describe the people from the area. In a florists inside City Syd, I interviewed two women working behind the counter. They both liked the sculpture. When asked why they thought a dandelion had been chosen for the area outside City Syd, the first woman suggested that it was because it was a "*down to earth flower, one which everyone knows*." Her workmate suggested that "*it is tough and strong like the people around here. It grows up everywhere and it doesn't give up*." In this example, the plants commonplaceness and its ability to grow almost anywhere, to push itself through the tarmac and survive against the odds are seen as positive qualities. These are characteristics of the weed, it grows where it is not wanted and it does not give up. It does very well on very little. A positive interpretation of a dandelion's qualities means that it is a good thing to be associated with weeds and classified with them. Resilience is a good thing.

On the other hand, at a local high school close to City Syd, two independent respondents suggested that the local council had been "*frekk*" or "*cheeky*" when they installed a dandelion on that roundabout<sup>12</sup>. The first person to say this was a teacher. She asked me if the City Council was implying that the people from the area were weeds. The second person to say this, a pupil at the school, believed that the council was saying that they (the young people in the area) were "*Tillerrampen (Tiller-hooligans) who should be pulled up by the roots just like all weeds*." The teacher and the pupil at the high school used the sculpture metaphorically to understand one field of experience in terms of another (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003:5). The dandelion plant has qualities whose meaning gets transposed onto the sculpture, and this meaning may be used to describe or define a social group. The dandelion as a weed is therefore not just a category of plants; it has been given a wider descriptive role by some members of its public. The artists who designed the sculpture did connect the Dandelion and Tiller with weeds. They are quoted

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<sup>11</sup> The term is used to refer to children growing up in difficult conditions, but who survive and do well despite the odds against them. The question which preoccupies psychologists is why do some children cope and do well as adults and some do not?

<sup>12</sup> Frekk is the Norwegian word used. It is not an easy word to capture in translation. Cheeky is perhaps too mild a term. Impudent or out-of-order are also possible translations.

in the local paper as saying, “This area is a weed in a town planning context, and we think therefore that the Dandelion fits in well here”<sup>13</sup>. However, the artists are suggesting that it is the physical structure and not the people who live and work there that is the weed. The public relationship with the sculpture takes the association a stage further making it not just about physical qualities, but also about social qualities. The negative associations with the Dandelion point to agency being based on both positive and negative qualities connected with the sculpture and the plant.



Tiller, September 2008



Tiller, December 2008

Associating the physical structure around the sculpture, the architecture and buildings with weeds was what the artists did and it is also something that a number of the people that I spoke to at City Syd did. A woman I met walking her dog in the area said that “*It’s fun; I fell for it straight away. It’s an amusing idea putting up something like that in a place where there are so many ugly buildings.*” When I asked her why she thought they had placed the Dandelion outside City Syd, she said that she was not sure,

<sup>13</sup> Adressavisa, Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> August 2007. My translation.

but suggested that it was to “*decorate a boring roundabout.*” When I asked her what she associated with dandelions, she said “*Weeds in the garden but it is a nice flower.*” This woman lives in the neighbourhood and by the time I asked her my questions the sculpture had been standing on the roundabout for just over a year. She had enough time to consider the sculpture and its relationship with the physical structure around it. Its aesthetic role is important to her, and at the same time the link between art, weeds and architecture had become an obvious connection.

The sculpture helps the lady dog-walker to explain the place or highlight qualities she was already aware of. Most of the people who answered my questions at City Syd were brief acquaintances, but I have had the opportunity to talk to some of the people who work at the shopping centre on several occasions and I therefore know a little bit more about their relationship with the Dandelion. One of these employees works at a hairdresser’s at City Syd. During a conversation during spring 2007, before the sculpture was installed, she said this about the physical framework around City Syd: “*I can’t understand why it is allowed, even though it is outside the centre, putting up something which is so very cheap and ugly. In the town centre architecture has to meet requirements. I think that it is just too bad that they are allowed to carry on like this in the suburbs.*” In September 2008, she used the Dandelion to explain the same structure: “*The sculpture says something about the place, and about the architecture, all the boxes that keep appearing everywhere. There isn’t really any kind of plan for the area and that’s a shame. They put up a box and it becomes a shopping centre. City Syd and Tillertorget have done more around their entrances and that’s good, but otherwise it’s just boxes. It’s like this in all Western countries and that’s not good*”<sup>14</sup>. The sculpture has not opened her eyes to a problem that she was not aware of before, she used the Dandelion to confirm an already established discontent with the physical framework in the neighbourhood.

As the sculpture became more established in its location, the connection between architecture and weeds became a more common association. I suggest that it is an unusual classification and one that has only become established in the Tiller

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<sup>14</sup> Tillertorget is another shopping centre within the Tiller neighbourhood.

neighbourhood because of the installation of the Dandelion outside City Syd. The connection between architecture and weeds is not one that exists within other contexts. Architecture and dandelions do not look alike and the actual similarities between them are not obvious, but in Lévi-Strauss's words they can be seen as "going together" (Lévi-Strauss 1966:9). Lévi-Strauss's intention when he suggested that things could be seen as "going together" was to show the difference between magical thought and scientific thought. The question, he says, is not whether the touch of a woodpecker's beak does in fact cure toothache but what is important is whether there is a point of view from which a woodpecker's beak and a man's tooth can be seen as "going together"<sup>15</sup>. They make sense within a classificatory system because they have relevance together within the social context in which they are classified. These kinds of connections are possible because relationships may be established on more than one level, looking alike is not the only way to make a connection. Lévi-Strauss uses the example of bees and carpenters being classified together because they both build things (1966:63). They are seen as going together because of what is known about them.

Classifying architecture together with weeds has on initial reflection as much logic as placing woodpeckers and toothache together, but a young woman who worked in a shop inside City Syd suggested that: "*Tiller is a place that is developing more and more. New things sort of appear everywhere. The place is flowering like a dandelion, like a weed. Weeds symbolise maybe the development and growth in the area.*" Buildings and dandelions do not look alike, but they are classified together because they both appear quickly around City Syd. A man I met shopping in a hardware store inside City Syd had this to say about why the Dandelion sculpture had been chosen for this particular location: "*Art can be so random. It has been installed there without any meaning, or it could be because shopping centres grow like dandelions.*" The man used to live in the neighbourhood and claimed to have given the reasoning behind the Dandelion some thought. He was convinced that the people who had planned the

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<sup>15</sup> Lévi-Strauss provides a number of examples where specific parts of particular animals are used for medicinal purposes, and where the connection seems strange if we do not allow for the connection being primarily intellectual rather than practical, for example contact with "a woodpecker's beak, blood of a woodpecker, nasal insufflation of the powder of a mummified woodpecker, gobbled egg of the bird koukcha (Iakoute, against toothache, scrofula, high fevers and tuberculosis respectively)" (Lévi-Strauss 1966:9).

sculpture had not given it any meaning, but he gave the sculpture meaning during his conversation with me. Therefore on an intelligible level for this man, and, I suggest, for other people I spoke to, the sculpture does not have meaning all the time. It works most effectively on a sensible or visual level. Upon reflection or provoked by an unusual situation, for example a conversation with an anthropologist in a hardware store inside City Syd, the sculpture is given meaning, and architecture and dandelions can appear within the same classificatory system.

The qualities referred to by the public have a wider potential than the associative structure connected to the Dandelion sculpture in Tiller because you can find the dandelion plant almost anywhere in Norway during the spring. Despite this, they only acquire value or significance within this particular context. A relationship exists between them in the neighbourhood because it is the only place that has a nine-metre tall sculpture of a dandelion<sup>16</sup>. The agency of the sculpture exists through the Dandelion's association with other elements available within the physical framework at Tiller. It is these associations that provide it with relational potential in the Tiller neighbourhood. Not everyone regards the sculpture as a symbol. The associations that many people provide are less like metaphors and symbols and more like associative responses that appear upon a moment of reflection within the physical framework that the Dandelion, City Syd and Tiller provide, or are provoked by my questions within this context. Their responses provide insight into the role that the sculpture plays, but are not of a kind that allows me to suggest that there is an agreement that the sculpture has become a symbol for people visiting or living in the area. On the other hand, it has become a symbol for some of the people I spoke to and a description of this symbolic role provides insight into the social life of the Dandelion sculpture.

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<sup>16</sup> Tiller is the only place in Norway with a nine-metre tall dandelion. Fiskå in Vanylven parish in Møre og Romsdal county has a sunflower monument which is more than thirteen-metres tall. Large flower sculptures are not uncommon. The artist Will Ryman has proposed sculptural roses from three to twenty-two feet for Park Avenue in New York. I have seen images of other dandelion sculptures but these are mostly inspired by dandelion clocks. A Polish labourer that I met outside City Syd claimed to have seen a sculpture similar to the Tiller Dandelion outside a sports stadium in Poland but I have been unable to locate this sculpture.

## Summary and Reflections



City Syd, September 2008

The chapter's focus was on the classificatory structure which has as its starting point in the representational form of the Dandelion sculpture in collaboration with the dandelion plant, and how this is a factor during the active phase of the artwork within its social and physical context outside City Syd. Dandelions are a common plant in Norway. Their commonplaceness means that we do not always value them; on the contrary, there is a tendency to see them as a nuisance. The installation of a nine-metre tall sculpture of a dandelion encourages the public to perceive the dandelion plant's qualities in a different light, and to allow it to be classified along with physical and social elements that are specifically associated with the Tiller neighbourhood.



Dandelions are often described as attractive yellow flowers yet they are also often described as weeds. These two descriptions point to the two main levels of the classification process; the sensible level, which starts with what we perceive, and the intelligible level, which is linked to the knowledge we have about the plant and the sculpture. There is a close connection between the two levels. The visible or aesthetic connection with real dandelions often starts the associative process, leading the public to consider what it knows about dandelions. However, the shopping centre public's response points to the sculpture being most effective on the sensible level, because although it did have meaning for many of the people I spoke to, it did not have meaning for them all of the time.

For some members of the Dandelion sculpture's public, Tiller has become Dandelion-land, and the commonplaceness of the sculpture allows for a breadth of association. For other members of the public, the widespreadness of the plant and the representational form of the sculpture prevents it from having a wider associative power and depth of meaning. The lack of opposition in understanding its form prevents the sculpture from being valued. I suggest that the associative power of the Dandelion does not work all the time, and that it perhaps works better under certain conditions; for example on a sunny day during the spring or summer, these are the physical conditions that the public commonly associates with dandelion plants. The chain of association is disturbed during wintery weather. Agency is therefore not permanent. The sculpture will be understood as more or less active during different points within its social life.

The social life of the Dandelion has its starting point in visual properties. These aesthetic qualities are intended to provoke a response from the public, but the sculpture is only one element within the context provided by the shopping centre and the neighbourhood. The public at City Syd associate the sculpture with other elements existing in the place. There exists a classificatory structure and the Dandelion is the key to this structure because it did not exist before it was installed. The Dandelion connects all the elements within a system which is the basis for classification. How the public responds to the associative structure provided by an object like the Dandelion sculpture can vary and this influences classification, because there are collective understandings of what the sculpture is or what

it means, and there are individual responses, but the connections are not always direct or obvious.

On the sensible level, which is associated with the physical form of the sculpture and the positive aesthetic qualities mentioned in the previous chapter, the Dandelion's agency is easily available. In addition, the Dandelion has a multivocal potential that points to the possibilities within the associative structure even if we are not aware of the different meanings all of the time. Talking about art in Tiller is associated with the everyday lives of the public; both positive and negative qualities associated with dandelions have been used to describe and define the people from the neighbourhood and the physical framework found there. The classification of dandelions and architecture in Tiller is an unusual association which makes sense within the associative context provided by the sculpture. The classificatory structure at Tiller is more complex than the representational form of the Dandelion sculpture implies, but most of the meaning is fleeting and contextual. It is provoked by events such as waiting in a queue of cars in front of the roundabout, or a conversation with an anthropologist, but the potential for a more active role exists within the sculpture because classification is associated with a plant that is "*widespread*." Dandelions exist within the everyday lives of many of the people who see the sculpture daily.

Architecture and weeds are seen as going together in Tiller. It is the association with the architecture of the place that is most effective in linking the sculpture to the shopping centre context. However, it was a general association, because even after a year within the context the sculpture was not directly associated with City Syd, nor was it associated with shopping. The Dandelion is active within the broader context. Dandelion-land is associated with more than just City Syd. The art in the Bullring, particularly the Bull, is intimately linked with a classificatory structure which has the shopping centre and the activity of shopping as its focus. Analysing the classificatory system allows insight into subtler and more contemplative qualities associated with the Dandelion's agency.

## 12. A Social Bull



The Bullring, May 2009

The Dandelion and the Bull have different kinds of agency. The public at City Syd likes the Dandelion and they think that it is nice. The shopping centre public at the Bullring told me on several occasions that they “*loved the Bull.*” The intention in this chapter is to establish what it is about the Bull that makes its public love it, and how this encourages its social role as a public work of art in the Bullring. This is an analysis of the Bull’s active phase as a work of art in the Bullring. The value of the Bull depends on its relationship with its public, and this value is intimately connected with the meaning and value that the public associates with the activity of shopping within the Bullring shopping centre. Shopping is not just about buying and selling because exchange creates more than just monetary value; it also creates social value (Appadurai, 1986:3).

The chapter starts with an analysis of the social understanding of the shopping centre context and the public understanding of the Bullring's context. The next section looks in depth at shopping and the relational aspects associated with this activity. The third section presents the meaning embodied by the Bull in the Bullring. Finally, I will analyse the role of the Bull as understood by its public, concentrating on two activities; the Bull as a photographic reference and the Bull as a meeting place.

To understand an object's value within a system of exchange it is necessary to look at its total trajectory because a commodity is not one kind of thing instead of another, it is one phase in the social life of an object (Appadurai, 1986:13). In an object's biography, all information about the different aspects associated with it before it is consumed has relevance when understanding its value. Such an understanding of the objects involved in shopping activities allows us to see them as more than just something being bought or sold, but also as having social implications for those involved in the transactions, and its influence on expectations towards the context in which the transactions take place. An object may acquire value due to where it is exchanged. In a shopping centre like City Syd, practical qualities dominate the paths an object takes. Aesthetic values provided by the Dandelion do not, I suggest, provide a serious diversion when associating value with the act of shopping at City Syd. The analysis of the Dandelion's active phase focused on the role of its aesthetic qualities in establishing a relationship with the shopping centre public, and the classificatory system which offers meaning and value to the sculpture in association with the physical and social context around it. Aesthetic quality and classificatory activity are also associated with the Bull, but they were not central within the fieldwork experience. This analysis of the active phase of the social life of the Bull places it within the social, physical and economic context of the Bullring. The social life of the Bull was intimately associated with the activity of shopping, the meaning associated with bulls in the Bullring and the sculpture's location outside the Debenhams entrance to the shopping centre.

In February 2008 I met four ladies from Devon who had travelled to Birmingham for a day-trip. The journey from Devon is, as one of them said, "*only two hours by train. It's a good excuse for a day out and to eat lunch.*" I approached them

because I heard one of the members of the group saying: “*Let’s have our photograph taken by the Bull.*” I asked them why they needed to have their photograph taken there. They all looked at each other and one said, “*I was wondering why as well?*” I was eventually told that “*the Bull symbolises the Bullring, which is the biggest shopping centre in Birmingham. That’s why we are here, to shop, although we haven’t bought anything yet.*” This conversation effectively describes the social situation around the Bull, and it suggests that shopping in the Bullring is in many ways a social experience. The four friends intended to enjoy the shopping experience together. They implied that it is more fun that way. A break for a photo-session by the Bull is part of the shopping experience in the Bullring. The Bull, by providing such an opportunity, is encouraging the shopping centre’s sociality. It is therefore intimately involved in the act of shopping in a way that is very different from the Dandelion, which stands in physical isolation on the middle of a traffic roundabout. The Bull adds value to the shopping centre experience.

### **A Context for Shopping**

It is the active phase within the Bull’s social trajectory that is the focus of this chapter and the public relationship with the Bull is at the centre of the analysis. However, the active phase cannot be separated from the candidacy and context. The context provided the background for the candidacy of the Bull, but its influence does not stop there; it is also associated with relational activity during the active phase. The context is described by Appadurai as the social arena that helps to link the candidacy with the commodity phase (Appadurai, 1986:15). I mentioned in Chapter 1 that Appadurai does not suggest that the context always comes first in association with the candidacy and the commodity phase, but that context is analysed first within the two public art projects presented in this thesis because it provides background for the planning activity associated with the candidacy. Planning the public art came before its active phase within the shopping centres. The context is also influential during the active phase of the public art because the public art at City Syd and the Bullring relates to its public in association with the physical and social context. It does not just influence planning and production, it also actively influences consumption. Shopping centres provide the physical context, the goods and the opportunity to meet and interact with others.

It is often assumed that it is not just consumption that manipulates the shopper; the physical framework in which shopping takes place is also seen as attempting to push the shopper towards predefined shopping patterns. The controlling form that shopping centre architecture is based on is emphasised by Jon Goss. Consumers, he claims, follow paths which have been designed for them, in spaces where other routes or shopping tactics can be prevented (Goss 1993:35). There is, Daniel Miller says, an academic tendency to downplay the intellectual engagement of people with the materiality of their worlds and the social and institutional forms that mediate the shopping encounter (Miller, 2001:108). Miller allows for the importance of capitalist forces within the shopping activity he describes, but he is sceptical of the wholly negative description of shopping activities and their contexts, which theorists like Goss suggest. The social situation around the shopper influences what they buy, and shopping takes place at a wide diversity of sites. Each site provides different shopping experiences and resources for identification (Miller, 1998a:24). Winning customers within such a competitive environment has meant that a sense of place has become increasingly important to shopping centres and part of a shopping centre's marketing strategy (1998a:27). Playful, unusual and pleasurable retail spaces are a result of this. Retail developers are encouraging meaning and value to be associated with shopping centres.

The negative meaning associated with shopping is something shoppers are aware of (Miller, 1998a:130). Shoppers use pragmatic and functional explanations for what they do. In some cases, it is the main grounds for the shopping activity and in other cases it is subservient to other forms of identification (1998a:142). The contradictions between ideals and the reality of the act of shopping exist, but the atmosphere of the place is important because it smoothes over the contradictions even if the fantasy is not fully believed by everyone. Shopping centres have been criticised for providing façades, a superficial fantasy packaging which underplays the commercial activity taking place within, but the criticism of the fantasy framework does not fully account for the reception shopping centres receive from their public (1998a:130). Shoppers like the fantasy and, as Miller argues, we should not underestimate the insight and understanding of the shopper.





The Bullring, November 2007

City Syd advertises itself as a unique shopping experience. This is often based on its size and the practical qualities it offers. It is also based on its position as one of central Norway's oldest shopping centres and its role it well-established. In the UK, the potential shopping centre public is much larger, but there are also a larger number of shopping centres competing for their custom. The Bullring therefore works hard to present itself as a unique shopping experience, which is part of the managerial strategy today and it was part of the strategy of the shopping centre developers during the planning of the shopping centre and its art. One young girl told me that the shops in the Bullring are really not that special: "*they are no different from what you would find on any high street.*" This girl was not very fond of the Bullring but her comments show that commercial services are not the only things important in the Bullring; the physical context and the meaning and value is important and these encourage shoppers to visit the Bullring.

The Selfridges building is a physical element that contributes to establishing a sense of place in the Bullring, and Selfridges was important to many Bullring shoppers who I spoke to. The store still carries with it some of the glamour and luxury that Gordon Selfridge encouraged during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the architecture of Selfridges in the Bullring continues this tradition. The Bullring website describes the shopping centre as “the glamorous heart to Birmingham”<sup>1</sup>. Glamour and luxury is what the shopping centre aspires to provide through the use of art and architecture. The pleasure provided by shopping in the Bullring encourages the public to develop a relationship with it as a place to shop, and the wider relational activity which this implies.

In May 2008, I met a man in the Bullring who works in tourism in Birmingham; he had this to say when I asked whether it was Selfridges or the Bull which represented Birmingham: “*Selfridges because it says two things: shopping and image, the Bull just says bull. At the same time the Bull is important, it draws people to the Bullring as well.*” The man’s comments show that the sculpture does play an active role in the Bullring but that it is not just the Bull that offers meaning and value to the shopping centre; the Selfridges building also does that. The Bull is therefore part of a meaningful structure that includes more than one element within the shopping centre context. A young man I met in the Bullring in May 2008 believed that people came to Birmingham to shop because of Selfridges, but the Bull was what represented the Bullring: “*It’s a meeting place, a very naturalistic bull but Selfridges is a landmark.*” I asked him what the Bull meant to him and he said that he would not want people to think that he as a person from Birmingham was represented by a shopping centre. The Bull represented something more than that. Several Birmingham residents that I spoke to liked the Selfridges building but were sceptical of the idea that it represented the Bullring or Birmingham. It was, they said, after all just a shop and one that you can find in a lot of cities in the UK. The Bull on the other hand was unique to Birmingham. The Bull carries meaning and value which has a closer association with the Bullring and the city of Birmingham than is offered by the architectural design of Selfridges. The sculpture says something about the place and connects the public to the context in both its past and present forms.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bullring.co.uk/website/> accessed on 26.07.2010

## Shopping is an Act of Love



The Bullring, February 2008

The shopping centre context provided by the Bullring offers a particular sense of place. The idea that shopping centres can offer a sense of place, and that there are different kinds of locations for shopping, supports the idea that shopping is not just a negative activity associated with commercial needs. The shopping centre public is looking for something more than just shops when it visits a shopping centre. There are different kinds of shopping; some shopping is provoked by individual needs and desires, but Daniel Miller tells us, shopping “could best be understood as being about relationships and not about individuals” (Miller 2001:41). It is an “act of love” (Miller 1998b:18). Shopping is therefore not just about consumption and production, buying and selling. It is also about who we shop with and why, and the care expressed in the act of shopping for others. Shopping is not always about love, there are also practical and individualistic reasons for

shopping, but Miller suggests that love is normative and dominant in the context and motivation for the bulk of everyday shopping practice (1998b:23). The activity of shopping provided background for the candidacy of the Bull, and in association with this kind of everyday relational behaviour, the Bull is provided with meaning and value. In turn it offers meaning and value to the activity of shopping in the Bullring. Shopping is also associated with the candidacy of the two public art projects, but it is presented in detail here because of its importance within the day-to-day activities associated with the Bull's active phase.

It is suggested by Miller that during the act of shopping, most people will subordinate their own personal desires to a concern for others (Miller, 1998b: 40). In February 2008, I met an elderly lady near the Bull who was not in the Bullring because she liked shopping there so much. She was waiting for her daughter whom she expected would "*walk my feet off me.*" I asked her what she thought of the Bullring and she said she did not like it. The Bullring she said was "*for young people*", but her family thinks that she is old-fashioned. She told me that she did not like Selfridges. She did not think it would last like St. Martin's church or the council offices have. There is, she said, too much in the Bullring but she supposed that it was better now that they had got rid of the "*60s' feel.*" With little positive to say about the Bullring it is perhaps surprising that she visits the shopping centre at all. Why would she do something which obviously is tiring for her? I suggest that she shops in the Bullring because it is something she can do with her family; she is subordinating her dislike of the Bullring in favour of being with people she cares about. She also mentioned that she hates shopping there with her grandchildren because "*they walk my feet off me.*" The importance of the relationship between the elderly shopper and members of her family is highlighted through shopping at the Bullring. She cares for her family, and feels cared for because she is still included in a central social activity; shopping at the Bullring. The Bull plays a role in her relationship with her family and the Bullring because it is by the Bull that they meet. Standing and waiting by the Bull allows her to wait in a place where she is safe in the assurance that she will easily be found, and comfortable in the knowledge that there are others also doing the same thing; waiting for family and friends.

The elderly lady's description of shopping in the Bullring is relational; being in the Bullring was for her about being with her family. The love described by Daniel Miller in his analysis of shopping is specifically associated with feelings of obligation and responsibility, "love has come to be primarily objectified through everyday practices of concern, care and particular sensibility to others, within which shopping plays a central role" (Miller, 1998b:19). Family relationships are important in Miller's description of love, and family relationships were important to the elderly lady's description of her association with the Bullring. She mentioned no other reason for being in the Bullring. Within his North London ethnography, Miller saw a reticence to express love in other ways; shopping was the way people expressed love. Love as a discourse, Miller suggests, has little to do with language because people find love difficult to talk about, but it has a lot to do with practice (Miller, 2001:142). Miller's use of love in his description of shopping highlights the social concerns involved in shopping. This is an aspect often underexposed because of modern society's focus on the negative elements associated with consumption. Love, I suggest, plays a role in the Bullring and this is in close association with the Bull, because as several of the people I spoke to said "*We love the Bull.*" The love implied is not directly associated with the act of shopping; it has to do with the Bull's associative role within the context of the shopping centre. However, I suggest that loving the Bull implies relational activity between the sculpture and its public, and the value it achieves within a relationship with its public is part of the associative structure, which includes shopping because the Bull is part of a shopping centre context.

Shopping is something we all do at some point in our daily lives, with varying degrees of intensity and enthusiasm, but it is an everyday activity and it is therefore not often reflected upon (Miller 1998a:15). The shopping that Daniel Miller focuses on is an activity undertaken almost every day in order to obtain goods for the people for whom the shopper is responsible (Miller, 1998b:2). The giving, receiving and reciprocity of gift exchange which existed in the traditional market is still an underlying dynamic in everyday shopping activities (Mauss, 2005:4,5). We give gifts at Christmas and on birthdays, and the small practical things we give to family and friends on a day-to-day



basis may also be associated with gift-giving. Food, clothes and cleaning products can also imply relational activity.

### **The Bull in the Bullring**

The Bullring provides a comprehensive shopping experience<sup>2</sup>. The art in the Bullring is part of this experience. Of the eight artworks in the Bullring, the Bull is the one that receives most attention from the public, and it is therefore central within this analysis. I propose that the Bull has established a social role within the shopping centre. The history associated with the shopping centre context influenced the candidacy of the Bull during the planning of the sculpture. In this section, I will concentrate on how the history associated with the Bull provides it with meaning that encourages a social role in the Bullring. The history of the Bullring is not just background and context; it was active within the role the Bull played in the shopping centre during the fieldwork.



The Bullring, May 2008



The Bullring, May 2009

The Bull did not mean something to everyone I spoke to. It was not uncommon for a person to say something like, “*the Bull doesn’t mean anything, it’s just a Bull.*” However, most people I spoke to in and around the Bullring did have some kind of relationship with it. For a lot of people, it was “*the Bull in the Bullring.*” In May 2008, a man I met collecting the council bins outside the Bullring said several times “*When you*

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<sup>2</sup> Only food and grocery stores are missing from the Bullring. These goods can be bought from the market halls or from, for example, the Marks and Spencer Store on New Street.



*are from Birmingham the Bull means something, it is history and heritage.*” He associated the Bull with more than just its aesthetic form and name, but many people simply saw a natural connection between the name ‘the Bullring’ and a bull. One elderly man I met in St. Martins Square was enthusiastic about the Bull: *“It looks just like a real bull, and the name fits, it’s a bull in the Bullring.”* A female shopper I met in the Bullring told me that the Bull was *“good, it says the Bullring.”* I asked her whether it was the Bull or Selfridges that represented Birmingham and she said *“It’s the Bull; it’s the Bull in the Bullring. I remember seeing it on the TV when the Bullring opened.”* The shopping centre developers have created a sculpture that has meaning because of its association with the place and its history. In addition, television and advertising have helped to establish it within the public consciousness, and make it easily recognisable within the Bullring today.

Although the majority of people who answered my questions were positive towards the present-day Bullring and had little good to say about the old Bull Ring, amongst older people, there was a certain amount of nostalgia for the previous shopping centre and the Bull Ring that came before that. A lot of comments related to the market area being better in the old Bull Ring and they also missed social qualities within the old Bull Ring. An elderly man suggested that you do not get the *“characters”* in today’s Bullring because it was not a place where you were encouraged to stop; people are just passing through<sup>3</sup>. Other older people connected the old Bull Rings with things they used to do with their family, such as Saturday shopping trips with their Mum or Dad. A woman staying with her sister and who was a visitor to Birmingham, but who had been born in the city, said that she remembered the two previous Bull Rings: *“I used to come down to the first Bull Ring with my Dad. I can remember the big iron gates in front of the market. The second Bull Ring was great in the beginning, it was so new and different, but it soon became rundown and unpleasant.”* Good memories of the old Bull Rings were valued, but as her criticism of the rundown nature of the second Bull Ring suggests, she was also pleased with the development of the present Bullring because it

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<sup>3</sup> Young people do hang around in the Bullring, as mentioned later in the chapter. The area around the Bull is a popular place to meet friends after school for teenagers and young adults. In certain areas people are not encouraged to stop; CCTV cameras monitor people entering and leaving the Bullring and security staff can regularly be seen moving people on.

was a place for her to visit and enjoy within a social and relational context of today. Not everyone visiting or working in the Bullring wants to hang on to memories of the old Bull Rings. A young man who works in one of the cafés in the Bullring told me that the Bullring is really great. He saw no reason to be nostalgic about the previous shopping centre; it was not a place that he would want to be associated with. He was too young to have ever valued it.

The shopping centre public, including older Birmingham residents, likes the contemporary shopping centre and believes that the redevelopment of the Bullring has had a positive effect on the city in general. Several people mentioned the Bullring bringing tourists to the city. One Birmingham resident said that he had never expected to see tourists in Birmingham. A security guard I met during his break just outside the shopping centre had this to say about the Bullring and the Bull: ***“I remember the old Bull Ring, it was old and it wasn’t very modern. The new Bullring is good, it’s made Birmingham more metropolitan, and people are coming here now because of it. Birmingham is the second largest city and before the Bullring there wasn’t anything in Birmingham which said that.”*** About the Bull, he said ***“It’s really nice, well-made and unusual. Nowhere else has got anything like it, so it’s special.”*** The Bullring with its shops, architecture and art has, the guard suggested, made a positive impact on Birmingham. It has, he suggested, changed not only the opinion of Birmingham residents, but it has also changed how people from outside the city view it, and the Bull is part of what has changed the public’s understanding of the shopping centre. There is positive value associated with the city and the shopping centre by both locals and outsiders, which did not exist before.

Places are important to self-definition and individual identity is increasingly articulated in relation to particular places (Miller, 1998a:20). This includes places where we shop. The Bullring aims to appeal to its customers’ sense of self-identification by being a good place to shop and also offering more than that. The Bull is an artwork within the shopping centre; it encourages the idea that the Bullring is also an aesthetic place. In addition, the Bull’s relationship with the historical Bullring encourages a social role

within the shopping centre and makes it one that the shopping centre public wants to be associated with.

The Bull, according to the shopping centre developers, symbolises both the market traditions first established during the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the shopping centre today. The history of the place was, as mentioned earlier, important to the candidacy of the Bull, but it was also important to the role the shopping centre developer understood the Bull to play in the shopping centre during its active phase. *“It has just worked because of what the Bullring meant to the city and the association with it. It was sort of pure. It was true; it wasn’t make-believe-land. I think trying to manufacture a similar icon, you know, unless there is a real depth of local connectivity, I think it would be seen as a little shallow....You know like you do a scheme in Nottingham and you put a statue of Robin Hood on that, I couldn’t – no. No, that’s rubbish.”* Meaning and value cannot therefore simply be created, and works of art do not become shopping centre icons simply because shopping centre developers wish them to become icons. There has to be a real connection with the place and the people.

The Bull has, I suggest, a real connection with the shopping centre because of the name ‘Bullring’ and a historical association with the Bullring’s market history. These two factors provide the Bull with meaning beyond its immediate association with the activity of shopping. The Bull represents the traditional Bull Ring and the glamorous contemporary shopping centre. It is actively involved in connecting both of these understandings of the place. The Bullring, with help from the Bull, is a meeting place for different ideas about what a shopping centre is. The meaning associated with the Bull encourages its active social role in the shopping centre. The Bull supports the activity of shopping, but it is not just shopping as a commercial activity that the Bull supports. The Bull encourages the relational activity described by Daniel Miller.

### **“We Love the Bull”**

The physical and social context influenced the Bull during planning and it is still influenced by the shopping centre context, but the sculpture also provides meaning which influences the public understanding of the Bullring. In the previous section, I considered how the meaning the Bull is said to embody by its public and the shopping centre

developers within the shopping centre today encourages a social understanding of the place, providing a connection between the past and the present. However, the Bull's role is based not only on the meaning it embodies, but it also actively encourages the public to connect with the shopping centre and with each other, which is what I want to concentrate on in this section. A man shopping in the Bullring told me, "*You know you are here when you are by the Bull.*" The sculpture's location by one of the shopping centre entrances provides a point of reference for many of its visitors.



The Bullring, May 2008

The morality of shopping ties the Bull to its public, establishing the necessity of art in the Bullring, because if shopping is to be understood as more than just a commercial experience then shopping centres need to provide something which has a broader significance than the purely commercial, and an artwork can provide this. Moral, political, economic and social aspects are all present in the act of shopping. The Bull

hints at all these aspects but is particularly effective in promoting the historical and social sides to shopping. Earlier in the chapter I quoted Daniel Miller and his suggestion that shopping is “an act of love” (Miller, 1998b:18). I saw two people kiss the Bull during my fieldwork in the Bullring and I managed to make contact with one of them. Kissing the Bull would seem to link nicely to the idea that shopping in the Bullring is about love and relationships, but it turned out that although the kiss did point to a relationship, things are not always so clear cut. Kissing is usually interpreted as a sign of a relationship; of fondness, even love, but it can mean other things.

The man I saw kissing the Bull in February 2008 was, I suggest, fond of the Bull, but he was also schizophrenic. I observed that this man first spent a lot of time rubbing the Bull’s head, and then eventually he kissed the Bull’s nose. I therefore approached the man and the woman who was with him and asked why he had done that. I had been expecting an answer relating to ritual behaviour, something like “Oh, we always touch the Bull” or “We love the Bull.” The woman who was with the man was a care worker and she answered my question for both of them: “*I expect he did it because of his illness. He’s schizophrenic.*” When she explained herself further it became clear that they both had a relationship with the Bull and with the Bullring. For the man, the visit to the Bull was intended to clarify and affirm the relationship. The woman told me, “*We are having an orientating kind of a day. Doing some shopping, looking at where things are. The Bull is on local TV a lot, so the next time he sees it, he will know what it feels like to touch it. The Bull is a bit of an icon really.*” Love in the Bullring does not have to be about shopping; it may also be about who you are as an individual and what the place means to you. Connecting with the Bull and the Bullring may be a means of connecting with the world around you. The Bull and the Bullring were a place outside his illness for the man with schizophrenia, and touching and kissing the Bull allowed him to connect physically with the sculpture.

A middle-aged woman who was shopping in the Bullring said several times during her conversation with me: “*I love the Bull; it means Birmingham and the Bullring to me.*” A member of the managerial staff told me when she guided me around the shopping centre, pointing out the public art and the finer points of the shopping centre design, that “*We love the Bull.*” She told me that she loved the Bull on several occasions

during the tour and that the Bull was her favourite work of art in the Bullring. She said “*I remember the opening when there was a box around the Bull, suddenly there was an explosion and it burst out of the box.*” This was not the kissing kind of love. It was love inspired by a long association with the Bullring. It was also love inspired by enthusiasm for the physical form of the sculpture and the local social values which it stands for.

An elderly couple I met sitting near Nelson also remembered the Bull being in the box. They suggested that art matters in the beginning but “*after a while you don’t notice it, you know what to expect.*” I suggest that the Bullring management in general loves the Bull, and that they encourage its place in the public consciousness. The explosion around the Bull on the opening day was intended to capture the public’s attention and allow an easy connection with the Bull, to establish its place within the physical and social framework of the shopping centre. The Bullring management has continued to do things with the Bull; the aim is to hold on to the public’s attention and to avoid the idea that you stop noticing things after a while. There are numerous postcards of the Bull available in Birmingham. The Bullring information centre sells small bronze miniatures of the Bull. In 2008, the Bullring owners celebrated the shopping centre’s fifth anniversary by painting the Bull silver, and in the summer of 2010, the Bull was given a voice. The shopping centre had a competition to find “a funny quick-witted individual to become the voice of the Bull on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> August”<sup>4</sup>. The Bull has therefore been given a social role within the daily life of the shopping centre; the management encourages its relational agency.

Alfred Gell attributes agency to persons or things which initiate “causal sequences” of events (Gell, 1998:16). Objects, he says, acquire agency when they become enmeshed in the texture of social relationships (1998:17). However, agency is not, according to Gell, an inherent property in objects. Objects, Gell suggests, are made by human beings, and it is the people who make and use objects that activate and attribute agency to them. Daniel Miller is critical of Gell’s stance and in his view, persons and things exist in “mutual self-construction” (Miller 2005:38). Miller suggests that both anthropology’s and sociology’s focus on what makes people rather than what people

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bullring.co.uk/website> accessed on 27.07.2010



make is rather hollow. It is a focus on frames rather than what is inside them. The Maussian tradition within anthropology suggests that things are not inert objects (Mauss 2005:63). Gell agreed that objects were not inert, but he required social actors to make them active, to give them agency. Miller takes the Maussian tradition a stage further by suggesting that agency may already be embodied in objects before a social actor takes them into use.

I suggest that some objects depend more on social relationships to become active and have agency than others, and that the Bull's agency, although it requires a social context, also depends on qualities which are inherent and part of the sculpture's physical and meaningful form. The Bullring's history is part of this agency. This was suggested by those who planned and developed the sculpture, but there already existed a historical association with bulls in the Bullring and the physical form of the sculpture encourages this meaningful association. The context is also an essential element within the role that the Bull plays; it is where the public meets the Bull and it defines what they do there. These qualities allow the Bull to connect with its public on a day-to-day basis; they are readily available and easily interpreted by the public. They provide the basis for the associative structure which I suggest exists around the Bull and this exists all the time. The Bull is not affected by weather conditions; climatic changes are less extreme in the Bullring than in Tiller. The Bull is also more established within the physical context than the Dandelion. The social context will influence the Bull's agency, although inherent qualities mean that its agency is more stable and will not change easily.

The agency of the Bull is also related to the sculpture's role as symbol. Art, according to Clifford Geertz, is not an autonomous aesthetic enterprise, it is part of the general discourse of everyday life, and it is part of a system of symbolic forms (Geertz 1983:109). Symbols are dynamic, they emerge in the meeting between people, and they reflect changes that take place in their everyday lives. A symbol has several definitions; a symbol can be a symbol for something else. It may represent a convention or it may carry a deeper meaning. Another understanding of symbols, and one that is relevant in the case of the Bull, is that there may be a connection between the direct literal meaning, what it denotes, and a deeper, hidden meaning. The connotations or deeper meanings are reached

by interpreting the literal meaning (Lübcke, 2010:676). In the system of classification described by Lévi-Strauss which was used to understand the associative system connected with the Dandelion at City Syd, there are also two levels of understanding. These are known as the sensible and intelligible levels. The sensible level has value on its own, but it also allows access to the meaning which is provoked by what we know and understand on an intelligible level (Lévi-Strauss 1966:63). This system of classification is also relevant in relation to the way the public gains access to and associates meaning with the Bull.

The literal meaning associated with the aesthetic form of the sculpture suggests that the Bull is “*the Bull in the Bullring*”; a deeper reading connects it to historical or personal events. A symbol may also be multivocal and contain more than one meaning at any one time, meanings that may be positive or negative (Turner 1971:25)<sup>5</sup>. The user of a symbol may not be aware of all the potential meanings or associations. There was a bull in the old Bull Ring, a large two-dimensional relief attached to the outside of the shopping centre, and which disappeared during the development of the current Bullring. The Bull in the present Bullring represents a kind of continuity between the old and the new shopping centres, yet at the same time it is very much a symbol of the new Bullring. Not everyone remembers the old bull and the new Bull in its shiny bronze-ness is also a symbol of the regeneration of the Bullring and the city centre. The Bull can mean more than one thing, but most of the people I spoke to in the Bullring concentrated on one aspect associated with the sculpture.

Meeting and taking photographs by the Bull are social activities which I often observed in association with the Bull. A man I met in the Bullring in May 2009 effectively described the Bull’s role: “*It’s really great, it’s a real focal point. Loads of people stand there and have their picture taken. It means the Bullring. It’s a symbol of the place.*” The Bull’s location by one of the main entrances to the shopping centre has not resulted in it being something that visitors and workers in the Bullring simply walk past on their way into the centre. The location has meant that the Bull has become the obvious place to meet or prove the authenticity of a trip to the Bullring in Birmingham. Rainy days, early

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<sup>5</sup> Turner used the term multivocal to describe the complexity of metaphors.

mornings and late afternoons are quiet times around the Bull, with little photographic activity; otherwise I think it is safe to say that standing next to the Bull in the Bullring is a popular place to have your picture taken. A young man who I mentioned earlier said that he would not want people to think that he as a person from Birmingham was represented by a shopping centre, but the photographic activity around the Bull would seem to imply that the shopping centre is one of the most well-known points of reference in the city of Birmingham. The Bull, although it has symbolic value of its own, refers for many of the people taking their photograph to a visit to the Bullring shopping centre.



The Bullring, February 2008

The elderly lady I met waiting for her daughter by the Bull in February 2008 said this when I asked her what she thought of the sculpture: “*It’s alright. It’s going all around the world with all these Chinese people taking photos of it.*” Another elderly lady I met during that week in February also mentioned the tourist’s relationship with the

Bull: *“It’s something for people to take their photograph next to and it symbolises the Bullring.”* This was something she was a little sceptical of because she said: *“Birmingham has lots of other famous things for people to take their photo next to”* although she did not specify what they were. On the other hand, she did admit that *“the Bull is Birmingham for a lot of foreigners.”* A photograph of the Bull can therefore be used as a reference point, to remind people where they have been and to prove that they have been in Birmingham. Digital cameras and mobile phones have given us easy access to the means to take photographs and they encourage us to take a lot of photographs. This means that the Bull has become a much photographed reference to a visit to Birmingham.

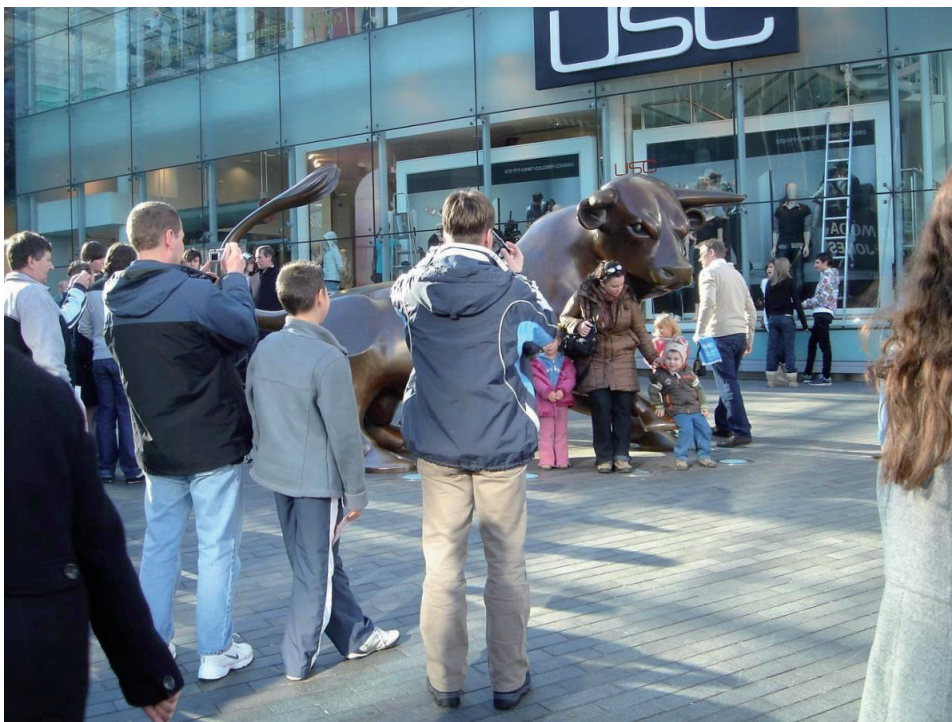
I asked the care worker I met in February 2008 why she thought people took so many photographs by the Bull and she explained it in comparison with local landmarks from her own home town. She said, *“I am from Telford and there is a statue of Thomas Telford in the town centre leaning on a bridge. People feel that they should have their photograph taken next to him. Ironbridge is just down the road and people feel that they ought to have their photo taken on that if they go there. They mean something to people; they help them to orientate themselves”*<sup>6</sup>. A lot of towns and cities have a symbol which it is almost obligatory when visiting to have your photograph taken next to. Paris has its Eiffel Tower, Trondheim has the old town bridge or ‘Gamle Bybro’ and Birmingham has the Bull. Their role as landmarks helps to make a town or city more legible and more memorable (Lynch, 1960:78). A photograph taken in front of the Bull clarifies where they have been and it is proof that they have actually been there. For visitors from outside Birmingham, it does not have to be more than a reference to the city as it was on the day the photograph was taken.

Taking photographs may be understood as a process of learning to look. Roderick Coover suggests that images “like words, evoke worlds; they propose views shaped by technology and image-making choices such as those of framing, focus selection, focal range, subject choice, colour, tone, contrast, light quality and grain”

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<sup>6</sup> Telford in Shropshire is a new town approximately 30 miles west of Birmingham. It was first developed during the 1960s around a number of older smaller settlements: Wellington, Oakengates, Madeley and Dawley. The town now also encompasses Ironbridge Gorge which is a UNESCO world heritage site. Telford is named after Thomas Telford who was appointed surveyor of public works for Shropshire in 1787. He was a self-taught architect and engineer who built roads, canals and bridges.

(Coover 2004:188). He also suggests that if the images are not grounded in a web of reference then viewers will rely on preconceptions and generalisations to make sense of the images. I suggest that most people who take photographs of the Bull do not reflect to such a degree upon the photographic process as Coover proposes. I met two professional photographers at work in the Bullring, both of whom I am sure made choices relating to the quality of the image they eventually produced, but the majority of people taking photographs by the Bull were attempting to evoke the place using technology which gave them easy access to images that would capture a moment. There is, I suggest, little thought given to the technical and formal choices that can be made about how the image will look when a picture is being taken with a mobile phone or a small digital camera.



The Bullring, February 2008

The majority of the people I saw taking photographs in the Bullring were taking 'snap-shots', photographs that are taken quickly and which are particularly related



to holidays. A snap-shot provides a short description or a small amount of information, one that gives you a good idea of what the subject is like (Hornby *et al.*, 2005:1447). When a lot of images or snap-shots are put together, they can be very evocative of the place and the time they are taken. My numerous Bullring snap-shots convey a lot to me, and provide visual overlay to the answers people gave to my questions, but I suggest that most visitors to the Bullring will only take one or two photographs by the Bull, and that there is little focus on overlay and reference. It is enough for most of the photographers I met by the Bull that they quickly connect themselves and their family to that particular place, on that particular day. For the ladies from Devon mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the photograph taken by the Bull was a visual reference to a pleasant day out shopping with friends.

It is the social and not the aesthetic dimension which is primary when the public takes photographs of family and friends by the Bull. The Bull, although it is a work of art and was planned as part of the shopping centre's public art programme and created by an accredited artist, is photographed because of its ability to locate people to the place. The aesthetic dimension is not irrelevant; it helps that the Bull is an attractive visual object. The public likes to look at the Bull and they like to touch and climb on it, but there are lots of attractive sculptures in public places that receive far less attention than the Bull. The Dandelion outside City Syd is also an attractive aesthetic object, but I only ever saw people photographing that on the day it was installed on the roundabout.

The Bull's location and association with the Bullring are, I suggest, the primary reasons for taking its photograph. It orientates, provides proof, and as a photographic reference visually links family and friends, encouraging the idea that the Bullring provides more than just a commercial experience. However, the Bull's agency does have similarities with the Dandelion's and this is because it is also fleeting and temporary (Gell, 1998:22). The Dandelion develops a relationship with its public during the moments when people stop and think about what it means, why it is there and if they like it or not. However, the active fluid nature of the place means that its public rarely spends long periods of time thinking about its role outside City Syd. The Bull is also active in the public's consciousness during the moments when the public is in contact



with it, but it is quickly forgotten and the public is not always aware that it is there. The agency of the Bull is therefore similar to the Dandelion's, but there are more opportunities for fleeting moments of agency because the number of people visiting the Bullring is much larger and the Bull's location allows closer contact with the public. The Bull itself has become a meeting place<sup>7</sup>.

In May 2008, a young woman who works in a shop whose entrance is just behind the Bull told me, "*The Bull certainly attracts a lot of attention, there are people around it all the time, but we don't get a lot of custom from it. People meet there and have their photograph taken and then they go somewhere else. The Bull just represents Birmingham.*" I asked her if it was the Bull or Selfridges that represented the Bullring for her, and she said that the Bull represents the Bullring, and that "*I meet all my friends by the Bull.*" The suggestion by Daniel Miller that shopping is an act of love therefore also receives support from the meeting and greeting that takes place around the Bull. The Bull encourages the sociality involved in the act of shopping in the Bullring because it is the place to meet friends and family in the shopping centre. There are other potential meeting places in and around the shopping centre; the water feature and Nelson were both used by people I spoke to when meeting friends and family, but the Bull is the one most commonly referred to. Young people in their teens dominate the meeting zone around the Bull but people of all ages met there and agreed that it was a good place to meet.

During my four visits to the Bullring, I met and observed a lot of young people of both sexes meeting people of their own age by the Bullring. There are probably other places where they could meet their friends in Birmingham, but the Bullring provides a popular framework to do so. At around four o'clock the area around the Bull would fill up with young people in their school uniforms. A middle-aged woman I met shopping in the Bullring in May 2008 said, "*I think that the Bullring is nice, it's a tidier space now. I remember the old Bull Ring, it had its old-world-charm but this is a better space. You wouldn't have young people hanging around the old Bull Ring.*" The Bullring is therefore seen as appealing to younger people. This is not just because of the shops in the

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<sup>7</sup> City Syd has around 3 million visitors per year. The Bullring has had up to 40 million visitors a year since it opened.

shopping centre. Its contemporary look and the meeting places it provides encourage social activity among young people from in and around Birmingham. One teenage girl told me that she liked the Bullring. It was, according to her, different from other shopping centres and she suggested “*you won’t find anything like it anywhere else in England. Particularly Selfridges is different.*” She liked the range of shops and came to the Bullring at the weekend to meet her friends. She liked the Bull and thought that it represented the Bullring, although she was not sure why. The Bullring is therefore attractive; its uniqueness makes it acceptable to the girl and her peers. In the girl’s description, shopping is a positive social activity for young people in the Bullring. They may not all love the Bull, but they all like being in the Bullring and the Bull encourages the social activity which they come to the shopping centre for.

### **Summary and Reflections**

The active phase during the social life of the Bull was the focus of this chapter, and it is during the active phase that the biographical aspect of things is most noticeable. However, as Appadurai suggests, the biographical aspect is more noticeable in some things than others (Appadurai, 1986:13). This does not mean that it does not exist in objects where the social movement is much less noticeable, but in some cases it makes the social activity easier to follow, which in the case of the Bull suggests that the sculpture plays a more active social role than the seven other artworks located in the Bullring.

The intention was to analyse the social role of the Bull within the physical and social context of the Bullring by looking closer at the public’s reasons for loving the sculpture and considering what part the public adoration plays in its agency. It is suggested here that the public loves the Bull in the Bullring because it offers meaning and value which complement the act of shopping and make it a pleasurable experience. Having a Bull in the Bullring enhances the social implications of making a transaction in the Bullring and the public relationship with the Bull is enhanced because shopping is not just about buying and selling, it is also about relationships, even love. The only reason the elderly woman waiting by the Bull visited the Bullring was because it gave her an opportunity to be with her family. The Bull is playing a social role, mediating meetings

between the people visiting the Bullring and their family and friends. The agency of the Bull therefore encourages the sociality which is part of the act of shopping in the Bullring.



The Bullring, May 2009

However, the public would not have loved the Bull if they had not liked the Bullring as well. The Bullring is about shopping, and the art is intended to encourage the public to shop. The Bullring management aims to present a particular sense of place that will encourage people to associate themselves with the shopping centre. A man I spoke to in May 2009 told me he thought that art was important in shopping centres because, “*In the old days, shopping centres just served a function. The shops weren’t open so long and people just went there to shop. Now people are there longer and need a bit more. Art makes it a bit less generic, a bit more interesting.*” Having art in shopping centres therefore makes a visit more pleasurable, perhaps even interesting. It offers the act of

shopping value which may be aesthetic, social and meaningful. The shops themselves are part of retail chains which may be found in numerous shopping centres or high streets in the UK thus it is therefore not the shops that encourage the particular sense of place in the Bullring, but the physical context provided by elements such as the Selfridges building and the art. The Bull has become a shopping centre symbol because there is a real connection between the sculpture and the place, and because it helps to connect ideas about the history of the Bullring with the glamorous modern shopping centre. The public responds to the Bull as an artwork, which has a direct association with the name 'Bullring' and they respond to it because of the history associated with bulls and the name.

The agency of the Bull is based on qualities associated with meaning, physical form and location, all of which are inherent. Agency is therefore a potential that exists all the time and is easily accessible, and this was present in the enthusiasm so many members of the public expressed when asked what they thought of the Bull. However, without its central placement at one of the Bullring's main entrances, I suggest that the sculpture would have been just another aesthetic object with associative potential. On the other hand, location alone is not enough to provide agency, and it can be seen that there is an intimate relationship between location, form, meaning and history.

The relational activity associated with the Bull would be difficult to achieve on the roundabout where the Dandelion is installed. The associative structure around the Dandelion relates to meaning and value connected with the physical form of the sculpture, the people and the place but it is not able to participate in direct physical interaction between its public. Under the guidance of the Bull, shopping in the Bullring becomes an act of love or at the very least an opportunity to meet and interact with the people who the shopping centre public cares about. The Bull has value as a relational point of reference because it is where the public meets and it is where they take photographs to authenticate a visit to the Bullring and Birmingham. The sculpture has become intimately connected with the place, shopping and the people who meet there. I suggest that the public loves it because it has an intimate connection on several levels, and these connections allow it to play a social role during numerous fleeting moments in the social life of the shopping centre.

### 13. Reuse and Reinterpretation: Admiral Lord Nelson, Past and Present



The Bullring, May 2009



The Bullring, February 2008

This chapter presents the changing relational role and value of the statue of Admiral Lord Nelson. The biographical aspect explored during the active phase of a public work of art's relationship with its public, may, says Arjun Appadurai, be more noticeable in some objects than others (Appadurai, 1986:13). The Bull is the work of art within the Bullring with most social activity associated with it, and some of this activity was presented in the previous chapter. The biographical aspect is also noticeable in relation to the statue of Nelson, but in the case of Nelson its presence was most noticeable through a historical analysis of its social role starting when it was installed in the Bull Ring in 1809, and continuing into the present and the fieldwork period.

The statue of Nelson looks good in its location looking out over St. Martin's Square, but when I looked at some old photographs of the Bull Ring I realised that the statue's physical and social context had changed, and that at certain points in its history

its role had been more social than aesthetic, and its meaning more important to the citizens of Birmingham. The Bull plays an active social role within the physical and social context of the shopping centre today, but the role that a public work of art plays is not necessarily as permanent or stable as its physical form often implies. A public work of art is dependent on the physical and social context; if these change then we can expect the artwork's role to change. This has happened to Nelson and it could happen to the Bull and the Dandelion. The physical and social requirements that were central during the planning of the two public art projects may disappear, and the artworks may be faced with a new set of challenges or possibilities that could either discourage or encourage an active social role. The Bull and the Dandelion are relatively new in their locations, and have not as yet experienced big changes in their context or social role. However, the Dandelion was affected by changing meaning and value during the fieldwork period where even transitory elements such as the weather affect how the Dandelion is understood.

The statue of Nelson has a prominent position within the Bullring's physical framework; it stands on a plinth at the end of a mid-level terrace called St. Martin's Walk looking out across St. Martin's Church and the city. Despite its prominent position, the shopping centre public did not often express much interest in the statue and few knew who it represented or why he was standing there. I suggest that this does not mean that the sculpture has no relevance within its location in the Bullring; public art is rarely relevant for all members of the public all of the time. Excluding the Bull, the six other works of art in the Bullring also received little attention from the shopping centre public during the fieldwork period, and there is little more to say about them than that, but Nelson is a historical statue and reinterpretation plays a role because historical elements within the physical context gain resonance through their use and reuse<sup>1</sup>. Presenting the statue's historical background as well as the response from the people I spoke to in the Bullring allows analysis of the reasons for the continuing existence of the statue in the Bullring and suggests that a social potential exists within monuments like Nelson because they can function as repositories of meaning.

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<sup>1</sup> This reuse also includes the Rotunda, St. Martin's Church and the Moor Street Station.



Within this chapter, using Gell and Appadurai, I will first present a relational understanding of the changing value of public statues. I will then provide some background information about Nelson before moving on to present the artworld of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which influenced the aesthetic form of the Nelson commission, and the local social context that funded the commission. The next section describes some of the changes Nelson has experienced since his installation in the Bullring in 1809 and finally I will present some contemporary interpretations of the statue.

### Moving Statues



The Bull Ring, 1890, WK/D1/808 Warwickshire Photographic Survey, (WPS). Birmingham Libraries and Archives

Nelson did not have a strong connection with Birmingham. He was an admiral of the British navy during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, yet Birmingham lies in the

centre of England, with no obvious relationship with the sea. The shopping centre developer said of the statue, "*It's a great statue of Nelson, reputedly one of the first statues of Nelson in the country. God knows why it's in Birmingham, it's one of the furthest places away from the sea.*" Nelson was not born in Birmingham and during his lifetime he had very little directly to do with the city. A woman who works in a shop in the Bullring said, "*I can't understand why he is there, he only visited once.*" The Bull, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, has an obvious connection with the shopping centre, because it literally is a "*Bull in the Bullring.*" However, the relevance of a public work of art does not always have to be obvious. Public works of art are often only active during fleeting moments of social activity. Nelson does play a social role in the Bullring and the public response suggests that, but he is more active when the reason for him being there, namely the historical relationship with the context, is known. Otherwise the public relationship is based on what it sees and this only encourages fleeting connections. Nelson's history in the Bullring has provided it with different meanings and roles. This potentially offers what Maruška Svašek calls "multiple significations" (Svašek, 2007:47). An active social role within the shopping centre is therefore encouraged through the potential for reinterpretation which its contemporary reuse offers.

To understand an artwork's role, Alfred Gell recommends that we look at the networks of relationships surrounding them within their social context (Gell, 1998:8). The relational perspective suggested by Gell allows us to see when things appear person-like, and enter a relationship<sup>2</sup>. It looks beyond the specific materiality of the art object and into the context around it. However, Appadurai offers the possibility to understand what happens when the social framework changes. An art object, it is suggested here, achieves "motion" within the relational complexity because the value of an object is not static and it may change according to its place within what Appadurai calls the "total trajectory" (Appadurai, 1986:13,16). Meaning and value will change due to changes in the social

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<sup>2</sup> Gell called this an "art nexus", which is a matrix in which social relations are mediated by artefacts. The nexus includes the artist, the index (artwork), prototype (the subject matter for the artwork) and the recipient (the public). The nature of the art object is understood as a function of the social-relational matrix in which it is embedded (1998:7).

context, but some of the meaning and value may be retained. The object will often be recognisable and this allows a certain amount of continuity and historical relevance.

The changes may take place over a long period of time and objects will be subject to interpretation in different ways by different individuals in changing socio-historical contexts (Svašek, 2007:43). Public activity around objects influences engagement where both meaning and practice influence this engagement. Describing or defining an object as an aesthetic object offers it a special status based on people's experiences, expectations and interpretations of them, and of other aesthetic objects. However, this does not mean that an object will always be understood as art. Changes in the social or physical frameworks influence definition (2007:11). Art is not, according to Svašek, simply a descriptive category of objects with inherent qualities that can be objectively isolated and compared. They may be artefacts that move around and receive different receptions, and have cultural biographies or careers in a way that is, I suggest, similar to Appadurai's commodities (2007:8,9). Being a public work of art is also not a permanent category. Changes in the social activity associated with it will affect its definition as a public work of art.

Artworks can have social careers, but I propose that an artwork can have some inherent meaning. The social framework may change and this will affect meaning and value, and how it is used and understood, but the physical appearance and initial content, if they remain the same, will continue to have relevance and agency. A work of art is not always a blank aesthetic slate upon which meaning develops. The relational perspective provided by Appadurai does not imply that all the physical and meaningful qualities associated with the art object will change, it is primarily its value which changes within the relational trajectory. The public's response in Birmingham does, I suggest, support this view because they point to the basis for interpreting the Nelson statue remaining the same during its long history within the Bullring. Furthermore, by establishing an aesthetic form and an institutional framework for an artwork's presentation, the artworld provides a context for its reception and understanding which is continuous, even when the setting, as in the case of the Bullring, has gone through at least three extensive physical changes.

## **The Battle of Trafalgar**

To be able to understand why a statue of Admiral Lord Nelson was installed in Birmingham in 1809, a city which as I mentioned earlier lacks an obvious maritime history, it is necessary to know something about who the Admiral was, and the events surrounding his death at the battle of Trafalgar on October 21<sup>st</sup> 1805. The battle is one of the most famous triumphs in British naval history. During the period leading up to the battle of Trafalgar, the French, led by Napoleon, dominated the European continent (Adkin and Farmer 2005:25). The battle confirmed British naval dominance and slowed down French expansion. It was not only British independence which was threatened by Napoleonic France; British industry was frustrated by France's refusal to open up European markets to their goods. An industrial town like Birmingham would have suffered from trading embargoes. During the Napoleonic wars, British naval supremacy meant it was able virtually unchallenged to support the armies on the continent which in turn ensured British trade. It is suggested by historian Mark Adkin that Nelson's victory at Trafalgar in 1805 was crucial to Britain's success at Waterloo in 1815 (2005:537). The battle of Trafalgar was the culmination of Nelson's career as a naval officer, but he was also one of the casualties of the battle<sup>3</sup>. The victory at Trafalgar confirmed Nelson as one of Britain's most celebrated heroes (2005:8).

It was during the period of national mourning, only a month after Nelson's death, that the statue in the Bull Ring in Birmingham was commissioned by representatives of the people of Birmingham. At its installation in 1809, it was the first figurative representation of Nelson's person and one of the first monuments in the UK celebrating his achievements<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The normal procedure after death at sea was that the body be thrown overboard. After Nelson's death on-board his flagship HMS Victory his body was laid in a wooden cask and preserved in brandy until its interment in St. Paul's Cathedral on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1806. Nelson's funeral and funeral processions lasted two days.

<sup>4</sup> There are a number of monuments in the memory of Nelson in Britain and in outposts of the former British Empire. The most famous example is at the top of a column in Trafalgar square. The monument was inaugurated in 1838, nineteen years after the statue in Birmingham and twenty-three years after the battle of Trafalgar. The monument was designed by the architect William Railton but the sculpture was created by Royal Academician E. H. Baily. Malcolm Miles, in a description of the changing role of the column said that when it was erected in 1842, it was "an image of English naval power in the aristocratic neo-classical style; since then it has become one of London's postcard views, no doubt as popular with French tourists as any others" (Miles, 1997:76). It is therefore not just Birmingham's Nelson which has seen changes to its role and status.

## A Bronze Nelson



The Bullring, February 2008

This section provides a description of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century artworld which provides the background to understand the statue's aesthetic form. Nelson's heroic lifestyle affected his physical appearance; his right arm was amputated, he lost the use of his right eye, he was hit in the stomach during the battle of St. Vincent, and hit in the head during the battle of the Nile. The personal appearance of Nelson is an important part of the myth

that surrounds him. The historian David Walder suggests that Nelson was “the most easily recognisable person in English history by external appearance, stature, visage, white hair, amputated arm and blind eye” (Walder 1978:xxi). The missing arm, eye-patch and naval three-cornered hat make him an easily recognisable folk-hero even in present-day Birmingham.

The statue of Nelson is not a typical representation of Nelson as the three-cornered hat and eye patch are missing and he lacks any kind of weapon. It is the figure of a rather slight, almost boyish, man dressed in the naval uniform of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. He is looking slightly downwards and his expression is thoughtful. One arm is missing and the empty sleeve is pinned across his chest. The remaining arm rests on an anchor with a sail draped across it. Behind Nelson is a miniature representation of part of his flagship, the HMS Victory.

Few of the people I spoke to in the Bullring knew that the statue was intended to represent Nelson, but most of them knew who Nelson was when I told them he was the one standing on the pedestal at the end of St. Martin’s Walk. David Walder suggests that “It is in fact not possible to be English and not know about Nelson, for Nelson is an English folk hero” (Walder, 1978:xv). Maruška Svašek proposes that when the public interacts with an art object it attributes values to it, and is also often influenced by the ideas or values which the object expresses (Svašek, 200:12). I suggest that knowledge about who the statue represents has the potential to influence the public’s response to it. Aesthetic qualities associated with the statue of Nelson are not enough to encourage a relationship; meaning and value is necessary. This is, I suggest, because the public has knowledge about Nelson but not about the aesthetic form of the statue in the Bullring. The statue of Nelson was a product of the aesthetic conventions of the period when it was commissioned.

The statue by Royal Academician Richard Westmacott now has a grade II listed status<sup>5</sup>. It is an early example of a sculpture made by one of the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s most successful British sculptors (Noszlopy 2007:152). Westmacott was a neo-classical

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<sup>5</sup> The authority for granting listed status comes from the Planning Act from 1990, which is currently administered by English Heritage. A Grade II listed building or monument includes buildings which are of national importance or special interest. Grade I listed buildings are buildings of exceptional interest, sometimes considered to be of international importance.



sculptor and as part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century artworld he followed the aesthetic standards of the day. His portraits and memorials, although often representing war heroes like Nelson or the Duke of Wellington, are characterised by neoclassical restraint<sup>6</sup>. Neoclassical artists attempted to emulate classical Greek art, and in the belief that this required the representation of antique calmness, their sculptural figures show little or no emotion<sup>7</sup>. There is no anger or terror in the Bullring's statue of Nelson. The neo-classical countenance of the limestone statue of Nelson in Trafalgar square is also described as having a calm and thoughtful countenance with little evidence of suffering (Walder, 1978:xiv). The non-aggressive stance was typical of the official image established at that time; an image that was a national trend and not just expressed by the Birmingham statue. David Walder is critical of the form that early 19<sup>th</sup> century hero-worship took and suggests that Nelson was not the public school, gentlemanly, modest hero celebrated in British fiction that the monuments and later descriptions of him suggest, this kind of man only appeared in society later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1978:xvi).

The underplaying of violence suggested by Walder is supported by Malcolm Miles, who says this is a general trend in monument commissions. The violence that was often present during the acts being commemorated is, Miles suggests, often diffused, "the dead heroes of conventional war memorials are relieved of their aggressive aspect and represented as a reflective and dutiful everyman" (Miles, 1997:61)<sup>8</sup>. It would seem that no one wants to be known to future generations as violent and brutal, not the admirals or generals who fought, and not the society around them who reaped rewards from their military triumphs. Miles also suggests monuments help to maintain order (1997:58). Monuments like the statue of Nelson help to define and make visible the values of the public realm; they are not intended to be neutral nor simply decorative. They mediate history from a position of power (1997:61). However, in Nelson's case, the aesthetic

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<sup>6</sup> Westmacott's monument to Wellington presents the mythical figure of Achilles on Hyde Park Corner in London, and was unveiled in 1822. An exception to this restraint in Westmacott's work is the memorial to General Sir Ralph Abercrombie 1805 in St. Paul's Cathedral. This shows the hero in a much more dramatic pose, falling from his horse into the arms of a soldier who had rushed to help him.

<sup>7</sup> The neo-classical style was closely associated with romanticism. Although it is often difficult to separate the two, neoclassicism is usually associated with sculpture and romanticism with painting.

<sup>8</sup> Plato in his analysis of poetry written in praise of Homer the commander, suggests that the violence or lack of success is not present in poetic representations of his battles (Plato, 2008:27). This suggests that there is a tradition for remembering military men as more heroic than violent.

form of the monument and the conventions which it fulfils do not effectively support the sending of the original message within the Bullring today. Our understanding of historical events becomes imprecise as time passes, and our relationship with monuments changes along with the changes within society, even when the physical form of the monument basically remains the same.

The prosperity in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain had implications for the artistic environment in which Richard Westmacott worked. Much of the knowledge and history which supports art institutions already existed, but the physical forms of museums, academies and galleries, and social practices of those who were associated with them became established during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The social practice required by the Dickie world to support the artworld therefore established its position during this period (Dickie, 1974:31). This artworld involved a smaller group of institutions than today, but it exercised a much greater level of control over the production and consumption of art than was the case during the production of the art for the opening of the 2003 Bullring. The Birmingham officials who established a fund for commissioning the monument to Lord Nelson would have considered it correct procedure to refer to the Royal Academy in London and choose one of its then most successful sculptors, Richard Westmacott, to design and produce it. However, understanding how the statue came into being is also based on factors from outside the artworld. Meaning and value were attributed to it by others who were perhaps more interested in its social role than its aesthetic form.

### **The Installation of the Statue**

The social context in Birmingham which existed outside the artworld around the time of Nelson's installation influenced the commissioning of the statue. The Birmingham monument to the famous British admiral was unveiled on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1809 as part of the Golden Jubilee Celebrations for King George III<sup>9</sup>. It was Birmingham's first publicly funded memorial. The decision to commission a monument to Nelson was based on the Admiral's national and local popularity. It took only six months to collect almost two and

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<sup>9</sup> The statue was part of a patriotic trend. There is a forty four feet high obelisk on Glasgow Green in Glasgow erected in 1806 and Nelsons Pillar was erected in Dublin in 1808.

a half thousand pounds, which was necessary to produce the statue and its plinth. The donations were, according to Noszlopy and Waterhouse, mostly made by working-class people who paid a subscription in support of erecting a memorial (Noszlopy 2007:154).



*Boulton, Watt and Murdoch, 1956 William Boyle, Birmingham, November 2007*

Birmingham during this period encouraged the activities of small independent masters as there were no large scale manufacturers there at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The production of buttons and buckles or toys inspired the ingenuity of the industrious entrepreneur (Ugnow 2002:17). A number of these entrepreneurs were also members of what was described as Birmingham's enlightened population, the Lunar Society. This club, which existed between 1765 and 1813, had among its members illustrious entrepreneurs such as Matthew Boulton, James Watt, Erasmus Darwin and Josiah Wedgewood. The society is often described as a philosophical society, but its members were also inventors and philanthropists. One of its leading members, Matthew Boulton,

was a supporter of the arts in Birmingham; he is recorded as funding theatre, music and choral productions<sup>10</sup>. He died in August 1809 just before the inauguration of the monument to Nelson, but he may have been one of Birmingham's citizens who provided funds for its production.

Monuments, Malcolm Miles suggests, require at least a partial consensus of values because without it the meaning that they present would not be recognised (Miles 1997:58). In Birmingham at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the combination of patriotism, economic and philanthropic success allowed the easy collection of funds for the erection of a monument to Nelson in 1809, and suggests more than a partial consensus value during that period.

### **Changing Roles and Moving Plinths**

This section describes some of the changes that Nelson has experienced during his time in the Bullring. During my first visit to Birmingham in November 2007, the statue of Nelson was decorated with a giant plastic poppy and there were wreaths at the base of the plinth. The poppy is a symbol of the annual Remembrance Day celebrations that take place every year on November 11<sup>th</sup><sup>11</sup>.

A member of the Bullring managerial team explained the statue's present role in this way: "*We're not sure why he is there. May be it's because he did a lot for Birmingham industries, you know buttons, leather and rope. He is involved in Remembrance Day celebrations depending on what the city wants to do.*" The flowers were placed there in remembrance of fallen heroes, but Trafalgar Day was not mentioned, and Nelson's part in Remembrance Day celebrations is not, the Bullring representative implies, necessarily a yearly tradition. There are other memorials in Birmingham dedicated to the First and Second World Wars. The Hall of Memory in Centenary Square was built in memory of the more than twelve thousand citizens of Birmingham killed during the First World War. This is also used during Remembrance Day celebrations.

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew Boulton's (1728-1809) success was based on the production of coins and decorative objects such as silverware using Sheffield plate. He was also a partner with James Watt and together they produced hundreds of Boulton and Watt steam engines which made the mechanisation of factories and mills possible.

<sup>11</sup> Remembrance Day or Armistice Day commemorates the sacrifices of the armed forces during times of war. The First World War is particularly in focus on the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month when the German leaders signed the armistice.



The Bullring, November 2007

In 1809 when the statue was installed, Nelson was a popular national hero and Britain was the world's leading naval power. In 1894 the Navy League was established, which revived the national enthusiasm for Nelson's victories<sup>12</sup>. The first Trafalgar Day celebrations took place in 1896. Trafalgar Day celebrations on October 21<sup>st</sup> were a national demonstration, celebrated with parades and flowers throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The navy still celebrates Trafalgar Day, but it is no longer a widely recognised national celebration. The First World War caused the British public to lose much of its enthusiasm for wars and heroes. It is likely that Trafalgar Day was not celebrated during the later years of the war, and it never regained its position within the public consciousness during peacetime.

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<sup>12</sup> The Navy League founded the British sea cadet corps.





The Bull Ring 1897 (Bull Ring 72, Warwickshire Photographic Survey (WPS). Birmingham Libraries and Archives

Historic photographs taken in the Bull Ring on Trafalgar Day provide a visual document which I suggest support the claim that Nelson's social role within the Bullring has changed during his lifetime on the plinth. The photographs record social activity around the statue; he is not presented playing a purely aesthetic role. In a photograph from the second Trafalgar Day celebration in 1897, Nelson appears as a Dionysian figure surrounded with flowers. The photograph from 1914 just after the start of the First World War is more subdued. There are still flowers and wreaths but their form is more controlled and the people around him are darkly clad and sombre. The last Trafalgar Day photograph shows a military celebration in 1954 and there are no flowers at all. The Birmingham public seems to have lost its taste for exuberant celebrations of war heroes.





The Bull Ring 1914 (Bull Ring 267)



The Bull Ring 1954 (Bull Ring 74)

(Both images Warwickshire Photographic Survey (WPS). Birmingham Libraries and Archives)

The statue of Nelson has not just been subject to social and relational changes, it has also been subject to physical changes. Photographs of the Bull Ring from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries show the statue in a prominent position. Its location in the Bull Ring placed it at the heart of the city centre, surrounded by people and market-related activity. The old market hall entrance was located close to the statue of Nelson. The statue's location has similarities to the kind of social physical location where the Bull stands today. During the 1960s, the old Bull Ring market area was demolished to make way for a modern shopping centre and Nelson was moved. A Birmingham resident told me that the statue basically stood on top of the public toilets, although I have not been able to confirm this.



The Bull Ring 1950 (Bull Ring 22, Warwickshire Photographic Survey (WPS). Birmingham Libraries and Archives)

A photograph of a newly opened Bull Ring shopping centre in 1964 shows the statue of Nelson standing in an isolated position in a recreational area on top of the shopping centre. His old plinth and railings have been replaced by the much more minimal ones that we associate with him today. The statue's location is geographically not far from its original location, but the main arena for social interaction was underneath the plinth in the concrete enclosures of the shopping centre and market place. An elderly shopper I met in May 2008 told me that he liked the first Bull Ring best. He also told me that he liked the Bull and he had seen Nelson: "*It's good that they have put it back where it should be. It was lost for years.*" The man had clear memories of the second Bull Ring and had good things to say about it, but his suggestion that Nelson was lost is not true. Nelson was not lost; he was in the Bull Ring all the time. It is clear from the man's comment that Nelson's location in that shopping centre had moved him away from the centre of social interaction and public interest.



The Bull Ring 1964 (Bull Ring-94-R&C, Warwickshire Photographic Survey (WPS). Birmingham Libraries and Archives)

In 2000, the shopping centre from the 1960s was demolished. Nelson was refurbished and given a new location in the new Bullring in 2003. The geographical location of the statue is much the same as it has always been at the centre of the Bullring, looking towards St. Martin's church. The possibilities for social interaction are much greater within the present Bullring shopping centre. A large number of people pass the statue everyday and a number use the area around it for resting, waiting and eating, but the physical framework around Nelson has changed a great deal. St. Martin's church remains the same but the market has moved away from Nelson to the other side of the church, and the modern shopping centre buildings have a very different scale and form from those which existed around the statue before the first shopping centre development. The physical context around the statue is therefore different from the one in which it was installed in 1809. I suggest that the physical and social changes which the statue has

experienced mean that the role it plays is also different from the role it played prior to the first shopping centre development.

## Contemporary Interpretation



The Bullring, May 2009

This section describes the response or lack of response to the statue of Nelson, and places it within the social and physical context which I experienced during the fieldwork periods, the final stage of the biographical trajectory. The section starts with the process around the reinstatement of the sculpture because it provides information with which to understand the physical form of the statue today. These are elements that the shopping centre developer and the Heritage Officer thought would influence the public understanding of the statue. One of the influences is a sign dominated by a portrait by Sir

William Beechy which shows Nelson as he was in life, decorated with the honours he was awarded after his victories. The text emphasises his heroic activities at sea<sup>13</sup>.

The Heritage Officer at the city council believes that the public needs information about the statue's history to be able to understand Nelson's role in the Bullring: "*That's one of my own bugbears as a museum specialist if you like. We expect people to know and be prepared to climb up statues and have a closer look. You know the reality is that having got people to engage often there is no information there for people to find out more.*" The interpretation of the sculpture was installed sometime during 2008. This official version of who Nelson is was intended to play a part in defining the role that the statue plays in the Bullring today. I did not notice an increase in recognition among the public in the Bullring in May 2009 during my last visit to the Bullring, but the statue does have historical relevance within the site and I argue that easy access to more information does support the statue's role as a meaningful object within the Bullring.

The Heritage Officer considered the statue of Nelson to be a central artwork within the Bullring, its relationship with St. Martin's church, he suggests, plays an important part in helping to make the physical framework work: "*It's always been a feature of the historic Bullring and so for it to retain that sort of centre stage was quite important. The statue and the church, St. Martin's, are kind of the two hooks the scheme is hung on I guess.*" The Bullring information pack points to the shopping centre's policy of retaining and

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<sup>13</sup> Two other images place him within the context of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century; a painting of the battle at Trafalgar by Nicholas Pocock and an engraving of the Bull Ring with the statue of Nelson at its centre by William Hollins. The text says "Horatio Nelson was born in Burnham Thorpe, Norfolk. He joined the Navy at the age of 12 and became a captain at the age of 20. When Britain entered the French Revolutionary Wars in 1793, Nelson served in the Mediterranean helped to capture Corsica and saw battle at Calvi where he lost the sight of his right eye. He would later lose his right arm at Santa Cruz de Tenerife (1797). As a commander he was known for his boldness and for occasionally disregarding his superiors. This brought him victories at Cape Vincent in 1797 and at Copenhagen four years later, where he ignored orders to cease action by putting his telescope to his right eye and claiming that he could not see the signal. At the Battle of the Nile (1798) he destroyed Napoleon's fleet, thwarting his bid for an overland trade route to India. Promoted to Vice Admiral in 1801, his most famous victory at Cape Trafalgar on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1805 saved Britain from invasion. Nelson was killed at his hour of triumph by a French sniper's bullet, depriving Britain of a national hero: a complex leader who balanced a personal longing for honour and glory with compassion and respect for his men. Nelson visited Birmingham in 1802 and was fêted wherever he went. Unveiled on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1809, Sir Richard Westmacott's statue was the first figurative memorial to Nelson in the United Kingdom. The £2,400 required to pay for the monument was raised within six months, mainly in the form of small donations from working-class people."



restoring physical elements which have a historical connection with the city of Birmingham. The sculpture is described in this way in the brochure: “A five-ton bronze statue of Nelson, dating from 1809, has been restored after 40 years of neglect on the outskirts of the old Bull Ring. Commissioned in memory of Nelson’s visit to Birmingham in 1802, the statue is the earliest known public work by Sir Richard Westmacott, one of the Victorian era’s most famous sculptors, and is also the first sculpture of the admiral created in the UK in tribute to his death after the battle of Trafalgar in 1805. Reinstated to take its historically prominent position within the Bullring site, the bronze is located on the mid-level terrace overlooking St. Martin’s Square, on a newly created Portland stone plinth” (Customer-services 2003:34)<sup>14</sup>.

The text suggests that the developers have done more than restore the sculpture; they have reinstated it in its previous position within the Bullring. This I suggest relates to the physical framework and not to its social position.

The restoration and reinstatement of Nelson was done in association with the restoration of other historical elements in and around the shopping centre. The restoration of St. Martin’s church, Lord Nelson and Moor Street Station was a large economic investment for the Birmingham Alliance. The aim of the restoration was to encourage the reinstatement of these elements within the physical framework of the town centre and within public awareness<sup>15</sup>. They encourage a positive image of alliance and the shopping centre, and help to connect the Bullring to the city centre. Each of the restored elements has an attractive historical form which has the potential to emphasise the Bullring as a place with more to offer than just shopping. The Bull plays a similar role, connecting the shopping centre to the history of the place, and is also included in this positive image of the shopping centre.

The process of reinstatement was not without its discussions about the form and presentation of the statue. During this period, the sculpture played an active social role within the Bullring and in Birmingham as a whole because it was part of a discussion

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<sup>14</sup> The information is not completely correct. Richard Westmacott had completed at least one other public monument and he was in the final stages of a monument for Westminster Abbey before he was given the Birmingham commission.

<sup>15</sup> The Birmingham Alliance does not own the church, the station or Nelson but has helped finance their restoration. The statue of Lord Nelson is owned by Birmingham City Council.



among local city council representatives, the Birmingham Alliance, the local population and the media. When the statue was first erected in 1809 it stood on a cylindrical marble plinth. The plinth was decorated with bronze reliefs that showed the citizens of Birmingham mourning Nelson's death after the battle of Trafalgar (Noszlopy, 2007:155). In addition, the plinth was surrounded by railings which were intended to look like metal pikes held together with a piece of twisted metal cable<sup>16</sup>. The railings created a furore after the reinstatement of the restored statue in 2003 because initially the shopping centre developers had not intended to put the railings back around Nelson<sup>17</sup>. The original railings had been lost and the developers believed that the public would develop a closer relationship with the statue if they were able to come into physical contact with it. The shopping centre developer was still frustrated about the use of railings around the statue five years after their reinstallation: "*Certainly before we took it down it had railings around it. And you know rumours were that the railings were genuine armaments from some big battle, but of course they were just cheap reproductions. So we brought the sculpture back it looked beautiful. We put it in a public space, and people were sitting around it and it was good....but some of the councillors were just insisting that we put the railings back because they felt that it was part of the sculpture.*" The shopping centre developer felt that the railings made the sculpture seem inaccessible and exclusive, and that they would hinder the public relationship with the sculpture because they are not able to touch it. The developer also suggested that the public's active interaction with the Bull proved the importance of physical access in encouraging a relationship.

The railings were mentioned by some Birmingham residents who also saw them as part of the monument. One man claimed that the railings were pikes that had been on Nelson's flagship, the HMS Victory. A pike is a weapon with a sharp blade mounted on a long wooden handle; the man did not seem to know enough about the weapon to know that they could not only have been made of metal, as that would have made them too heavy to handle. The idea that the railings were pikes from HMS Victory

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<sup>16</sup> At the edge of the railings at the four corners of the monument, supported by upturned cannon barrels were lampposts shaped like clusters of pikes and ships' lanterns. The original plinth and its reliefs, as well as the canons and lampposts, were lost when the sculpture was moved during the development of the first Bull Ring shopping centre in 1961.

<sup>17</sup> The Birmingham Evening Mail ran a series of articles about the controversy in 2003 after the reopening of the shopping centre.

makes the connection between the real hero, Lord Nelson, and the battle of Trafalgar much stronger. A woman who was part of the managerial staff at the Bullring suggested that the original railings had been paid for by the Birmingham Women's Institute, the WI, and it was the WI who had demanded their reinstallation. That so many opinions from at least four different standpoints could have been inspired by an element seemingly as simple and everyday as metal railings, I suggest, emphasises the layers of meaning that can surround a public monument with a long history. I also suggest that it does not matter whether the response is based on proven fact or not, it all adds to the statue's meaning and relevance. The statue may initially seem static and socially non-active, but the layers of meaning around the railings support the suggestion that the statue of Nelson is a repository of meaning. Both inherent and non-inherent qualities may be included within its understanding.

In addition to the comments about the railings around the statue, two main themes appeared in the responses from the public in the Bullring. There were those who suggested that the statue of Nelson did not make a connection with the public in the context of the Bullring as it is today, and there were a number of people who believed in the relevance of historical statues and monuments.

The lack of public connection suggested in the first theme relates primarily to the aesthetic tradition which the statue of Nelson stems from. The statue of Nelson has been prescribed a decorative rather than social role by the shopping centre developers. They saw it in visual association with the church, and in aesthetic contrast with contemporary architectural elements within the shopping centre, but few of the people I spoke to responded to its aesthetic form, and those who did talk about the way it looks responded negatively to it. A young woman I met told me that she knew Nelson was up there, and she thought he was some kind of soldier, but that she was not really into that kind of art because it is "*too traditional*." She said that she liked art that is unusual. In February 2008, I met a postman from Stafford who was visiting the Bullring for the day. He thought that the Bullring was "*just getting better and better. Twenty years ago it was a dump, now it is really good*." He had noticed Lord Nelson, and he thought that he was "*good*" but that "*art should be more modern. Nelson only talked to people when it was*

*first put there. People don't understand it today.*" The criticism was related to the physical form of the statue and to the aesthetic tradition in which it was created. These two people suggest that the traditional form limits its connection with the public in the Bullring today. The aesthetic limitation affects the meaning associated with it, because it hinders the connection with its historical content. A teenage girl I met in May 2009 was not fond of the statue: "*and him (Nelson) well, I didn't even see him. Even though he has been there that long. It doesn't mean anything to me. Whereas the Bull does; people know about the Bull.*" This young girl was in general fairly scathing about art in shopping centres and it was only the Bull that had made a positive impression upon her, and this is because of its social position within the shopping centre, a social position that Nelson previously held in the Bull Ring.

However, the meaning associated with the statue's historical place within the Bullring was something which often encouraged a positive response from the people I spoke to. I suggested earlier that knowledge about who the statue represents has the potential to influence the public's response, but to a person without any knowledge about who it represents, Nelson may appear simply as an aesthetic object without any contributing meaning or value. During a conversation with an elderly Asian man in the Bullring in May 2009, I told him who the statue represented. Initially the man told me that he had not noticed any of the art. He had not seen Nelson even though he had been to the Bullring many times.

From where we were sitting in front of the church we had a good view of the statue, and the man became very animated when I told him the statue was Nelson because he had worked in the Chatham dockyards in Kent where the battle of Trafalgar is still celebrated<sup>18</sup>. He said that "*Nelson is an important man there.*" Afterwards I asked him if he thought art played a role in shopping centres and he said yes it was important that art was there. It was important for the young people, so that they can learn something about the history of the place, "*like I did today.*" He said that next time he went past the statue he would be able to tell his grandchildren that it was Nelson and about the time when he

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<sup>18</sup> Chatham Dockyard was a naval dockyard for 414 years. The dockyard closed in 1984 and is now run as a tourist attraction.

worked in the Chatham dockyards. It may take more than information printed on a sign attached to the railings, but once the information about the statue has been passed on (even if it requires an anthropologist asking questions to do so), the example shows how meaning has the potential to engage the public in a relationship, and even make them think more about public art in general.

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The Bullring, February 2008

The social potential of the statue of Nelson is less obvious than the Bull's, but for some, its potential lies in its historical role even when knowledge about this role is vague. A young woman who worked in a Bullring café admitted to not knowing who the statue represented, but said when we talked about the different works of art in the Bullring that, "*You can't just take away something which is part of the history of the place.*" She lacked knowledge about who the statue represented, but she was aware of its physical position, and knew that it represented a historical personage. Its historical role

meant something to this woman. The woman, who was one of my younger interviewees, likes things that have a history to them. It matters to her that there are elements in the Bullring that connect it with the past; the Bull does that for her as well as the bricks. A student who had a summer job working in a shop in the Bullring was also glad that the shopping centre was interested in retaining some of its past. She did not know who the man on the plinth was but she thought that it was good that he was there because, "*He has always been here and it's good that they have kept a bit of the history of the place.*" I suggest that history makes the place seem more than a shopping centre. An elderly lady who remembered the two previous Bull Rings remembered the statue from the old Bull Ring and she also knew who the statue represented. She told me he was "*a seafaring man.*" It was important she said that they had not got rid of him even though they had done the shopping centre up. Nelson gives the Bullring a deeper relevance than the obvious physical structure that was around us when I spoke to her on that morning in May 2009. On the sensible level, it is an attractive sculpture associated with the history of the place, and on the intelligible level it has the potential to mean more.

### **Summary and Reflections**

An analysis of historical statues or monuments like Nelson highlights the possibility that all public works of art may be subject to changing social roles. An object may become a public work of art and achieve an active social role, but there is no guarantee that the role will be permanent. On the other hand, artworks that are passive within the physical and social context may become active socially due to changes in the context. The Bull plays a role which is intimately connected with the social activity of shopping and being in the Bullring. The biographical aspect associated with the statue of Nelson is not instantly obvious to everyone who sees it in the Bullring; its social role is much less active than the Bull's. An analysis of old photographs shows that Nelson's role within the Bullring has changed. Nelson's physical location in today's Bullring is basically the same as it has always been, but he has experienced physical and social changes. The statue used to be at the centre of social interaction in a way that is similar to the role the Bull plays today. Now Nelson's active potential is primarily associated with its historical content, which although it is not relevant all of the time for everyone, is important to some members of

the Bullring public. The statue of Nelson is a repository of meaning, and reuse of the statue has the potential to encourage new meaning, new roles, debate and an active relationship with its public.

Within the active phase an artwork achieves agency within the relational context around it and according to the standards of criteria that define its exchange. We can therefore expect its meaning and value to change along with social and physical changes that take place around it. However, not everything about the artwork will change; some qualities may be retained. In Nelson's case, its physical appearance and some of the meaning and history associated with the historical figure of Admiral Nelson remain constant. The statue is not automatically associated with Nelson because it does not present his most recognisable physical characteristics, but Nelson's naval achievements support his continuing fame in Britain and offer meaning to those who know who the statue represents. Birmingham was at the time of the commission an expanding and prosperous town. There was a general enthusiasm for the erection of a monument to Nelson among the local population. It was a statue for the people, but Nelson's contemporaries did not expect it to play a neutral role on its plinth; it was also a presentation of the power and success of the Admiral and the navy. At the same time, Nelson is not presented as an aggressive commander. The early 19<sup>th</sup> century artworld influenced the aesthetic form and moral content of public sculpture. The public in Birmingham therefore got a memorial to a hero who they admired, and in this respect it was a public pleaser, but the statue was given a form that fulfilled the aesthetic and educational requirements of the artworld at that time. This, I suggest, goes a long way in explaining the neo-classical calm and lack of direct heroic references.

The aesthetic form of the statue has remained constant, but it cannot alone offer more than a limited relational potential. The Dandelion's aesthetic form is the key to its relational activity on the roundabout outside City Syd. The shopping centre public in Tiller does in general like the way the Dandelion looks. The shopping centre public in Birmingham expressed scepticism of the aesthetic form of the statue of Nelson. It did not conform to their understanding of how a work of art should look today. This scepticism limits Nelson's relational potential. The fieldwork experience suggests that knowledge



about the history of Nelson and his place in the Bullring encourages the public to appreciate the statue. The restoration of the statue has given it new polish and poise which encourages contemplation of its aesthetic form and its position within the rest of the physical framework, but I would argue that Nelson has remained on his plinth in the shopping centre primarily because of his historical relevance within the Bullring. The statue along with St. Martin's Church, Moor Street Station and the Rotunda provide historical references to the Bullring as it used to be, and they help to connect the shopping centre to the established physical framework of the city centre. Their restoration supports the idea that the Bullring is more than just a shopping centre.

Nelson's long history within the Bullring allows it to function as a repository of meaning. Some of the meaning associated with it is true, while some of it is more mythical than true, but it all adds to the relational possibilities that the statue offers. Art objects have the potential to engage with the public, to be relational, but Daniel Miller suggests that subjects and objects can do more than this because they exist together in mutual construction. Objects like works of art do not merely make us look or act; they are also part of what makes us who we are (Miller 2005:38). Historical statues like Nelson are an established part of the physical framework of our towns and cities; they provide meaning connecting the people with the place. However, the statue of Nelson is not active all the time; this suggests that there are limitations associated with this kind of art in public places. Physical location and aesthetic quality will not always succeed in establishing an active social role, one which makes it active in the way suggested by the initial definition of public art. Meaning and value are important and Nelson has plenty of this, but there are problems associated with gaining access to it. The meaning and value associated with the Bull is more easily accessible in the Bullring today. The fleeting temporary public relationship with the statue of Nelson is a primary quality. The public is not always in a relationship with Nelson, but it is on occasion. The statue gains relevance when the fleeting relations become more frequent. Reuse and reinterpretation encourage continued relational contact.

An active social role is what the shopping centre developers had planned for, and in the case of the Bull they achieved this. The Bull even exceeded their expectations. However, comparison with the statue of Nelson shows that agency achieved in a

relationship with the public is not permanent, despite inherent qualities in the art object which can encourage agency. During the social life of a public work of art, changes in the social and physical context will affect the role an artwork plays, and agency should not be taken for granted.



# Summary and Reflections



Tiller, December 2008

## The Social Role of Shopping Centre Art



City Syd, February 2007



The Bullring, May 2009



City Syd, October 2008



The Bullring, May 2009

The main question asked in this analysis is *what is the social role of public art in shopping centres?* The intention here is therefore to present the ways public works of art play a social role at City Syd and in the Bullring, and to consider what this can tell us about public art in general.

The Dandelion standing outside City Syd and the eight works of art found in the Bullring have been followed, as far as possible, through the whole of their social lives through their context, candidacy and active phase. The analysis started by looking at the situation before they were installed by delving into the physical, social and historical factors that encouraged the development of public art projects for the two sites, and

concludes within the timescale provided by the fieldwork period with an analysis of the numerous conversations with members of the shopping centre public at City Syd and the Bullring. During this analysis, I have considered why the specific public works of art were chosen for the two shopping centre locations, the background for the choices and the influence of the planning process. I have also considered whether the intentions and expectations exposed during the planning process have become part of the meaning and value associated with the public art within its shopping centre contexts. However, the main focus has been the public's understanding of the public art in the two shopping centres.

### **Understanding the Field**

The analysis of public art presented here is supported by a methodological and theoretical field. My method within the two shopping centres was anthropological, and the theoretical background for the analysis is also anthropological, but the field of Western public art which I am studying is not one that anthropologists are known for their interest in. The analysis of public art in shopping centres therefore required art and architectural theory, as well as historical information; this has given the analysis a multidisciplinary form. The active relational analysis of the social life of the public art at City Syd and in the Bullring stemmed from two main lines of anthropological theory.

The first was provided by Alfred Gell's theory of agency. The agency of objects is not a new idea, but Gell played particular attention to art objects as part of the social context. Works of art, Gell suggests, actively influence the people using and looking at them (Gell, 1992:43). It is therefore not just people that can cause things to happen, artworks can also do that when they become involved in relationships with their public. Gell's agency theory is a study of artworks in motion because artworks with agency play active social roles. They are understood as something more than aesthetic objects with a passive contemplative position within the social context. Public works of art are intended by their planners and producers to play an active role in their locations in Western towns and cities, and the theory of agency supports this understanding of art being active within the social context. Agency theory understands the artwork as active within a nexus of social relationships. It also allows for the possibility that agency does



not have to be in place all of the time; it can be fleeting and momentary. Furthermore, I suggest that agency does not have to be observable; its position may be on a contemplative level. However, Gell's theory has difficulty in capturing the changes in the social role of an artwork, the different paths that it may follow and the potential for inherent qualities within a work of art.

Agency also offers opposition within the study of public works of art because it provides exclusions within the social analysis of an artwork's role. Alfred Gell rejected the study of the meaning of art and the use of aesthetic and institution theories. These were regarded as having a predefined form and content, which would hinder access to the actual social situation around the works of art. The public associates meaning with art at City Syd and in the Bullring, and aesthetic theory and artworld or institutional theories are associated with the public understanding of the art located in the two shopping centres. Aesthetic and artworld theory are both part of the discussion associated with the definition of objects as works of art. They support the understanding of the objects analysed here as works of art, and place them within a wider theoretical and historical art context associated with art in Western society, which is necessary when understanding why public works of art are installed in shopping centres, the role that they play there and the public understanding of them. Aesthetic theory and artworld theory helps to differentiate public art from other objects found within the physical and social contexts of shopping centres. It suggests that exclusivity and difference are qualities also required by shopping centres.

Capturing the active and changing social situation provided the second main line of anthropological theory; Arjun Appadurai proposes that we should follow the things in themselves because their meaning exists in their forms, uses and trajectories. It is "the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context" (Appadurai, 1986:5). This provided a tripartite known as the context, candidacy and commodity (what I called active) phases, which were followed when I presented and analysed the social life of the public art at the two shopping centres. The context, candidacy and active phases allow us to study "the exchangeability" of a thing, in this case public works of art, within its past, present and future (1986:13). It also allows us to locate the meaning and value associated with the art objects, and where and when it is located within them. Public

works of art may be associated with more than one social group, and their role is not always socially active. The approach offered by Appadurai allows us to follow the changing value of art objects through the course of their social lives.

By those who plan and produce it, public art is expected to play an active social role. The definition of public art proposed by Massey and Rose requires that public art should have agency, because without a relationship with its public, it cannot be understood to be a public work of art at all (Massey and Rose, 2003:12). Location within a place of open public access is not in itself enough to encourage an active social role. Shopping centre art meets with particular challenges that affect the kind of art planned for them and the public response which also affects its agency. Shopping centres provide a particular sense of place and a particular social context. At City Syd and in the Bullring, the shopping centres provide physical and social contexts which the artworks are required to act in association with. Shopping centres are market places within a modern architectural form associated with practical shopping-based activities; they are not often associated with art. There is a tradition for the use of decoration within retail structures, but the shopping centre public does not visit shopping centres because of the art; the public is there to shop or to work, and it is not a typical artworld public with knowledge about art. The public meeting with the art in the two shopping centres is accidental and rarely motivated by a specific interest in the artworks. The limitations associated with the accidental interest in public art in shopping centres means that the possibility exists that shopping centre art will not establish a relationship with its public, and will not therefore be defined as public art. Those who planned and produced the art were aware of this danger, and they planned for art that would play active social roles within the context.

Understanding the role of public art in shopping centres requires that we know something about public art and art in general, how it is defined and the expectations associated with it. Artworld theory is central within this analysis because it affects the planning, production, presentation and consumption of art. The theories of Arthur Danto and George Dickie describe the knowledge and practice which within an artworld defines an object as a work of art. Sociological artworld theory provided by Howard Becker gives a less elitist understanding of the workings of the artworld. The artworld is a

theoretical standpoint with which to understand the production and consumption of artworks, and provides insight into the difference between a public who has access to artworld knowledge and intentionally seeks out art, and a public who has not acquired artworld knowledge and whose meetings with public art are unintentional. The latter of public is the kind of public found in shopping centres. The artworld is an exclusive group which is actively involved in the definition of objects as works of art, but they are not the only group to do so. A non-artworld public within a shopping centre context also defines objects as works of art. The Dandelion and the art in the Bullring are defined as works of art due to a collaboration between the understandings of the artworld and the public in the shopping centres. An accidental meeting can also offer meaning and value which influences the role and definition of the art object. Playing an active social role in a shopping centre does not depend on the artworld. The artworld offers objects that are to be understood as works of art, but being defined as a work of art is only one potential aspect of its agency.

According to Alfred Gell, artworks play active roles within the social context, and aesthetic theory was excluded from agency theory because he understood it as offering a predefined, passive and evaluative understanding of works of art (Gell, 1992:42; 1998:3,6). However, positive aesthetic quality is understood here as encouraging the communication of meaning between artworks and their public (Danto, 2005:10). It therefore plays an active role in the relationship that a public work of art establishes with the public and cannot be excluded from a relational analysis of public art within Western shopping centre contexts. Aesthetic qualities are evaluated by their public in the shopping centres; liking or disliking the object encourages its definition as a work of art and the establishment of meaning. The sensory qualities associated with an object's aesthetic quality can be understood as both good and bad. Aesthetic quality is not synonymous with looking good, and liking or disliking a public work of art is a reminder that there will not always be agreement to appreciate a public work of art among its public, even when it has been approved by the artworld who planned it.

An analysis of the meaning of a work of art is a common approach within the anthropology of art, but Alfred Gell also rejected this approach. An analysis of meaning, according to Gell, assumes embeddedness within social practice (Gell, 1999:17). The

public at City Syd and in the Bullring understood the public art as meaning something, therefore meaning is relevant within this analysis. The meaning presented here was associated with the artworks during the fieldwork period. Changes in the physical and social context around the artworks will affect the meaning and value associated with them. Understanding the role of public art within a Western shopping centre context requires a theoretical approach associated with the meaning and value active within the shopping centre contexts, and this therefore includes Alfred Gell's exclusions.

Artworld and aesthetic theory provide a background to understand the activities of the planners and producers, and their expectations and values associated with public art, but it is the people who meet the public art at City Syd and in the Bullring on a day-to-day basis who can tell us whether the art plays a role with the physical and social frameworks in which it is installed. The analysis presented here is based on a study of the interactions and interdependencies between people and public works of art. This meant that the fieldwork activity aimed to gather as much information as possible about the public understanding of the artworks found in and around City Syd and the Bullring. The methodology used was anthropological but it was not traditional Malinowski-methodology. Public art does play a role within City Syd and the Bullring, but it is not always the focus of public attention. I therefore chose an active approach which resulted in numerous short conversations with workers and shoppers. The active approach meant that the questions were specifically about the art and the physical context. I did not ask questions about the everyday lives of the shopping centre and its public, because the actual social role of public art in shopping centres is dominated by the primary preoccupation within this context, which is shopping. Shopping plays a part within the analysis because it is important within the context, but I did not need to ask specific questions about shopping to gather information about it.

The fieldwork activity started out with the search for some traditional anthropological preoccupations such as symbols, association and meaning, but as the fieldwork progressed, trying to gain access to the public understanding of the visual became the focus. This change occurred when the realisation hit me that, as an anthropologist whose point of departure was some very large, very visible objects, my

fieldwork activity should aim to find out the public response to the visual experience of meeting art at City Syd and in the Bullring, and that this would help to explain what, if any, the role of the art in the two shopping centres was. There is more to the Dandelion and the art at the Bullring than what the public sees, but the public response to my questions was encouraged by what they had perceived. If they had not seen the art in the shopping centres then there was nothing to say about it. The response to the visual, which was primarily provoked by the aesthetic qualities, provides insight into the meaning and value associated with the public works of art by their public. This suggests that despite Gell's rejection of the contemplative aspect in works of art, an active role can include reflection and contemplation. Aesthetic or visual qualities are often the means by which a work of art achieves its effect (Danto, 2005:10). The visual effect encourages access to the meaning and value which is perhaps not immediately obvious, but is also often associated with a work of art. Knowledge about the artwork, the meaning associated with it and the way it looks is all part of a visual system which influences the role that it plays within the physical and social context.

An anthropological analysis encourages the study of the details of everyday life, and in this way it is possible to show public works of art in action. The next three sections describe the art at City Syd and in the Bullring in action, and the qualities that define its role within the two shopping centres. The description follows the aforementioned context, candidacy and active phases.

### **Shopping Centre Contexts**

An artwork may not always play an active social role within a location. Its role may change and these changes will be influenced by the social and physical context. Understanding an object as a public work of art is not a fixed definition and it must be established within the context. The Dandelion and the Bullring art were designed for specific contexts. A context refers, according to Appadurai, to the variety of social arenas that help to link the candidacy of an object to the commodity (active) phase of its career (Appadurai, 1986:15). Value may be embodied in the objects exchanged, but an object cannot act independently of the context. Appadurai describes the context as social and

historical (1986:13,14). A context like a shopping centre is practised, and both past and present forms and understandings contribute to make sense of it. The context is understood here as including social, historical and physical aspects. This is because shopping centres also provide physical qualities which support the commercial activity that takes place there, and which influences the candidacy and active phase of the public art. Capturing the dynamic character of the contexts provided by City Syd and the Bullring required a multidisciplinary standpoint. An anthropological understanding of a place sees it as generated by the activities of the people within it, but shopping centres are not just social contexts, they are also physical contexts with a particular character influenced by function, history, geography and aesthetic quality.



Tiller, January 2008

There is a close association between the physical and social and they are difficult to separate from each other within a context. However, some qualities, such as



the marshland upon which City Syd is built and the inner city location of the Bullring, are physical aspects which emphasise the difference between the two shopping centre contexts. The context within this analysis provides background for the candidacy of the public works of art and it is therefore presented first in the relational trajectory of the public art at City Syd and the Bullring. According to Appadurai, the context also links the candidacy of an object to the commodity phase of its career. The context is therefore closely associated with the active phase of an artwork's career (Appadurai, 1986:15). It is not always possible to compartmentalise its influence.

The activity of shopping causes City Syd and the Bullring to have similarities as they are both part of the same retail history. However, they are also different shopping contexts whereby their history and the kind of location in which they exist in Trondheim and Birmingham have contributed to give them different physical and social contexts. Their backgrounds and their physical and social qualities influenced the development of the public art projects. Shopping centres are not one big homogenous physical mass that are all alike in the Western world. They provide particular places and art in shopping centres contributes to their sense of place. The public art projects for City Syd and the Bullring were influenced by their physical, social and historical context, and they aimed to influence the understanding of them.

City Syd and the Tiller neighbourhood provide the context for the Dandelion sculpture, which is located just outside the shopping centre's boundaries. City Syd is a popular place to shop; even after more than twenty years of business, it is still the most successful shopping centre in the region. The neighbourhood's form and function today on the outskirts of Trondheim is the result of an expected population explosion that never happened and the cost of developing the marshland which originally dominated the area. The commercial history of the neighbourhood is recent. During the 1980s, the price of developing the land was relatively cheap which encouraged rapid development. The architectural form found in the commercial zone is standard retail warehouse architecture found in around many European cities. This supports the practical qualities associated with City Syd, but does not offer positive aesthetic qualities. However, although City Syd and its architecture are associated with the rest of the

commercial structures in the area, it is also unique, with a strong self-image. There is no other shopping centre quite like it, and within Central Norway, it is a shopping centre icon. The Dandelion plays its role in Tiller in association with the area's lack of positive aesthetic quality, and in relation to the iconic form of City Syd.

The physical framework of the City Syd shopping centre is the result of practical and commercial needs and so is the Bullring shopping centre, but the Bullring is a different kind of shopping centre. City Syd has been in its location for more than twenty years and it is starting to look its age. The Bullring is a luxurious contemporary shopping centre, which appeals to both older and younger shoppers. In addition, the Bullring's location at the heart of Birmingham city centre in close proximity to the New Street shops and the newly developed market halls means that it provides a shopping experience closely connected to the everyday life of the city centre. City Syd offers its customers a suburban car-dependent experience. The Bullring's location in the middle of the city centre means that the site has a long commercial history. This history had implications for the shopping centre development, it influenced the planning of the public art project and it still influences the public art project today.

The shopping centre developers at the Bullring have attempted to entrench the shopping centre within the physical and social activity of the city centre. They have done this, for example, by retaining and restoring architectural elements associated with the history of the site and by installing public art that also has connections with this history, but it is a certain kind of history which is associated with the contemporary Bullring. Birmingham is an industrial city; the town started to grow at a dramatic rate during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century due to developments in the iron industry, but it was the town's market history which the shopping centre developers focused on. This history dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. However, the previous Bull Ring shopping centre, although it is represented by the Rotunda, does not play a central supporting role. The shopping centre from the 1960s was the shopping centre not to be repeated. It was also modern and glamorous when it opened, but when it was demolished in 1999 it had become run-down, unprofitable and was mostly unloved by the Birmingham population. The first shopping centre and the road system which had accompanied it divided the city centre in two. The

development of the new Bullring reinstated the town centre in Birmingham, reconnecting the upper half of the city centre represented by New Street shops with the lower half of the city centre around the market halls.

The Bullring aims to appeal to more than one section of the public. Installing art which says something about the history of the shopping centre and restoring architectural elements which have a connection with the place as it used to be before the two shopping centre developments, encourages a connection with older members of the Birmingham population. The role that the past plays in supporting the shopping centre within the city centre is a subtle one. The combination of art, architecture and place names is open to interpretation for those members of the public who are aware of its presence within the Bullring. It also provides a pleasing contemporary environment that encourages the activity of shopping and supports an understanding of the place that suggests that the shopping centre means more than just shopping and commerce. The present Bullring has a large number of young people among its customers and these do not have any memories of the previous Bull Rings. It is the contemporary shopping centre experience which appeals to them. The public appreciates the shopping experience offered by the Bullring; it has become a popular place to shop and to hang out. The public is not, however, always aware of the history of the place and the historical elements associated with it, and the public relationship with the art does not depend on it.

### **The Candidacy of Shopping Centre Art**

City Syd and the Bullring are very different shopping centres and the planners and producers of the public art had different expectations about the role the public art would play. The presentation of the candidacy highlights the differences in both the shopping centres and the art. The Dandelion and the art in the Bullring arrived in the two shopping centre contexts with meaning and value already associated with them. The candidacy of an object describes the standards and criteria that define its exchangeability in a particular context, and it refers to a cultural framework where the values shared may or may not be stable, finally defined or supported by everyone (Appadurai, 1986:14). The candidacy of the public art influences the role that it plays after installation.



The Bullring, May 2009

Appadurai does not define who should be involved in the candidacy of an object, but he suggests that those involved should agree to some extent on the value of the object exchanged (Appadurai, 1986:14). The candidacy of the public works of art in the two shopping centres is here primarily concerned with the activities of those who planned and produced the art, and who were working with expectations about what the context needed and what kind of role the art that they chose would play in the shopping centres. The public has also expectations about the role public art plays and they have knowledge about how a public work of art is defined. These general understandings are useful when meeting or discussing concrete works of art, but in the case of the public art at City Syd and in the Bullring, they had no specific expectations about the art because they did not know that public art would be installed there. Their expectations became specific and provided meaning and value after the art was installed. This separation between the planners and the public has been used to clarify the role of the planning

process and to gain access to the expectations about public art prior to its installation within a shopping centre.

The definition of a public work of art suggested by Massey and Rose requires a relationship with a public (Massey and Rose, 2003:12). The relationship should exist in the context where the art is located, and this implies that it develops after the installation of the art. The public art committees planned for public art that would be involved in a relationship with its public. The public art committee at City Syd and the shopping centre developers at the Bullring represent the artworld within the two contexts. The definitions of the artworld do not suggest an active role for the public during the planning and production of art. It is during its consumption that the public becomes active (Silver, 1995:21). The planning process described by the public art committee at Tiller and the Bullring's developers also suggests a peripheral role for the public. There were no members of the shopping centre public involved in the development of the two projects. At the Bullring, the public was involved in the designing of the Bricks but this was only one of eight artworks in the shopping centre.

The theory, history, knowledge and practice associated with the artworld have been used to analyse and understand the activities of the public art committee at Tiller and the shopping centre developers in the Bullring. The artworld is associated with two main lines of theory. In a Dantoworld, an art object is defined by how its properties connect with the art theory and history which came before it and it helps to discriminate art from other objects (Danto, 1994:477). The Dantoworld requires knowledge to define an object as art. The Dickieworld, while agreeing that art history and theory points to the institutional nature of art, requires additional established practice from artworld members (Dickie, 1974:31). It also requires that an object has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation within a framework for the presentation of art (1974:41). George Dickie defined the artworld public as a public prepared to some extent to understand the artworks presented to them (Dickie, 1997:82).

An artworld is an exclusive group defined by knowledge and participation in the commissioning, production, presentation and consumption of art. The idea that there is a

world which is exclusive encourages the idea that the objects produced by the artworld are also exclusive and different. The artworld which provides the background for the practice of the two groups who planned the shopping centre art combines the knowledge and practice stemming from both Danto- and Dickie-worlds. Placing objects from the artworld into everyday contexts such as shopping centres allows the shopping centres to be associated with what is exclusive and different. However, the requirements of the artworld defined by Danto and Dickie exclude shopping centres as a location for the presentation of art and shopping centre publics from being a proper public for art. Shopping centres and the shopping centre public are not often associated with artworlds because they are not exclusively about art and there is no particular interest in art among the public. These expectations about where art should be presented and who its public is provide opposition to the understanding of the objects installed in shopping centres as art. This elitist understanding, however, underestimates the shopping centre public and their role in defining the object in shopping centres as art.

A post-modern critique of the artworld suggests that an artwork should not be understood as having an autonomous cultural aesthetic value (Sullivan, 1995:266). Works of art are part of the wider society and this includes both their production and consumption. This anti-elitist understanding of the workings of the artworld sees it as not so very different from other kinds of work and regards artists as workers like everyone else (Becker, 2008:xxiii,xxiv). On the other hand, connecting art with the everyday world of shopping centres does not have to lose its association with what is exclusive and different, because it is these qualities which encourage its production and consumption and support the practices of the planners and producers of public art. Without its association with the artworld and the notion of exclusivity, locating art in public places loses relevance. The planning and production of public art is not a closed aesthetic sphere because it is placing art into a wider relational context, and it provides the context with values stemming from the artworld. These values have the potential to influence the role that an artwork plays within the context it is located. The public response to the artwork and the norms and values of the artworld which it contains has the potential to influence the artworld, because the artworld considers the response to previous projects when it is developing a new public art project.



The planners and producers of public art supported by knowledge and practice stemming from an artworld plan public art projects which they expect to have agency within the physical and social context. Artworks in public places achieve agency when they become part of the texture of social relationships although they do not become active through their physical and visual presence alone. They must have meaning and value which connects them to the social context. The history of public art is part of the standards and criteria which supported the candidacy of the public art in the two shopping centres. The public in its meetings with public art within the actual context is also influenced by the meaning and value associated with this history. The history goes back at least as far as the monuments produced during classical antiquity, and is also associated with the art presented in more traditional artworld arenas of museums and galleries.

The expectation that public works of art should play active roles within a public context is not a new expectation, but what the expectations are and the role the artworks play have changed. The monuments which were commissioned before the 18<sup>th</sup> century were about control and domination; their primary intention was to present the power of the Gods and their representatives on earth. When a public for the arts developed during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, an appreciation and interest in the arts was regarded as good for the moral life of society due to the fact that art offered moral, political and social guidance and placing art in locations other than museums and galleries offered it to a wider audience. The educational guidance provided by art has remained a quality associated with public art projects, but during the 20<sup>th</sup> century the ideological content became less pronounced. The planners of public art projects started to see art as offering practical aesthetic qualities to dysfunctional urban environments. The 20<sup>th</sup> century also saw an increasing focus on public needs and efforts to communicate with the public. The political and ideological agenda associated with the artworks was no longer primarily about supporting the official understanding of public places, art was also used to criticise this understanding.

Public art is now intended to be inclusive rather than exclusive and moralising. However, this does not mean that the educational aspect has completely disappeared or that aesthetic quality is no longer a requirement. The Dandelion outside City Syd has meaningful content. The public in Tiller is offered an aesthetic object which also aspires

to challenge ideas about the place. Cher Krauss Knight suggests that shopping centres do not often aim to challenge the public through their use of public art (Knight 2008:76). The use of art in shopping centres like the Bullring is about establishing an image, particularly one associated with luxury. The meaning and value provided by the public art aims to support an image of the Bullring as a place that is inclusive and unchallenging. The implicit guidance which it offers is about encouraging the shopping centre public to shop.

The candidacy of the Dandelion was influenced by the social and physical context provided by City Syd and the Tiller neighbourhood. The public art project that resulted in the Dandelion sculpture was also the product of collaboration between the established practice provided by Trondheim City Council, which has experience with working with numerous public art projects within the local urban environment, and the Art Academy in Trondheim, whose students needed the opportunity to put their ideas into practice. As a group, the public art committee had the knowledge about art and understanding of the practice required to plan, produce and define objects as public art. Individually, only three of the members of the public art committee had a close association with the artworld. The public art consultants offered artworld practice which allowed the definition of the project as art, but the values associated with the planning of the public art in Tiller were not just artworld values. Values associated with professional experience used when planning for the urban environment in Trondheim also had relevance within the context of the public art project.

The students from the art academy suggested ten potential projects for the area around City Syd. Three projects were chosen but only the Dandelion was realised. The public art committee chose the projects which they considered most realistic within the practical and financial demands of the project. They also chose the projects which they thought were the most aesthetically pleasing. The planned public art was, by actively engaging with the public and the physical context, expected to have a positive effect on the neighbourhood in general. It was expected that it would challenge ideas about the place, cause debate and change the way the public understood the physical framework

around City Syd. The Dandelion was also expected to play an aesthetic role on the roundabout and improve the visual appearance of the area outside City Syd.

The Bullring's shopping centre developers also planned for art that would be active and relational. The group that provided the candidacy for the Bullring art and planned and produced the eight works of art was much larger and much more fluid than the public art committee that planned the Dandelion. Three members of the group who planned the Bullring art were interviewed and this group was central in the planning process. The production of public works of art is characteristic artworld practice. However, the background knowledge required to define objects as works of art, and the understanding that their activities were artworld practice, was implicit knowledge among the group of shopping centre developers rather than explicit. It informed what they did but it was not something that they were conscious of all the time. This also applied to City Syd's public art committee.

The Bullring project was a commercial project funded by the Birmingham Alliance who developed the shopping centre, and the public art project was planned and produced at the same pace as the shopping centre itself. The Dandelion was a publicly funded project, planned for a location that was just outside a shopping centre context which had been in place since 1987. The background for the commissioning of the two public art projects and the source of funding influenced the form and function of the projects and the meaning and value associated with them. The Dandelion is intended to challenge the visual impression that the area around the shopping centre makes. The public art in the Bullring does not aspire to challenge its public, it aims to please.

A successful shopping centre was what the shopping centre developers planned for in the Bullring, and public art was expected to help the shopping centre become successful. The shopping centre developers had specific ideas about what constituted successful public art, and these ideas were influenced by the roles that the shopping centre developers played outside the public art project. The urban designer believes that public art should increase urban legibility; the shopping centre developer expects public art to help create a sense of place; and the public art consultant wanted the public art to fulfil practical and aesthetic requirements. Achieving all this and at the same

time being meaningful and relevant to the place requires that the artworks fulfil a large bundle of tasks. Nevertheless, fulfilling all the demands of the project limits a work of art's ability to enchant and have agency. This is a reference to Alfred Gell's suggestion that art as an example of technical prowess can encourage us to see the real world in enchanted form (Gell, 1992:44). Art as a separate kind of technical activity, which has associations with the everyday life, is able to attract and enchant because it embodies something special and different. An object, I suggest, stops functioning as a work of art when it is associated with so many qualities at once; its functionality causes it to lose its exclusivity and difference.

In the Bullring, objects which were planned as works of art, for example the 24-Hour Railings, the Bricks and the Light Wands have become part of the functional fabric of the shopping centre, and they are not often noticed by their public or recognised as works of art. Their agency is therefore limited by the wealth of expectations. Despite this, as part of the fabric of the shopping centre, they are helping to create a place which is aesthetically pleasing and that the public appreciates. Positive aesthetic qualities can encourage a social role but they are not always enough on their own. It is also possible to suggest that there is a discrepancy between the expectations of the planners and producers and the actual role that the public art plays. However, this does not mean that the artworks do not play a role. A role may take an unexpected form.

The art in the Bullring lacks educational content. The guidance it offers is about shopping; the Bullring art is expected to provide a sense of place and encourage feelings of pleasure by providing aesthetic qualities which other shopping centres lack. This avoidance of social issues is common in shopping centre art. Retail developers and managers fear that art that discusses social issues will put the public off their desire to shop (Knight, 2008:76). The public in shopping centres is large and diverse and some members of this public are there purely to relax and enjoy themselves while others may be disposed to look at and think about the art around them. The Bullring has up to forty million visitors a year and the shopping centre developers have therefore missed the chance to do more than create a sense of place and encourage people to shop. The Dandelion at City Syd, although it offers more of a challenge to the understanding of the place, is unable alone to make a serious impact on the understanding of the context. In

addition, the Dandelion is primarily an aesthetic object, which encourages the public to focus on the way the sculpture looks; its meaningful impact is limited and fleeting. However, a negative evaluation of the use of positive aesthetic qualities to create a sense of place undervalues the difficulties involved in creating pleasurable places and the necessity of an aesthetic role in the physical context. An aesthetic role, although it does not make a dramatic impact, may have a subtle contemplative effect on the context which it aims to support.

Shopping centres are places where the public spends a lot of time shopping, working and involved in other kinds of social activity, but they are not public places, they are privately owned places which aim to make maximum profit. Shopping centre management decides on the opening hours and appropriate behaviour. We are encouraged to spend time there, but only if we have the finances to do so or are providing a service which shopping centres need. Public art in shopping centres helps to define what kind of place it is. By encouraging the association of meaning and value that is broader than the commercial activity usually associated with shopping centres, public art can help to make the place seem more like a public place than the privately owned commercial space that it actually is. Furthermore, public art also supports an aura of exclusivity by providing an atmosphere of luxury, one where only those with the necessary finances feel comfortable. Public art must also be maintained; this requires security and it therefore supports the exclusion of unwanted social elements. Art has the potential to increase the value associated with a context at the expense of those who cannot afford to be there. By providing something which is different from the rest of the shopping centre context, public art may end up excluding those who are different. Public art in shopping centres must balance the inclusive with the exclusive because public art which only has agency for a limited idea of who the public is has only achieved a limited role within the social context.

### **The Active Phase in the Social Life of Shopping Centre Art**

In this section, the public response is in focus and it is the third of Appadurai's aspects to be presented. The active phase allows the study of the actual relational situation around

the public art at City Syd and in the Bullring. Appadurai called this phase the commodity phase (Appadurai, 1986:13). However, it is artworks and not commodities that are in focus here. The commodity phase is known here as the active phase because it is within this phase that it is possible to see the artworks in relational activity with the shopping centre public. The context links the candidacy of an artwork with the active phase and it allows different groups to meet and interact. Although it is possible to study artworks in motion within the active phase, it is not suggested that all public works of art are part of active relationships with their public. An active relationship is the ideal, the one that public art committees plan for, but some works of art such as the statue of Nelson within the context of the Bullring during the fieldwork period, are only occasionally in interaction within the shopping centre public. A work of art can play a passive non-active role. The active phase highlights the differences in the roles that public art plays during its social life within a shopping centre context.

The public art committee in Tiller and the shopping centre developers at the Bullring had expectations about the meaning and value that would be associated with the artworks once they were installed in the shopping centres, and they planned for them to play specific roles. In addition, the background of history, theory and practice associated with the artworld influences the public understanding of public art. The art installed in the two shopping centres was therefore not a number of blank pages upon which meaning could simply be imposed by the public. Meaning cannot entirely be predefined; it is also a product of the context into which an artwork is installed. It is the artworks in motion in relationship with the public that points to their value within the social context. The value a public work of art achieves is not static, it changes according to the artwork's place within the candidacy and the active phase, and it is influenced by changes that take place within the social and physical context around it.

The social role of a public work of art depends on its definition as a work of art. This definition is an active part of the relationship with the public. If the Dandelion had not been defined as a work of art by its public in Tiller then its social role would have been different. The definition of a work of art like the Dandelion in Tiller depends on the planning and production process which takes place among members of the artworld; it



also depends on the shopping centre public's understanding of how the definitional process works within the artworld as well as their own efforts to define the sculpture as a work of art. The role of the art in the Bullring also depends on how it is defined, but the fieldwork experience points to the artworks in the Bullring not being dependent on being defined as art. The public was aware of the presence of the Bull for example, but they did not always define it as a work of art. It was "*just the Bull*" and other aspects associated with its role in the shopping centre were sometimes more important than its definition as a work of art.



Tiller, January 2008

There are certain aspects associated with the Dandelion which allow it to be defined as a work of art by its public. Skill associated with the artists who made the Dandelion is one of the qualities associated with the sculpture and with art. The idea of the artistic genius which was established in 18<sup>th</sup> century aesthetic theory is also present in

Tiller, and is associated with the public understanding of the technical skills which an artist controls. Skill can inspire belief in the artist and in the artwork. Difference is also a quality that encourages the definition of the Dandelion as a work of art. A work of art that is different has a defamiliarising effect, and in this way it can open the public's eyes to the world as it is perceived and not just as it is known (Shklovsky, 1965:12). The strangeness of the Dandelion's form within its location offers it a place within a category of objects outside the realm of the everyday which otherwise exist within the context in Tiller. Skill and difference were two of the definitional suggestions made by the public at City Syd, but the public was also aware of the problems associated with the definition of an object as a work of art within the artworld. There no longer exists within the artworld a list of necessary conditions that can define an object as a work of art according to the way it looks, therefore the public often suggested that anything or everything could be defined as art today, including a large dandelion.

Being aware of the open definition did not hinder the public from expressing personal preferences, which they suggested allowed an object to be defined as art. Attractiveness was a definitional requirement at City Syd. Aesthetic qualities can no longer be said to be enough to define objects as art within the artworld, but positive aesthetic qualities do encourage the definition of the Dandelion as a work of art in its context in the vicinity of City Syd. Visual qualities establish contact and play an active part in the relationship the Dandelion has with its public. Positive aesthetic quality therefore remains central within the shopping centre public's definition of art. The public's preference for positive aesthetic qualities is reflected in its use of the term 'nice' to describe the Dandelion. The word nice is associated with the visual appearance of the sculpture, and it provides a way to understand how the Dandelion has become associated with the everyday lives of the public at City Syd. Agency theory suggests that a work of art can play an active role in a relationship with its public. However, Gell did not see aesthetic qualities as relevant within agency theory. Aesthetic quality suggests contemplation, which is passive. It also points to an evaluation of art objects, which suggests interior mental acts, and the anthropology of art which Gell had in mind was interested in the production, circulation and reception of art (Gell, 1998:3). Nevertheless, when there is an object involved, the public will consider its visual qualities and evaluate

them. Evaluating the objects in the context around us is an everyday activity that is not just connected to aesthetic objects, and the aesthetic experience is not just associated with art objects; aesthetic qualities are also associated with popular culture. The breadth of the aesthetic experience allows the Dandelion to be associated with aspects involved in the everyday lives of the public at City Syd. The word nice may be associated with practical everyday terminology that is useful within the lives of the shopping centre public. It is not part of the artworld's lexicon, but the Dandelion's niceness, which is represented by its positive aesthetic qualities, is the primary means by which the sculpture instigates contact with its public.

Aesthetic qualities are often what the public first perceives when it looks at a work of art, and the visual meeting helps an artwork to present meanings by visual means (Danto, 2005:10). Looking at the Dandelion encourages the public to think about what it knows about the sculpture and what it means to them as members of its public. The agency of the Dandelion is based on a complex independency between what the public sees, what it knows and what it associates with the sculpture, and it is the aesthetic qualities of the Dandelion which initiate the response. The Dandelion has become part of the physical and social context found in the Tiller neighbourhood and the evaluation of the sculpture takes place within an associative structure initiated by the shopping focused environment. The public art committee planned for positive aesthetic qualities to be associated with the sculpture. The importance of these qualities in the role that the Dandelion plays was unexpected although all the members of the public art committee liked the Dandelion. The public's appreciation and the committee's own appreciation were seen as going together.

The associative structure, which is part of the active phase of the Dandelion sculpture's social trajectory, connects with an existing system of classification relating to the dandelion plant which grows wild in Tiller. The dandelion plant was not specifically associated with the neighbourhood prior to the installation of the sculpture. The plant itself is associated with the Norwegian landscape as a whole, it is commonplace, but because of the representational aesthetic form of the sculpture, it has been given specific local associations which provide a classificatory system that can be used by its public to

explain the role of the sculpture at City Syd. The classification takes place on two levels; on the sensible level which is provoked by what we perceive, and on the intelligible level, where what we know or understand about an object provokes a response (Lévi-Strauss, 1966:63). There are two main descriptions of dandelion plants; they are often described as attractive yellow flowers and they are also described as weeds. The descriptions point to the two levels of the classification process. The physical form of the Dandelion sculpture provides a connection between the two levels; it is the visible or aesthetic connection which starts the associative process encouraging the public to consider what they know about dandelions. The sensible level is most successful in providing a connection with the public. For many members of the public, the sculpture does not have meaning all the time, and when it does have meaning it is only fleeting and transitory.

The abundance of dandelions encourages a breadth of associations with the Dandelion itself, but this same quality can stop it from having a depth of meaning. Aesthetic qualities encourage the public to make contact with the Dandelion; it offers access to the meaning embodied in the sculpture. However, the lack of opposition offered by its representational form prevents this form and the meaning associated with it from being valued by some members of its public. The associative power of the Dandelion provides meaningful possibilities, but not for everyone and not all the time. Despite this limitation, it is the commonplace qualities of dandelion plants that makes the meaning associated with the Dandelion sculpture easily accessible and this encourages numerous fleeting relationships, which Alfred Gell suggests encourages the agency of a work of art (Gell, 1998:22). It is these fleeting relationships which connect the sculpture with the everyday lives of the public, and talking about art in Tiller is associated with the everyday lives of the public.

The meaning and value provided by the artworld only has limited impact. For some members of the Dandelion's public, the sculpture has become a symbol with which to understand the social and physical situation found within the context of the area around City Syd. This relates particularly to the idea that dandelions are weeds. In Tiller, weeds are now used to characterise the local population and to explain the architectural form which is found in the commercial zone. People, architecture and weeds have become obvious associations in Tiller. The Dandelion provides an aesthetic standard with which

to evaluate the social and physical context. They evaluated it before the sculpture was installed, but the Dandelion provides visual and meaningful qualities to do this with. Tiller and its Dandelion can be seen, in Lévi-Strauss's terms, as "going together" (Lévi-Strauss 1966:63). There is agency in the associative structure which the classification of the Dandelion offers its public. This provides the sculpture with a role within the local social context.



The Bullring, May 2009

Shopping is a social activity. It is an important activity at City Syd and in the Bullring, it helps to define the two shopping centres as physical contexts, and it influenced the candidacy of the public art projects. However, the Dandelion is not directly associated with the activity of shopping. City Syd was established as a place to shop twenty years before the Dandelion was installed, and the sculpture's location outside the boundaries of the shopping centre has not encouraged its association with the activity of shopping. On

the other hand, all eight works of art in the Bullring shopping centre were intended to encourage shopping and of these, it is the Bull that is most closely associated with the shopping centre and shopping.

Shopping is not just about production and consumption, it is also about the people who are shopped for and the people who are shopped with. The shopping which takes place on an everyday basis is part of a social dynamic which connects people, and much of the shopping that we do takes place because of everyday needs associated with the people that are cared about (Miller, 1998b:23). Shopping is therefore not just about the controlling powers of consumption, but it can also tell us something about what shoppers believe in. Shopping is described by Daniel Miller as an “act of love” (1998b:18). Shopping in the Bullring is for many members of the shopping centre public a relational experience, and the Bull, in its location by one of the two main entrances to the shopping centre, plays an active part in this relational activity. The Bull mediates meetings between people visiting the shopping centre and several members of the shopping centre public whom I spoke to told me that they loved the Bull. The Bull has a pleasing aesthetic form which is easily accessible physically and meaningfully, but they also love the Bull because it is associated with a place they like to be, and an activity which they enjoy. Loving the Bull and liking the shopping centre are intimately associated. The shopping centre public loves to shop in the Bullring. They would not have said that they loved the Bull if they had not liked the Bullring as well. The Dandelion is also part of the social and physical context outside City Syd. The public likes the Dandelion, they think it is nice but it is not intimately associated with the activity of shopping at City Syd and the public does not claim to love it.

The context which a shopping centre offers affects the relational activity which takes place, and where the public chooses to shop says something about what is meant by the act of shopping. The Bull offers value to the context which has a wider field of association than the purely commercial. Winning customers increasingly means that creating a sense of place within shopping centres is important. The Dandelion is creating a sense of place on the roundabout and the area around it. It is intended to encourage positive visual associations with the area, but its association with the shopping centre and



the act of shopping is indirect. The art in the Bullring, along with elements like the Selfridges department store, is providing a physical context which offers a particular sense of place. The shops in the Bullring could be found anywhere in Britain thus it is not the shops alone that provide a sense of place. Public art in shopping centres is an attempt to communicate that the Bullring is a place which has meaning and value outside the act of shopping. It also suggests that the retail managers care about the place and desire the shopping centre public to do so, and to associate themselves with the meaning and value which it is offering. The Bull as the most active public work of art in the Bullring connects two different sides to the Bullring; the Bullring as a historical market place and the Bullring as a contemporary shopping centre. The Bull is a meeting place for different ideas about what the shopping centre is.

The Bull's social agency is most noticeable in its ability to encourage the public to connect with each other within the shopping centre. It is the place where both old and young members of the shopping centre public meet, and it is where they take photographs to prove that they have been in the Bullring and in Birmingham. Objects, according to Alfred Gell, acquire agency when they become enmeshed in the texture of social relationships (Gell, 1998:26). The agency of the Bull is available all the time and it is physically and socially accessible.

The Bull plays an active role within today's Bullring and it has meaning and value within its location, but this could change. Most public art gives the impression of permanence; this is because its physical form is often large and heavy. Contexts can change, and public art, no matter how heavy it is, can be moved. In addition, it is not just form and location that gives the impression of permanence; meaning associated with the art also appears permanent. However, as time passes, meaning can be forgotten and the public connection with it can change. The meaning and value associated with the Dandelion changed during the course of the fieldwork period. Just after its installation, the Dandelion was actively different within its context. As time passed, its position became established and it was not noticed as often because of its difference. Changes in the weather conditions and the season also affected the meaning and value associated with the Dandelion sculpture. The active role that we associate with the Bull in the Bullring

today may not be permanent. An analysis of the statue of Admiral Lord Nelson, which is also located in the Bullring, indicates that location, meaning and value are not always permanent in association with public art. The statue of Nelson used to play an active role in the Bull Ring which was similar to the role the Bull plays in the Bullring today.



The Bullring, February 2008

The Bull is part of the shopping centre developer's efforts to retain a historical connection with the retail activity that took place on the site prior to the present shopping centre. In addition to the Bull, history and place through reuse and reinterpretation is associated with a number of elements within the physical framework of the shopping

centre. The statue of Admiral Lord Nelson from 1809 is a public work of art with a long historical association with the context. Nelson's role within the Bullring appears on initial consideration to primarily be based on the sculpture's aesthetic qualities, but further investigation shows that its historical association with the city and the Bullring is the main reason for it remaining on its plinth in the shopping centre. There was little public response to the statue during the fieldwork. It is active during fleeting moments, but the fleeting moments of activity are far fewer than is associated with the Bull.

According to Appadurai, things can be seen as moving in and out of the commodity state during the commodity phase (Appadurai, 1986:13). He goes on to suggest that understanding commodities is doomed to fail if they are not understood as being in motion (1986:16). Examples like the Dandelion, the Bull and Lord Nelson point to the value of public works of art also being in motion. They may retain their definition as public works of art, but the role that they play and their value within the social context is in flux. It is possible that a work of art may stop being active within the social context and therefore according to the definition of public art presented earlier, stop being a public work of art. When Nelson was installed in 1809 he was an important national symbol. He represented Britain's naval power, the victory over the French, the city's economic success and he was one of the most well-known public figures of his day. In 1809 everyone knew who Nelson was. The public paid for the statue to be made and installed within the city's most prominent location; the centre of the Bull Ring marketplace. Nelson is still a well-known hero, but his connection with Birmingham today is not obvious; an admiral so far away from the sea seems on initial consideration a little out of place. Moreover, Nelson is no longer at the heart of social activity in the Bullring. The statue of Nelson still plays a social role, but he is less active and the focus of social activity is now around the Bull.

The statue of Admiral Nelson is one of four historical elements which are part of the shopping centre's physical context. The other historical elements within the Bullring are architectural structures and their role is functional as well as aesthetic and historical. Their reuse and reinterpretation makes sense within the physical framework of the shopping centre. They connect the Bullring with its past and offer meaning and value that

is not obviously commercial. The statue of Nelson does not make such a visual and physical impact and his role for many members of the shopping centre public I spoke to is less obvious. However, the public in the Bullring did appreciate historical monuments and when asked about the statue said that the statue represented the history of the place, and that this was important in a shopping centre context. This was said even when the public admitted to not knowing who the statue represented. A historical role becomes more important when the public has knowledge about who the statue represents.

Nelson is not the only artwork in the Bullring to play a more passive than active role. The Bricks, texts, window and 24-Hour Railings all receive little or no response from their intended public. This could change, but the potential for relational activity between the statue of Nelson and his public is greater because of the depth of the historical association with the city. The statue is a repository of meaning in the Bullring. Art objects do not just make us act; they are also part of what makes us who we are. Sculptures like the Dandelion, the Bull and Nelson provide meaning connecting people with the place. Art objects may therefore be related to knowledge and value that is personal and situational, connecting the public with works of art on the fleeting occasions when they are in contact with them.

### **The Social Role of Public Art in Shopping Centres**

The focus within this analysis is the social role of the shopping centre art, and there are four central themes within the analysis which point to the challenges associated with public art within the active non-art focused contexts of shopping centres. The first two themes are associated with the theoretical framework provided by Gell and Appadurai, which although they offer clarity and structure within the analysis, also offer opposition.

The first theme supplied by Alfred Gell's agency theory proposes that works of art within the social and relational context encourage the public to act (Gell, 1998:16). Gell's theory provides insight into the active role of art, offering the possibility of studying works of art as social actors rather than passive objects. It was these ideas that provided background for the fieldwork activity. With Gell's theory in mind, the intention was to search for where a public work of art could be seen to have agency and to discover what factors encouraged an active social role.

Gell's agency theory is associated with the definition of public art supplied by Massey and Rose, which proposes that an object only becomes public art when it is in a relationship with its public and has agency (Massey and Rose, 2003:18). When artworks are part of the texture of social relationships they have agency, but public art does not only make us act by being elements within a physical and social context; public works of art can also be part of what makes us who we are. Public art helps us to understand a context, socially, meaningfully and it helps orientate the public. Artworks are part of what makes a place practised and they can offer information about the context in both its past and present forms. They do this because they do not just make a connection with their public visually, they also connect meaningfully. Planners and producers of public art expect art to play an active role and there is a longstanding tradition for this within the artworld. The challenge associated with public art in shopping centres is installing art which achieves this active role. Art does not become active and relational because of expectations alone. Agency theory suggests the active potential of artworks within social contexts. Massey and Rose make agency a requirement and its presence or lack thereof make it possible to judge the effectiveness of a work of art within the social context. However, public art cannot always be judged by its effectiveness or whether it lives up to expectations. Artworks with agency can be seen to play a role in the social context, but few works of art can be seen to be active all the time for everyone. Even the Bull, which I suggest plays a particularly active role, is not noticed by everyone all the time.

Arjun Appadurai's social life of things provided the second main theme and the context, candidacy and active phase which encourage a social description of the activity around the public art. The social life of things points to where within the object's social life agency can be expected to be found. It is objects in motion that Appadurai is interested in and the three aspects within the tripartite allow us to follow the paths they follow. The context, candidacy and active phase are not separate categories which can be clearly compartmentalised. Within the thesis I have chosen to present each aspect individually, which has caused some unnecessary separation, but this separation highlights the individual relevance of each aspect and clarifies where their role is important and why. Public works of art are not independent aesthetic objects, they depend on the social and physical context, and on the theory and practice which supports

their development. It is suggested here that the changes in the role of a public work of art will be a result of changes in the social and physical context around it. These changes may be personal, seasonal and fleeting or they may have a longer historical aspect and be associated with developments over time or physical intervention. Meaning and value associated with a public work of art will change during the whole of its social life, but it is most social when in a relationship with the public during the active phase, and it is here that there exists the greatest potential for change.

A third main theme explored here, which is one of Alfred Gell's exclusions, is the artworld. Artworld theory helps to define objects as works of art, and the activities of those who plan, make and present art as artworld practices. It provides material objects to be located in public places which are both exclusive and different. There is a background of history, theory and practice stemming from the artworld associated with public art. However, the projects have important differences associated with the planning process, which affects the role that the public art plays in the shopping centres, and the meaning and value they achieve in association with the shopping centre public.

The Dandelion was funded by public money and it is located in a context which is owned and serviced by the city council outside the boundaries of the City Syd shopping centre. The sculpture is located in close physical proximity to City Syd but it is not about shopping; it is an aesthetic object which aims to do something with the visual appearance and understanding of the context in Tiller. None of the members of the shopping centre public I spoke to at City Syd associated the Dandelion with shopping. The public art in the Bullring was privately funded. The aim of the public art project in the Bullring was to create a successful shopping centre and therefore to encourage shopping. The Dandelion does not have such a functional focus; its association with the shopping centre is a visual association. Aesthetic quality and the effort to improve the visual impression are primary, but there is an educational undertone which suggests that the physical context lacks positive aesthetic quality and requires improvement. The Bullring art is not offering an educational undertone, it is about establishing image. The guidance that the public art in the Bullring offers is about shopping. These were primary expectations associated with the planning process and the candidacy of the public art in



the two shopping centres. They provide a background with which to understand the role that the public art went on to play in the shopping centres. The kind of funding which was used to support the development of the shopping centre art can be seen to influence the functionality of the two projects, it also influences the organisational background associated with the public art projects and affects the meaning and value associated with the public art. Functionality is associated with success in the Bullring, but it also threatens the qualities of exclusivity and difference which help to define the objects installed as art.

The educational undertone at City Syd provided some negative associations with the sculpture which are also part of its agency. Being a weed provides meaning as well as colourful physical and visual form. Its interpretation by its public is associated with the expectations provided by the candidacy even though the public had little knowledge about these expectations.

The fourth theme which has had an impact on the role of public art in the two shopping centres is the visual and meaningful associations provoked by aesthetic quality. Aesthetic qualities have not always been understood as active within a social and relational context, but within a public art project these qualities often start the process of establishing a relational connection with the shopping centre public. Having meaning to communicate encourages relational activity and interaction that is more than just a fleeting contemplation of visual qualities. However, the meaning associated with the art in the two shopping centres only has a limited impact upon its public. The interaction between the public art at City Syd and the Bullring and their public starts with its visual qualities that often remained the focus of the response.

Analysing the social role of public art in shopping centres is not about evaluating whether the artworks have positive aesthetic quality or not, because being described as having positive or negative aesthetic quality is not enough to establish whether the artworks play a role. An art critical analysis may miss the point, good public art is not bad art, as Danto suggests (in Knight, 2008:85). Good public art may fulfil the expectations of the planners and producers and the definition suggested by Massey and Rose by playing an active social role within the context in which it is installed. Liking or

disliking the physical form of the art does play a role, but the main question is whether the art can be understood as public art or not, and can therefore be seen as playing an active social role. Public art can be seen as playing an active social role at City Syd and the Bullring, but the way the artworks are active varies, and this is highlighted by comparing the Dandelion and the Bull. The Dandelion is understood as an artwork by its public and it is appreciated because of its positive aesthetic qualities. However, the role the Dandelion plays is less obviously social than the Bull in the Bullring. The Dandelion is an autonomous aesthetic object in the traditional artworld sense and it stands in physical isolation on the traffic roundabout. The Bull is also understood by many members of its public as a work of art with positive aesthetic qualities, but there were also people who did not regard it as a work of art. They liked or even loved it but not necessarily because it was understood as a work of art. Its location outside one of the shopping centre's main entrances and the meaning associated with bulls and the place make the Disney Bull planned by the shopping centre developers a social actor within the shopping centre.

Public art challenges artworld understandings of what a work of art is and the role it plays. When working with public art they must put aside their usual expectations about autonomy, public knowledge and the location for presentation. Shopping centre art takes these challenges even further because it is an extreme case within the field of public art. It is extreme because the art exists within a physical and social context which is focused on the activity of shopping. Art in and around shopping centres is not there for its own sake. Public art is intended to support activities associated with the shopping centre and it must fight for public attention within the context. The public was not expecting to meet art thus their relationship is accidental. Shopping centres are a non-artworld location with a predominantly non-artworld public, and this offers opposition to the understanding of the objects installed as works of art. Achieving an active social role as public works of art within a context which is not about art is not easy. It requires careful planning and there is no guarantee that the art will be noticed. However, when public art achieves a social role within a shopping centre it can play a part, as the example of the Bull shows, in encouraging the relational activity which takes place within the shopping centre as a whole. Shopping in the Bullring in association with the Bull is for many members of the

Bullring public a little more special than shopping anywhere else, it has become an act of love (Miller, 1998b:18). In addition, analysis points to the actual role of a public work of art being associated with the unexpected. Meaning and value cannot always be predefined. A more contemplative role than was originally planned may be the result of the artwork's position within the relational context. The Dandelion offers meaning and value to the context in Tiller that did not exist before, but it is not meaning that is present all the time for everyone.

The active social role required to allow the artworks at City Syd and in the Bullring to be defined as public art can take more than one form. The art can be meaningful, aesthetic and historical. Public art can provide meeting places, function as landmarks and encourage legibility. It may be a source of debate, a source of memories, and support an atmosphere of luxury. The effect can be unexpected, changeable or provoking. Furthermore, public art can support the act of shopping and legitimise the location of a shopping centre within a context. Installing public art in shopping centres is a big gesture, which aims to have an effect on the physical and social context, but it is actually effective through small acts of everyday interaction. It is these small acts which make up the fleeting moments when public art can be seen to be playing a social role.

Artworks with agency actively influence those who were using or beholding them. They have, Alfred Gell suggests, the ability to enchant and cause people to act. However, the influence of works of art does not happen all the time; it occurs in the fleeting moments when social conditions allow it (Gell 1998:22). The public response shows that public works of art in shopping centres are most effective relationally during visual interaction with their public. Moreover, it is the potential for numerous fleeting moments which strengthens the relational connection between an artwork and its public. As a part of the interactions and independencies of the social life of a shopping centre its public may come to love the public art and appreciate its place within the social and physical context, or they may only register an artwork's presence during fleeting moments when social and/or physical factors encourage it. Fleeting moments are necessary for public art to achieve its social role and their relevance within the social and physical context should not be underestimated. A shopping centre with art becomes a

particular place for the people who shop there, because art encourages a sense of place. Shopping centres with strong self-images are successful and the relational activity which takes place is positive because it takes place within a social context supported by public art.

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## **Appendix**

### **A Fieldwork Report**

The empirical information gathered during a period of fieldwork which took place off and on for more than two years is the foundation upon which this anthropological analysis of the social role of public art in shopping centres is built. The fieldwork at City Syd started in February 2007 and ended just before Christmas 2008. The public art project which eventually resulted in the installation of the Dandelion outside City Syd was still under the planning stage when I began looking for a location for my fieldwork. I was therefore able to follow the last stages in the development of the public art project at City Syd, and I also observed the Dandelion establishing its social position on the roundabout. The Dandelion was installed in August 2007. Fieldwork in the Bullring started in November 2007 with a short preliminary visit. The last of four visits took place in May 2009.

A lot more time was spent doing fieldwork at City Syd than in the Bullring. Its geographical location just outside Trondheim, my home town, allowed this. Although I have spent more time at City Syd, the fieldwork was less intensive and elements such as the weather and my own boredom played a greater role. More than two hundred interviews with people from all sides of shopping centre life were completed during the fieldwork at City Syd. They were people of all ages and both genders, and included shoppers, people who work at the shopping centre, people just passing through, and regulars who meet at the cafeteria on the second floor most days of the week for a chat.

Most interviews/conversations were short and informal. When I first started my research at City Syd I had a questionnaire with nineteen questions. I approached the public with my badge, my book and a pile of papers. I soon discovered that I had more success if the book and the papers were kept out of sight. I therefore limited my use of questionnaires to employees within the shopping centre who were more prepared for my approach. Questionnaires were only used when employees had time to answer my questions, for example during quiet periods or during breaks. When talking to people at City Syd, I memorised the questions that I asked and attempted to turn my interviews into

informal conversations. I allowed the person being interviewed to define how long we talked and how the conversation about art developed. Time was always limited; I attempted to repay people's kindness in taking the time to talk to me by being as concise as possible. The language used during interviews was Norwegian. The translations of the public's responses were done by me.

The public art committee at Tiller was also interviewed as well as one of the artists who developed the Dandelion sculpture. These people were interviewed individually using a longer list of questions and a dictaphone. The questions were designed for each person based on previous interviews and what I knew about their role in the process of developing the public art project. This may be seen as a cumulative hermeneutic process, where a series of interviews develop based upon preceding interviews (Kaarhus, 1999 in Follo 2008:19). Eight individuals were interviewed about the planning process, and each interview lasted from thirty minutes to an hour. Although I interviewed each member of the group individually, the list of questions connected them because the public art committee was a group working together. At City Syd I interviewed the public art committee both before and after the sculpture's installation. The first set of interviews was aimed at uncovering expectations associated with the public art project. The second set of interviews was intended to gather information about whether the expectations were fulfilled.

One of the things I wanted to study was the development of relationships with the public art at City Syd. I have therefore spoken to some people, mostly City Syd employees, up to three times. A hairdresser's at City Syd is one of the locations where I found a number of people to interview. At one point, I was afraid that my research would turn into shopping with hairdressers because this group was so easy to gain access to. It was also nice and warm inside the salon.

Six main questions were used. The questions were more or less in place from the sculpture's installation on August 9<sup>th</sup> 2007. I tried to keep my questions as open as possible and to encourage people to talk broadly on the basis of them. The focus of the questions was the Dandelion, and the aim was to encourage the public to express an opinion about the art, whether they liked it or not, and if they associated any meaning



with it. I also asked what they thought about City Syd and the Tiller neighbourhood. I hoped to discover if the public thought that art played a role in the physical and social frameworks, and if they thought that public art could make a difference to the place. I also asked them to define art. Some people talked happily for a long time, but most people kept their answers short.

At City Syd I spent a lot of time wondering who to talk to, and talking myself out of talking to people. A lot of people I approached at City Syd said no to being interviewed. People generally do not like to be bothered with sales representatives or statistical studies, and an anthropologist with questions could easily be seen as falling into these categories. I noticed quite early on that I tended to approach women of a certain age initially (my age and older), but I gradually noticed that this group, although the largest group at City Syd, was most likely to say no to talking to me. For reasons unknown, men of all ages were much more willing to talk to me. There are lots of pensioners at City Syd during the day but I wanted my group to cover a wide range of ages, so I gradually avoided them. I found teenagers a bit daunting as they often appeared in groups. Anyone moving was also a problem because they were probably busy. Anyone eating was excluded because it seemed impolite to disturb them, and anyway how could they talk to me with food in their mouths? Some days there seemed to be no one who fitted into a category whom I dared to approach, although the large number of people I spoke with shows that I did manage to get around the problems I had in approaching people. Pensioners, receivers of disability benefit and mothers on maternity leave were in the majority among the people I spoke to at City Syd. I could never quite achieve the complete cross-section of society that I initially aimed at because my own life got in the way, sending me home at 3 o'clock, when people with daytime jobs were arriving at City Syd.

For the Bullring, I chose an intense fieldwork form, concentrating data collection into three week-long intensive fieldwork trips, plus a three-day exploratory visit. During the three weeks, I immersed myself in the interview process, moving from person to person within the shopping centre in the hope of encountering people willing to talk to me about

the art in the Bullring. When I say talk about art, I mean conversations that went beyond one word answers like, yes, no, maybe and it's nice. This meant long days in the shopping centre, and many ups and downs; moments of euphoria when I felt I had really managed to engage a member of the shopping centre public in a conversation about art, and other times when I felt physically that I could not face approaching another person. I have talked to at least one hundred and fifty people, from teenagers to senior citizens, shoppers, workers and others of both genders in the Bullring. I have also interviewed three shopping centre developers; these included a representative from Hammerson plc, the owners and developers of the Bullring site; a public art consultant; and a City Council representative responsible for urban design. I also interviewed the heritage officer at Birmingham City Council. This group was interviewed once using a long list of questions prepared individually for each person; the conversations lasted for at least an hour and were recorded.

At the Bullring, there was no time for doubts about who would be willing to talk to me. I had less time, and therefore set myself greater aims, for example talking to ten to twenty people per day instead of five or six at City Syd. The process was easier in the Bullring. Fewer people I approached said no to being interviewed, and there are a larger number of people to talk to. Up to forty million people a year pass through the Bullring. The Bullring also contains more art, and has a larger number of meeting points.

The questions that I asked the people I met in the Bullring were based on the questions that I used at City Syd, and I used the same interview form based on memorised questions with the intention of getting people involved in informal conversations about art. The limited time period meant that I did not have the opportunity to go back and talk to different groups again in the Bullring. At City Syd, I used a questionnaire when I wanted to spend more time with people working at the shopping centre and a questionnaire was used when I interviewed groups of pupils at a sixth form college in close proximity to City Syd. These extra rounds of interviews were not possible at the Bullring. To compensate for that, I had a slightly longer list of questions and although I did not always remember to ask every question, interviews tended to be slightly longer in the Bullring.

As mentioned earlier, the questions were similar to the ones asked at City Syd, but because of the location of the Bullring in Birmingham city centre and because the shopping centre developers showed an interest in the history of the shopping centre, I started my questions by asking what people thought of the Bullring and the role it plays in Birmingham. I wanted to know if the public was aware of the historical content prescribed for the art by the shopping centre developers. I was in general interested in the meaning that was associated with the art in the Bullring. There is a lot more art in and around the Bullring than there is in City Syd, but not all of it is located in central locations and not all of it looks like art objects. Some of the art is made up of texts on walls and colourful iron-railings. These are objects which are not always defined as art and are therefore not automatically associated with art. My questions were therefore aimed at discovering if people had seen the art and whether they regarded it as art. I also asked the people I spoke with to define art.

The fieldwork experience at the Bullring was different from what I experienced at City Syd. At the Bullring, unhindered by family life I aimed to cover a longer working day. I started at 10 am when the shopping centre had been open for an hour and stopped at twilight or 5.30 pm. The shopping centre was open until 9.00 pm, I could therefore in theory have extended my working day, but I discovered early on that people who were outside the usual cross-section of the shopping centre public appeared in the Bullring during the late afternoon/early evening. These people were not shoppers, and although they involved me in interesting conversations, the information gathered was not often relevant to my interest in art, and I found the religious or alcoholic undertone disturbing and therefore avoided the shopping centre after twilight. During my final visit to the Bullring I spent over half the period outside the shopping centre, because a gas leak in the air-conditioning system meant the shopping centre was closed for business. This turned out not to be a fieldwork disaster because workers and shoppers spent a lot of time outside waiting for the shopping centre to open. With nothing better to do than hang around they were often happy to answer my questions.

### **Jorun's Poem: Forbilde or *Role Model***

Jeg ser på deg – , *I look at you –*,  
du kan ikke snakke. *you cannot speak.*  
Men du kan vise meg vei, *But you can show me the way*,  
når livet møter en tung bakke. *when life meets a hard climb.*

Du gir ikke opp, *You do not give up*,  
selv om du blir tråkket på. *Even when you are trampled upon.*  
De vil ha deg unna, *They do not want you around*,  
men du finner nye veier å gå. *but you find new roads to travel.*

Du har fått et rykte, *You have a reputation*,  
som ikke er godt å ha. *which is not a good one to have.*  
Men du har dine rundt deg, *But you have your supporters around you*  
jeg ser at samhold er bra. *solidarity is good.*

Dine kraftige røtter, *Your strong roots*,  
irriterer så mange. *irritate so many.*  
Men røtter vi trenger, *But we need roots*  
både korte og lange. *both short ones and long.*

Om vi mister noen røtter, *If we lose some roots*,  
så har du vist meg, *you have shown me*,  
at jeg ikke må gi opp, *that I must not give up*,  
jeg må gjøre som deg. *I must do as you do.*

Du reiser deg opp, *You pick yourself up*,  
og skinner som ei sol. *and shine like the sun.*  
Din vilje, din styrke – *Your will, your strength -*  
takk løvetann !, for at du er på vår jord. *thank you dandelion!, for being on this earth*