

The Intersection

Kayla Watterson - Deakin University

The space of my research is a 'intersection on Pioneer Road which provides access for both vehicle and pedestrians along the continuation of Pioneer Road, the Waurn Ponds Shopping Centre and its carpark. The opposite side of Pioneer Road provides pedestrian only access to a sheltered bus stop and an assortment of City of Greater Geelong (COGG) maintained facilities; Indoor Aquatic and Recreational Centre, Library, Skate Park, Baseball field and Tennis courts. Due to COVID-19 restrictions however, these COGG facilities are formally closed to the public, resulting in less pedestrian traffic than I have observed in the past. The intersection directs and regulates movement through multiple sets of traffic lights and an array of instructional signs. A green wire fence provides a hard boundary between the intersection and the shopping centre's carpark. The COGG facilities are separated through a strip of open manicured grass and shrubbery. Discarded trolleys create an unofficial perimeter around the bus stop. Observing the intersection from the outside the space is fast paced and continuous, vehicles and people stopping only momentarily for the traffic signals. Engines and fast traveling vehicles vibrate noisily, commercial advertisements and illuminated branding occupy the immediate surrounds and the familiar aroma of grilled meats and vegetables charge the air.

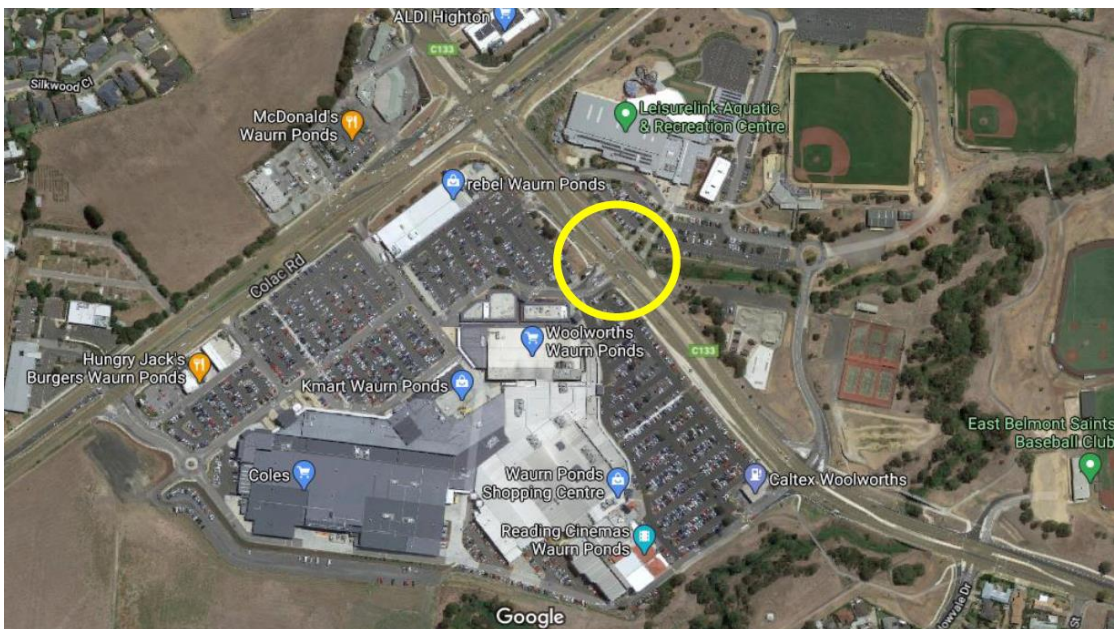


Figure 1: The intersection of focus circled in yellow. Pioneer Road, Grovedale: Google, 2020.

This intersection is a shared space with incalculable narratives, perpetuated by a multiplicity of individual and collective activities and processes collaboratively. Emily McKee's chapter *Bridge: Distant Neighbors* (2016, pp 83-93) engages the reader in an ethical and ethnographic journey. Throughout my observation and participation, I harness curiosity and neutrality to conduct research consciously and cautiously; understanding the impacts my acts and interpretations may have of this space and the actors within.

From my local knowledge and the appearance of freshly sealed and painted roads, modern texturized bike lane, shining silver metals and young plants; this intersection has undergone significant structural and aesthetic enhancements. The financial and political investment into this intersection highlights the influential relationship between local government, big business, commodification and space. Land administrative and zoning laws provide advantage to business and the shopping centre by actively prohibiting alternative organization in this space. These laws and political relationships are actions external to the physicality of the intersection, though directly constructs meaning to its spatiality. As a centrality of foot and vehicle traffic between commercial and recreational spaces, the intersection is an extension of the consumer experience. As such, this space may be

valued by business and entrepreneurs as a supplemental source for improving consumer access, safety and perception with the goal of increasing capital and profits. Through the acts of researching, designing, lobbying, investing, the physical fabrication of and the ongoing maintenance of the intersection; this space has become one of political, ideological and economic meaning. This kind of exchange produces a meaning of commodity and reminds me of McKee's (2016) thick discussion of land administration law and land rights between the Israeli State and Bedouin. These laws produce clear lines of exclusion for the benefit of those who create them, restricting activity within landscapes and devising divergent meanings. The Wadawurrung peoples of the Kulin nation are the traditional owners and custodians of the land in which the intersection lies. The traditional custodians of this land have and continue to be actively discouraged, excluded and dispossessed of place through political, ideological and laws to intensely uphold elitist interest comparable to the experience of the Bedouin. Walking along the footpaths I notice disused construction markers, piles of broken concreting and abandoned temporary fencing. Bedouin have used comparable kinds of materials to fashion blockades in attempt to turn public into private (2016, p. 102), though there is no evidence of this here. This lack of action speaks as a form of acceptance of the authoritative meaning of the intersection. This further enables the political and economic meaning of this space. Similar of the land administrative laws discussed in *Dwelling in Conflict*; living, cultivating, modifying or building on these lands has been illegalized and severe repercussions serve to deter noncompliance. This limits connections and activities which could allow for differing meaning to space.

A young adult dressed in a chain fast food restaurant uniform, stops to finish a cigarette and adjust their collar before walking toward and pushing the pedestrian signal button. Another young adult walked toward the intersection dressed in a chain department store uniform was talking loudly into their phone and presenting exaggerated body gestures. Whilst crossing into the intersection this person ended the phone conversation, explaining that they were at work and would call back on their break and became far less animated than before. Through the act of passing into the physical boundary of the intersection, an active change in behaviour or performance the workers have produced an extension of and an alternative entrance of their workplace. This was evidenced by the person acknowledging that they are now 'at work'. Both present in the intersection at different times, though observed to share meaning of space through performance. The intersection has become a space for engaged transformation from one set of expectations to another. Feasibly, the employer code of conduct provides cause and motivation for such change. This specific meaning is further pronounced when comparing with observations of consumers within the intersection. Many in groups, without uniforms, carrying shopping bags and eating take-away food, they laugh and chat and seem to apply little further meaning to the intersection other than a means of safer passage on their journey. Each share the same spatiality though participate within their individual landscape. This situation reminded of the broader themes of social and moral expectations placed on different groups throughout McKee's *Dwelling in Conflict* (2016). In particular, the ways in which people through individual and collective agency, do and do not embody expectations as a means of survival, to oppose unfavourable conditions and in turn preserve said agency within individual landscapes of the same geographical location.

The intersection is not the traveller's destination, rather it has become a part of everyday mundane practice. Through these actions it has become a place of little significance other than fleeting moments of frustration or relief depending on the traffic signals and flow. People stop at the traffic lights in conversation with passengers or on a call, focusing in on the traffic signals themselves. Before taking time to observe this place, it was personally one of mundane thought and action. However, this is changing through the acts of the Deakin student who wanders and watches the intersection, enthusiastically scrawling notes and completing their assignment. It has given life to an expressive and significant meaning to space and provided space for education. Therefore, participation within space becomes not only a way of creating meaning to space, but space and place also contribute to our broader individual and collective narrative and realities.

References

McKee, E 2016, *Dwelling in Conflict: Negev landscapes and the boundaries of belonging*, Stanford University Press, ProQuest Ebook Central, retrieved 14 April 2018.