



Louise Ashcroft

I'D RATHER
BE

SHOPPING

18 August – 20 September

arebyte



Supported and reported by funding by
ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND



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arebyte is pleased to present I'd Rather be Shopping by Louise Ashcroft.

Since January 2017, artist Louise Ashcroft has been in residence off-site at Westfield Shopping Centre in Stratford, East London, as part of arebyte's 2017 programme, Control.

Louise's research trips to Westfield have revolved around the marketing strategies used in fashion, retail and shopping culture in general, from the language used for branding and advertisements, to the architecture of shopping environment and the emotional impact of the shoppers and visitors.

I'd Rather Be Shopping is Louise Ashcroft's second project with arebyte this year. Her show All My Lives was at arebyteLASER in Clerkenwell from 17th July until 2nd August as part of Hotel Generation, a series of exhibitions curated by Rebecca Edwards.

about Louise Ashcroft

Louise Ashcroft's practice is generated from actions and observations made in ordinary places like the supermarket, a stranger's house, a LinkedIn profile, or the street. These contexts are used as material for social collages and subversions which reprogramme prevailing cultural logic and suggest alternatives. For example, planning a life together with strangers while helping them with their housework (*Why Don't We Live Together?*, 2016-17); repeatedly smuggling unfamiliar-looking African vegetables into supermarkets and trying to buy them (*Vegetable*, 2003-17); or working with communities in Exeter to redesign the entire Internet from scratch using whatever materials were to hand (*Remaking the Internet*, 2016).

Louise studied at The Royal College of Art and The Ruskin School of Art, Oxford. She is co-founder of the free art school AltMFA. She has exhibited widely including at Westminster Waste, The Koppel Project, The Government Art Collection, Exeter Phoenix, AVU Prague, Latitude Festival, Guest Projects, Turner Contemporary (Margate), ArtLicks Weekend, The Boring Conference and The Function Room. Louise was recently Family Artist in Residence at Camden Arts Centre and Tate Schools Artist in Residence. She is also a visiting lecturer at various universities including UCA Farnham and Goldsmiths.

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#SIGNS In April Louise worked with specialist sign painter Hannah Matthews to lead a workshop in which participants painted traditional narrow boat signs using words and phrases from fashionable slogan T-shirts found in Westfield, such as 'Sorry not sorry', 'I won't answer your texts' or 'Like is the new love', in lieu of boat names. Mass-produced languages of fast fashion were slowed down through this handmade process, which is traditionally used to christen boats Destiny, Dawdler or Narrow Escape (these are a few that frequent the river at Hackney Wick). Louise is making dozens of these boat signs, some of which will be displayed in the exhibition and then gifted to boats along the Stratford waterways after the show.

Mallopoly is a Westfield shopping centre based card game which is available for free at arebyte (it will also be handed out sporadically in the food court at Westfield). Players use the centre and its contents as material in a series of challenges relating to the social, economic and political context of the mall.

Retail Therapy is a bookable tour of Westfield shopping centre led by Louise Ashcroft. Each hour-long session is for between one and three participants, who will use the shops and their contents as props for psychological exploration.

Grimy Goods Louise has compiled words from Argos catalogues in Westfield to create a cut-up text, which has been recorded as a track by the acclaimed grime artist Maxsta. Westfield was built on top of an important grime venue and the area of E3 is the home of this influential music genre.

Artist Happy Meals Louise Ashcroft is redesigning the 'happy' toys given away with fast food in the shopping centre. Visitors to the food hall at Westfield can email artisthappymeal@gmail.com with a photograph of their fast food toy and their address and they'll be sent an artist-designed toy instead, demonstrating a more complex range of emotions.

I'd Rather be Shopping

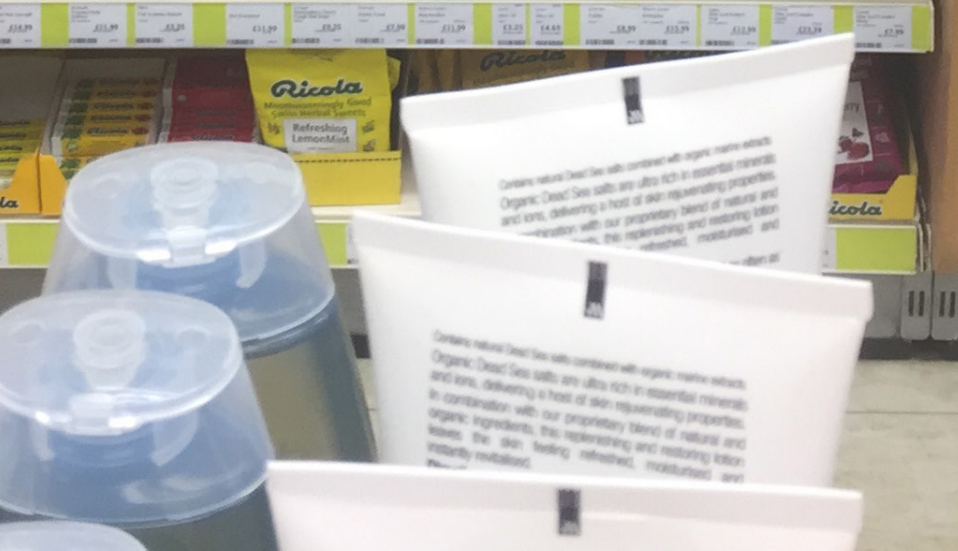
Trailer Text by Louise Ashcroft

Destination emblazoned on its forehead like a post-it-note Guess Who game heading for Taylor Swift, the 158 jams along Leyton High Road to Newham's proudest terminal. Stratford. Stratford! Stratford!! The word above the windshield tells its I-told-you-so\ {I-wish-you'd-trust-me} truth like a stopped clock's twice daily smugness; Sign screaming civilly in Edward Johnston's 1913 bowler-hatter humanist sans serif. Old school British gent suited in nu-nighties noughties neon. Anachronistic. Nana-chronistic. Like those Granny ravers ballroom dancing to techno in Fabric, all night with a Twitter hangover. Going viral.

And then it stops. An announcement...WESTFIELD. The colossal logo of the Australian mall. Post-colonial, post-state, postbox red. Teen skate stars, in advance of broken collarbones, flank the colossal logo as they YouTube down the stairs, #goofy-foot #McTwist #casperflip #fail.

No Shakespeare. Stratford without the Avon. And the Avon lady has settled down, ditched the door to door catalogue for a London Living Wage at Pandora or SpaceNK, sharing their company vision mission-values to optimise personal sales performance. Surfing stock levels in line with the centralised system. But it's not a centre any more, it's a mall; a sprawl. In crystallography, Polymorphism is the occurrence of multiple crystalline forms. Anarcho-capitalising like Quartz. Every Swarovski is a relay and exists only as a relay, hold on we're going home- but we're not. You, the shopper, are the door to door sales rep now. So represent! Represent! Represent yourself. Huh. The street is filled with undercovers. Lipsy, Hello Kitty and a Fiorelli at half the price.

Slogan tshirts ranging from 'just do it' to 'stay in bed'; from 'stay fierce' to 'I'd rather be shopping'. From 'trouble maker' to 'aliens believe in us' or 'sorry not sorry' or 'like is the new love'. Woodcut emo street&sheet wear in punchy German gothic script; wars away from Johnston's transport font, but vacant enough for newer trenches and networks. The Victorians built locomotives on this site. Industrial reliquary still clogs up the canal the other side of the Olympic Village. Boat names: Destiny, Wind Flower, Merlin, Marilyn, Lone Ranger, Genie. Not slogans, chants or demands; just vessels to a deferred elsewhere. And here's where we begin.



Retail Therapy



Book your free psychological shopping tour
with artist Louise Ashcroft

30th August 2017

Retailtherapywestfield@gmail.com

www.arebyte.com

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Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
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Grimy Goods :
Argos Catalogue Cut
Up Lyrics
by Louise Ashcroft
performed by Maxsta

In the shredding turbine, pesky Marshalls in tropical work-wear gather asymmetrically like cubic zirconia studs. Champions of clutter-free testosterone greetings, their enamelled legs melt into freshwater teat-speech, inflated by jets of white noise percussion.

To stop the mineral bladder overheating, newborns and ninjas are lacing the ebonised fountains with sieves of dried mink stubble-their split-yoke facial ride-ons grinning in soprano.

Flashing....Arcade-yellow solar-crown-fondue.

Lovers role-play with flirty sacrifice-generators, tuned to audible mouthpiece surges and waffled by the plush munchkin tissues of bamboo stowaways, printed with high-vis moon-hairs. Top-coat-stretching, just out of reach, they elbow-grease their embossed goggles for clarity, as a two-way voice pitches the thrills of his one-handed rubberised trigger switch, to preloaded echoes of teenage breathing sessions as the rebound of a pegasus-masher kneads his chest valves.

On special occasions like this, an ageless crew of discreet but cream-based survivors with plump accents release granules of lava pigments, which they've scraped off the hero with a marble squeegee and long, wet grass-combs. Military disco-balls are illuminated by 3D skeleton-messages- perhaps launching a new nasal-fin Bistro by leaking champagne and suction-based stain removers into the dry-folds of sixty-year bikini necklines. Prune-cast trolleys oscillating with frayed raindrops, these pearlescent humidifiers drip hygiene-breakdowns from gilded rose elevators, tempered with crushed waterfall-laquer.

Shimmering. As the live-feed gutter-flare-ups of your slouchy, distressed power-status tilt kerb-side for 10 laps- A pair of telescopic, rib-knit rot cultivators hanging off your slip-thru tracksuit mindset.

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12/17

Me

OPEN

38

1
e



An Apple Tree by Heath Bunting

00854: a human being in possession of a natural person in control
01161: a human being created (conceived)
01197: a human being created (born)
01741: a human being
02838: a human being in possession of a natural person
02838: a human being in possession of a natural person
03602: a human being in possession of land
06492: a human being located in bristol leighwoods
07109: a human being customer of tesco
08411: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person
08411: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person
09559: a human being in possession of a natural person customer of chew valley trees
09560: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person customer of chew valley trees
09620: a human being in possession of tree inner bark
09635: a human being in possession of an apple tree fruit
09636: a human being in possession of a natural person owner of an apple tree fruit
09637: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person owner of an apple tree fruit
09638: a human being in possession of an apple tree
09639: a human being in possession of a natural person owner of an apple tree
09640: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person owner of an apple tree
09701: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person owner of apple tree wood
09710: a human being in possession of a natural person owner of apple tree wood
09716: a human being in possession of apple tree wood
09735: a human being customer of chew valley trees
09782: a human being in possession of an apple tree flower
09783: a human being in possession of a natural person owner of an apple tree flower
09784: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person owner of an apple tree flower
09785: a human being in possession of an apple tree root
09786: a human being in possession of a natural person owner of an apple tree root
09787: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person owner of an apple tree root
09788: a human being in possession of apple tree inner bark
09789: a human being in possession of a natural person owner of apple tree inner bark
09790: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person owner of apple tree inner bark
10045: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person owner of an apple tree leaf
10046: a human being in possession of a natural person owner of an apple tree leaf
10047: a human being in possession of an apple tree leaf
10048: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person owner of an apple tree seed
10049: a human being in possession of a natural person owner of an apple tree seed
10050: a human being in possession of an apple tree seed
10054: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person owner of apple tree sap
10055: a human being in possession of a natural person owner of apple tree sap
10056: a human being in possession of apple tree sap
10591: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person owner of apple tree outer bark
10592: a human being in possession of a natural person owner of apple tree outer bark
10593: a human being in possession of apple tree outer bark
11327: a human being in possession of a natural person owner
11329: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person owner
11330: a human being in possession
11830: a human being located in bristol triangle brandon hill
12217: a human being in possession of a natural person in control of an artificial person owner of an apple tree fruit juice
12917: a human being in control of an artificial person
17038: a human being in control of an artificial person owner
17407: a human being in control of an artificial person customer of chew valley trees
17706: a human being in control of an artificial person owner of an apple tree
17707: a human being in control of an artificial person owner of an apple tree root
17708: a human being in control of an artificial person owner of apple tree wood
17709: a human being in control of an artificial person owner of an apple tree leaf
17710: a human being in control of an artificial person owner of an apple tree flower
17711: a human being in control of an artificial person owner of an apple tree fruit
17712: a human being in control of an artificial person owner of an apple tree seed
17713: a human being in control of an artificial person owner of apple tree inner bark
17714: a human being in control of an artificial person owner of apple tree outer bark
17715: a human being in control of an artificial person owner of apple tree sap
19183: a human being in control
21819: a human being in possession of a fertiliser

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Terminal: Till 3

Sold Items	£
Apple Tree Seed	2.50
Apple Tree Sap	2.50
Apple Tree Root	2.50
Apple Tree Leaf	2.50
Apple Tree Inner Bark	2.50
Apple Tree Outer Bark	2.50
Apple Tree Wood	2.50
Apple Tree Flower	2.50
Apple Tree Fruit	2.50

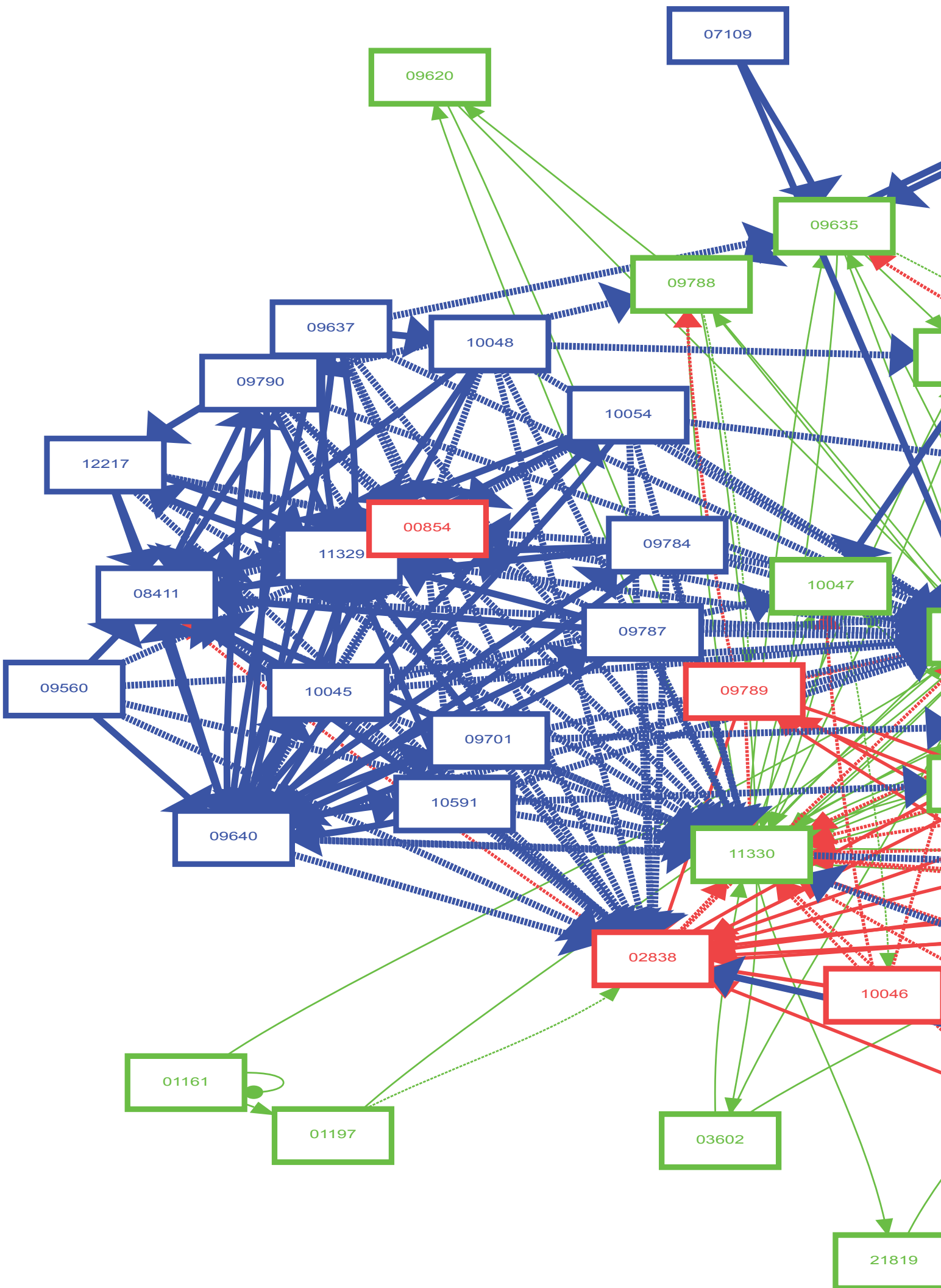
Sold Items Total

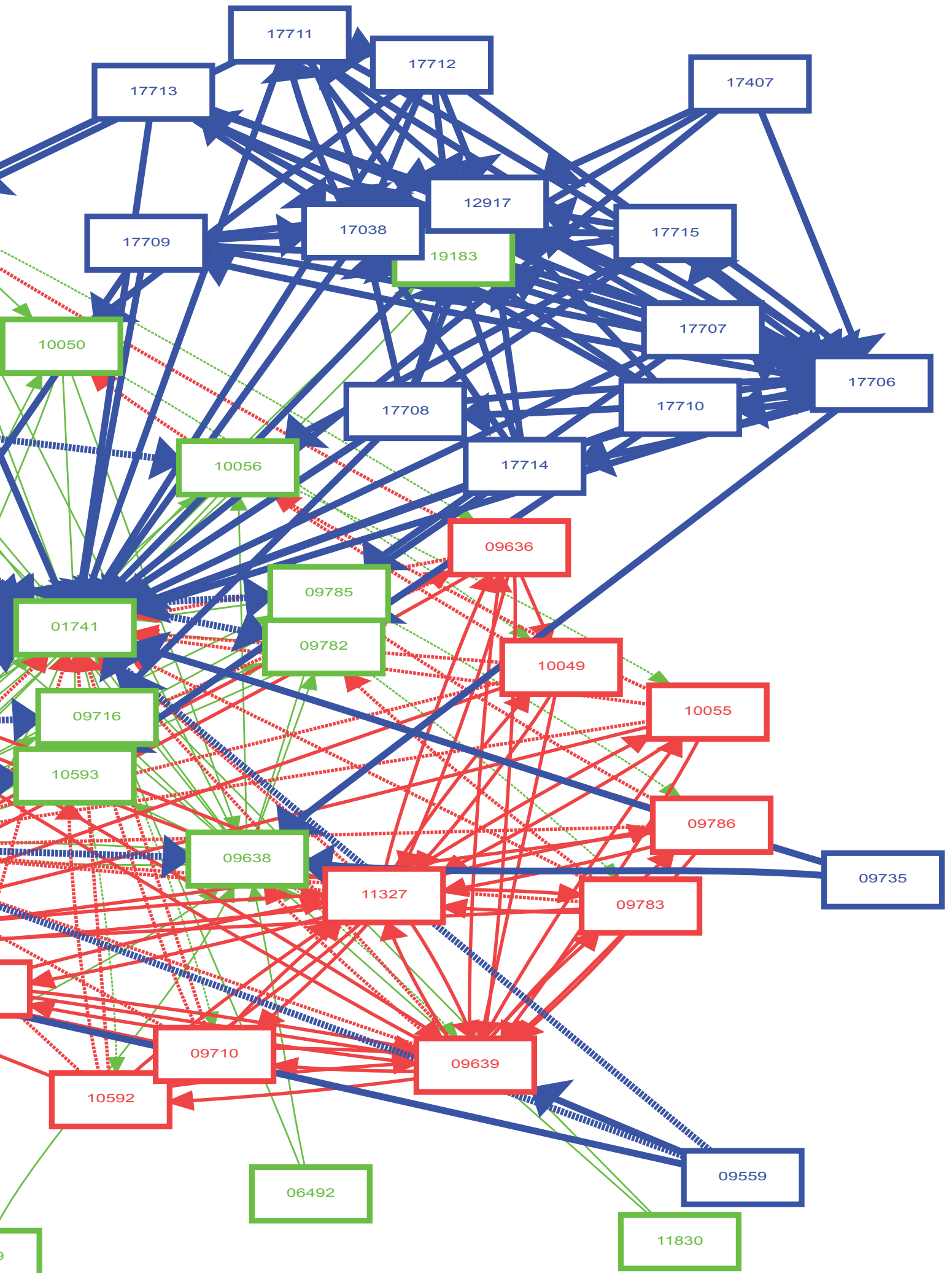
Apple Tree 22.50

Payments

Cards 22.50

THANK YOU - PLEASE CALL AGAIN





How not to shop *by Régine* *Debatty*

One would be hard-pressed to find a more sterile terrain for artistic explorations than Westfield Stratford City. As its name implies, the shopping centre does its very best to ape a real urban center. It has a playground, a cinema, perfectly innocuous art works, live music, restaurants, plenty of shops of course and a bit of foliage here and there.

Like many of its peers, however, this perfectly disciplined theater of consumerism is a sorry ersatz for urbanity. Any behaviour, any living creature that doesn't serve a commercial purpose is systematically banned from it. No photos, no skating, no begging, no jogging, no loitering, no tripod nor unsanctioned filming. An apparatus of surveillance cameras, guards and other 'security solutions' ensures that the visitor's experience is as carefully controlled as the air conditioning system.

Yet, this is the very place that Louise Ashcroft has selected for a self-assigned artist residency. No one has invited her at Westfield. To avoid blowing her cover, she thus had to play happy shopper, quietly smuggling her unruly artistic practices and critiques of capitalism inside the famous glass-vaulted cathedral of retailing.

Ashcroft is a master at what artist and researcher Benjamin Gaulon calls Retail Poisoning ¹. The name of the

practice is directly inspired by the strategies of torrent poisoning used by the entertainment industry to hack into peer-to-peer networks. Retail poisoning is a form of culture jamming that uses stealth, humour and critical actions to disrupt the mechanisms of consumerism. Even though Ashcroft is targeting shopping temples, she is not the Reverend Billy of Stratford. She does not preach nor lead choirs, she isn't coiffed like a blond Elvis Presley nor does she brandish a megaphone. Her tactics are more underhanded and hushed. They are made of small-scale, short-term and low-cost interventions that have the potential to turn a well-behaved but dumb environment into a space that offers experiences that no amount of money can buy.

Ashcroft's own take on the art of Retail Poisoning is less about hijacking than about reclaiming and re-purposing the space for her own enjoyment and the one of her shopping audience. Where most of us would only see restrictions and garish food courts, she finds free sugar packets and social sanctuaries for teenagers. Where we see corporate-brewed coffee and strict codes of conduct, she discovers opportunities for deviation and cracks in the seemingly perfectly-oiled machine of consumption.

What makes Ashcroft's practice particularly meaningful is that she leaves a space for the public to take a performative role in the clandestine actions she orchestrates. Having spent six months exploring the shopping centre and hunting for every possible loophole, crevice and ambiguity that had escaped the attention of its shareholders and managers, she is now inviting the public to a series of activities that will make them reassess what a 'retail experience' can (also) be. It involves foraging for free stuff, organising dress-

up activities in shop fitting rooms, or pondering upon the lyrics she wrote for grime artist Maxsta using an Argos catalogue as her sole source for inspiration and beats.

The influence of her shambolic transgressions of standard shopping etiquette can run deeper and influence the consumers that we all are, long after her show at arebyte gallery has closed. Nowadays, customers can be confident that, as soon as they set foot inside a mega mall like the Westfield one, the whole space will do the thinking for them and all they have to do is submit themselves to the hyper-codified and hyper-comfortable retail experience. Because of the way Ashcroft spurs audiences to think critically and challenge the status quo, it is highly likely that after an hour in her company, people will no longer see shopping as they used to. "I'm a believer in the power of confusion," she told me recently. "And when a group behaves unusually it provokes those involved and their witnesses to question what's going on, and to question the whole environment they might have taken for granted."

Ashcroft's adventurous enactments of art outside the art world also reminds us that art doesn't have to limit its field of action to the white walls of the museum and gallery system. Or to the audience who queues and pays to enjoy it. By setting an unofficial workshop in Westfield and distributing flyers that invite shoppers to join her little exercises in business disruption, the artist makes us consider what art (and especially the one that defines itself as "socially engaged") could achieve if it had access to a demographic as broad, as diverse and as willing as the one that visits the Westfield center. Shopping malls were born in the U.S.A.

The first one opened in Edina, Minnesota in 1956. It was designed by Victor Gruen, an Austrian-born architect who gave his name to the Gruen Effect, the moment when a dazzling shop display compels you to buy something you had never intended to purchase. Sixty years later, we are still as enthralled as ever by the promises of goods we have no need for but shopping malls are dying in the U.S.² The phenomenon hasn't reached Europe yet but experts, investors and retailers are always on the lookout for new strategies to attract and enthrall the public.

The worst thing that could happen to Ashcroft's residency at Westfield is success. At least what passes as success nowadays. It would be a setback if Ashcroft's playful interruptions in the flow of capitalist propaganda were seen as an inspiration for shopping centers. If, like street art and other guerrilla practices, they were co-opted and commodified to boost customer traffic.

Let's hope then that the Westfield Corporation's board and management team never recognise the potential of Ashcroft's art intrusions into their premises. Artists like her might not have the ambition (nor the resources) to overthrow capitalism but they have the talent to devise ordinary acts of resistance that, if replicated, can slowly effect changes in the way a society decides how its time and money should be spent.

1 Retail Poisoning: retailpoisoning.tumblr.com

2 Josh Sanburn, Why the Death of Malls Is About More Than Shopping, published in Time, 20 July 2017
Retail historians, Peter Blackbird and Brian Florence document the decline of shopping malls on their website DEADMALLS



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