

Lockdown Stage 4: Life in a 5km radius

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It is Saturday morning in late August, one of those brisk but sunny winter days Melbourne experiences as the spring months near. The year is 2020 and we are in the middle of a global pandemic. Melbourne has been placed into 'Stage 4 lockdown'. This is to say that the state government has imposed strict restrictions on people's movements in order to control the spread of the Sars-Cov-2 (Covid-19) virus throughout the community.

Residents have been given a one-hour time limit outside the home each day to exercise; this time for me is used walking around my local neighbourhood with two overly energetic, although senior (11yrs and 9yrs), Siberian Huskies.

As we wander closer to the park the dogs grow ever more excited. Even after six months of social distancing measures and mandatory mask wearing, the dogs still associate this place with children who want to pat them, and adults who tell them how beautiful they are. But sadly, again, today there will be no people to talk to, or play with. The children's play equipment is cordoned off by red and white striped tape like a crime scene and displays an official notice from the local council. The sign reads thus:



Figure 1. Heysen Reserve, Skye, Victoria - August 2020. Kristy Proudlock.

'In response to public health advice relating to the Covid-19 pandemic, this facility is currently CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC. Please exercise social distancing at all times. Social gatherings of more than two people are prohibited by law and fines apply. For the latest Covid-19 updates visit: dhhs.vic.gov.au.'

The sign, first placed here in March of this year, disappeared for a few weeks before what the health experts call 'the second wave', hit. Quickly council workers re-posted the signs and once again the playgrounds fell silent, but that did not mean that this space became unusable, in fact, quite the opposite.

As the dogs and I round the corner of Arlene Drive, something in the park catches my eye. Glistening gold in the sun just under the parks sign; 'what is that?' I think. I wonder if someone has dumped some rubbish. Maybe they missed bin collection day and desperately wanted to rid themselves of this gold, possibly plastic object? My assumption of dumped rubbish makes me think of Mary Douglas. I realise my reaction is likely due to the confusion and contradiction of my socialised classification of the park as a well-kept, tidy public space (Douglas, 2003, p.45). I remind myself that people have been using spaces differently recently and that maybe it is not pollution but just 'matter out of place' (ibid, p.44). Still too far away to make out what the shiny object is, I conclude I will soon find out and keep on walking.

As we reach the corner of the park, a lady with a small child on a bike and a greying brindle Staffordshire Bull Terrier appear at the opposite corner. I hear her yell 'Jake!! Stay on the grass matey. Don't go near the playground'. The kid tears around the park like it is the Phillip Island Motorcycle Grand Prix circuit, enjoying life like only a small child can, using the outline of the playground as his track. Although it is a Saturday morning, we are the only people and dogs using this public space. Three people, three dogs. However, other families walk by with dogs on lead and kids riding bikes. During this 'Stage 4 lockdown', the neighbourhood has seemingly stepped back in time to the 1980s, with only one addition: facial masks, but in a typical Melbourne style, face masks are quickly becoming not only a safety precaution but also this seasons number one fashion statement.

Front yard vegetables gardens have started to appear too, another new quintessential Melbournian 2020 fashion. I wander near the edge of the park, keeping distance between myself and the other park users. I notice two ladies on the other side of the road, talking loudly through masks while social distancing. Not long after the conversation begins a handful of what looks to be silverbeet is passed over the fence. This small local gift economy has popped up since March. Maybe a nostalgic return to the “old ways”, or perhaps just a small kitchen garden to supplement the diet of the locked down families. It is possible this return to small-grade agriculture is an unconscious pushback to the global, capitalist, convenience market. A return to the pride created through the production of the simple life, a recovery of a ‘lost sense of comfort and belonging’ (McKee, 2016, p.107), during months of state-imposed restrictions.

The lady with the dog reaches Jake who is still tearing around the margins of the playground like it is a motocross track. ‘Come on! I’ll race you to the trees Mum!’ cries Jake as his little legs peddle his bike ever faster. Knowing this family are leaving the park creates the opportunity for me to pop over to the shining gold thing, which I can now make out is a whole bunch of shiny gold objects. Whatever it is, it is clearly ‘matter out of place’, but I do not think this is rubbish. It looks to have been deliberately placed under the sign of the park. My pace quickens, before the dogs jerk me to a swift halt to sniff something that must be particularly interesting on the ground. As I wait for the dogs to finish investigating the



Figure 2. Spoonville Skye, Heyson Reserve. Kristy Proudlock 2020.

“good smell” I notice a child, about nine or ten years old, running towards the gold shining objects. She has what looks like a painted wooden spoon in her left hand. The little girl reaches the mystery object before I do, she bends down, and with a great downward force she plants the end of the spoon into the ground.

No one has dumped rubbish here! This is the new way this public space is being utilised during this time of great restriction. Humans, adaptable as we are, have found a new way to have fun in this cordoned off space. ‘Spoonville’ has arrived in our little neighbourhood. ²

Notes

¹ Not the child’s real name.

² I was tagged in quite a few ‘Spoonville’ photos once the above photo was posted to Instagram. More photos can be found at: <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/spoonville-fad-dishes-out-lockdown-relief-for-stir-crazy-kids-20200716-p55cos.html> And further information about Spoonville internationally: <https://spoonvilleinternational.com/>

References

- Douglas, Mary, 2003, ‘Secular Defilement’, *Purity and Danger an analysis of the concept of pollution and taboo*, Routledge, New York, pp. 36-50, downloaded 4 August 2020, Deakin Talis.
- McKee, Emily, 2016, *Dwelling in Conflict: Negev Landscapes and the Boundaries of Belonging*, Stanford University Press, California