

## What's Bad About Spoonvilles?: Investigating Pedagogies of Kindness and Connection Through Community-Engaged Art Projects in Public Space

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### Abstract

When the pandemic struck I felt that art had nothing to offer in such an apocalypse. But after being involved in participatory art projects I saw them as pedagogical vehicles, connecting people through shared experiences and emotions. Many participatory projects were made by the public and placed physically in public space—banners, murals, chalk drawings and collections of decorated spoons under the auspices of ‘kindness’, ‘joy’ and ‘hope’. Commonly these projects encouraged the people to create and contribute something, focussing on connecting people to the artworks and connecting them to a particular community.

Alongside the actual site of the physical artworks, they also existed online. Images shared through social connections via the internet often facilitated more participants and an audience for artworks. Ironically some of these facets of the artwork are very personal and private instead of public. These private moments of making and encounter (integral to public art) can question our assumptions about the publicness of public art. We assume that such projects connect, include and benefit the public—but ‘community’ can also *exclude*—perhaps evidenced by responses of threats or the destruction of the artworks. Besides sweet platitudes, what does evidence bear out?



Title Image: Spoonville, Kings Road, Delahey. Photograph by author

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### Toward Kindness

‘Being kind and helping others is what life is all about and this initiative [the Spoonvilles] has shown us just what kindness is still out there amongst all of us.’ (Junelle Wilson, quoted in Clarke, 2020)

The arrival of the pandemic floored many people. We were suddenly in lockdown and I felt as if art was illusory and flimsy. Thin as paper. Paling in the shadow of how science and money would assist with this emergency. Art seemed to be a luxury item that comes *after* needs for bread, water, shelter and health are met. I felt that art had little to offer in such a disaster and so I had to reconfigure its meaning in this new situation.

As I walked daily in my suburb during the Melbourne lockdowns, wearing a mask, moving from the path and crossing streets for social distancing, my mind always churned about how art could contribute. I envisaged the street as a place to hang messages. I imagined my responses to the differing opinions about what we should or shouldn’t be doing, written large on banners in bright fabrics, a pedagogy of instruction or advice: ‘let’s work together’, or, ‘stay at home’.

Most of us have learned from experience; the pandemic has revealed much division between politics and beliefs. Giving advice would likely cause more anger and division. I imagined the only way I could reach out to all people was to use ‘kind words’. At this moment I teamed up with Gallery Sunshine Everywhere and began the ‘Little Say of Sunshine Banner Project.’ People were invited to submit kind words. A banner was made of the words, then sent back to the person, who was asked to display the banner in public space and send us a photo. One of the participants, Athina Singh (2020), comments on the types of text used on the banners in this project, when she states, “They are different from the other messages from the news, which are more grim reminders. The banners are colourful alternative reminders that show there is a light at the end of the tunnel and to keep hope” (p. 13).

By limiting the text to ‘kind words’ the banners were more inclusive of people, regardless of their politics and beliefs. I imagined this was a way of bringing people together and into a community of sorts and also creating a public who viewed the banners. I am writing this essay after experiencing 18 months of the pandemic, being involved in several participatory art projects during this time and noticing many others as well, often physically placed in public space—banners, murals, chalk drawings and collections of decorated spoons. Commonly these projects encouraged the public or community to create and contribute something. They

focused on bringing people together, and spreading kindness, hope and joy. Many personal testimonies explained how these projects were powerful in helping participants with their mental health (Bosley, 2020; Bossinakis, 2020; Murray-Atfield, 2020).

Ideas of what community projects in public space have the power to do are repeated mantra in many community-based art projects that flourished during COVID-19. I viewed them as pedagogical vehicles that connected people together through their shared stories, experiences and emotions. However, I am wondering if it just made me feel better and if my ideas about how art was useful in the pandemic are really true, or just some kind of lip service or set of platitudes that we believe. Art projects often come with an explanation of what they *do*, but these might be the hopes of the project's creators and advertising jargon, not necessarily the outcomes of the project. Perhaps our common understandings of the power of community art are not true at all. We assume that such projects connect, include and benefit the public—but 'community' can *include* and *exclude*. Perhaps if we searched for evidence, we might find the opposite to be true.

### Methodology and Purpose

In previous research I have used the methodology of *portraiture* (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997), which looks for the good in things. Faced with the assumption of the overwhelming goodness of these projects, I thought it might be useful instead to turn this methodology on its head and look for the bad in things. The 'portrait' is thus upside down and also veers sideways as I explore related experiences of making art during the pandemic. I also draw on *a/r/tography* to acknowledge and include my interest and experience in this field as artist/researcher/teacher, and as a public art practitioner and teacher when I involve community members in making public art projects (Springgay, Irwin, and Kind, 2005). My purpose is to disturb and complicate the way we think about the relations between art, community and public space (Springgay, Irwin, and Kind, 2005).

In researching and writing this text, I teeter between the good and bad, positive and negative; I see all these positions as useful in research but also dependent on each person's unique perspective and experience. As I delve into the destruction of some community artworks, during the same period of time there was a much larger scale destruction of statues in public space as part of the Black Lives Matter movement. As Leyh (2020, p.242) explains:

One of the most significant aspects of BLM [Black Lives Matter] has been its critical voice and its ability to encourage individuals and communities to question their everyday landscapes and how these landscapes are very much tied to the concepts of race, law, and power.

The destruction/denigration of statues and memorials can be viewed as negative or positive depending on who you are. Both creation and destruction are useful and integral aspects of public space, critical to its role in democratic communities (Mouffe, 2000, 2008) as a space for protest, action and change. In a similar vein even small interventions such as spoons or graffiti in public space can be seen as a testing of democracy—testing the boundaries of the rules about public space (Cooper, Pricco, and Miles, 2020). All artworks, small or large, conceal stories of conflict, discrimination and injustice that may be difficult to unearth. Artworks made by community members in public space are often deep and rich in backstories and hold complex and poignant meanings for the individuals involved in them (Qadri, 2018). This is also true for graffiti writers (Palmer, 2017; Halsey and Young, 2006). I classify all artworks in public space as public art and view them as important aspects of public art theory and practice, and relational to democratic citizenship.

## Community Interventions in Public Space

When I write about public space, I am usually thinking of places which are generally accessible to all. COVID-19 created a very strange upside-down world where traditional galleries became only accessible via the internet, and on the street new contexts gave rise to more community artworks appearing physically in public space. Whilst public space was emptied of its usual traffic, it also became populated with locals walking for exercise during lockdowns. The ways that people used public space changed. For example, protests continued during the pandemic but with adaptation for safety (Pinckney and Rivers, 2020). People stood on marked spots to socially distance in protest or they used cars to block streets. Activists became more innovative in using digital media to sustain social movements. There was an increase in social activism, which may have been due to more people being unemployed and at home for more time (Pleyers, 2020). The pandemic was also a threat of ‘disruption of the quotidian’, changing social and economic conditions, and loss of normal routines, which made people more psychologically open to participating in collective action (Pinckney and Rivers, 2020).

I noticed more use of fences for slogans of positive messages. In my suburb I noticed two fences of empty houses that were used by a writer. One fence said ‘Love’, and another said ‘Care, peace (symbol), help and love’. Neither were removed by cleaners with the usual speed. Later the one that said ‘Love’ was changed to say ‘Love Melbourne’.



Image 1: Fence in my suburb: CARE, PEACE, HELP, LOVE. Photograph by author.



Image 2: Fence in my suburb: LOVE. Photograph by author.

I felt that people were taking more liberty with public space for emotional reasons. A resident of Gladstone Park who had never previously considered herself to be an artist began regularly drawing on her front footpath in chalk. Decorated spoons were being plugged into the ground to form mini villages of spoonvilles all over Australia. People who previously may not have contributed to art in public space, began to participate in this field. A kindergarten in Diggers Rest made a hasty mural on its fence that faced a busy road. Normally artworks in public space required permits but it seemed that artworks were popping up as responses to the situation without the usual permission process.



Image 3: Painted mural at kindergarten in Diggers Rest adjacent to main road. Photograph by author.



Image 4: Spoonville, Kings Rd, Delahey. Photograph by author.

Although seemingly small and innocuous, spoonvilles often contravened rules about public space by residing on nature strips and public land. They would also have been viewed by some as creating trip hazards, contributing to litter and visual disturbance. Public art usually goes through a bureaucratic process with local council before it is 'allowed'. But spoonvilles and other community artworks that emerged during the pandemic mainly ignored these protocols of obtaining legal permission from councils and were also revolutionary in how they involved thousands of people who wouldn't normally make art in public space. These interventions in public space seem small but would have caused people to think more about their own role in public space. The momentum of spoonvilles in gathering other participants to add to public space resembles the graffiti movement, which is often made by many people in one place, often socially and communally (Frederick, 2014). Community participants became artists or vandals, depending on your perspective.

### **'SPOONVILLE—Feel Free to Add More Spoons'**

The spoonville craze began in Scotland early in the pandemic, but became popular in the state of Victoria and its capital city Melbourne during the long 16-week lockdown in 2020 because they could be visited by people on their daily one-hour walks. Spoonvilles always include a sign inviting people to decorate a spoon and stick it into the ground along with the other spoons in the 'Village'. A spoonville could also be a metaphor for a community where each spoon placed into the ground represents the person who placed it. Again akin to graffiti with its 'proclamation of self and identity' (Palmer, 2017, p. 3659), the placing of each spoon was also a moment of placing oneself into public space and saying 'I was here'. The 'spoonies' could be together whilst the real people had to social-distance from each other. Melbourne resident Katie Scoble (2020) writes about her experiences creating and witnessing spoonvilles:

As I looked around Spoonville, I could see a reflection of this lockdown. I saw spoons with masks drawn on. Spoons donning medical scrubs and capes. Spoons just standing quietly side by side, not touching but united together. I saw optimism in the sparkles and the glitter. An invisible hand reaching out, a shared connection, a sense of community. Children doing what they do best. Providing us with hope. I saw myself in those spoons. Just trying to stay upright, quiet, waiting. I squeezed my child's hand as I fought back the tears. "Great," I thought. "Now I'm crying at f\*\*king spoons".

Metaphors are very important to people in times of stress and art projects provide an opportunity to create visual representations of these metaphors (Qadri, 2018). Alongside metaphor, spoonvilles focused on physical objects, including the physical body that decorates them (painting and gluing) and physically goes to the spoonville to put the spoon into a real place. Social media in the 'virtual world' also played an integral role in sharing information about spoonvilles and encouraging participation, as Callanan (2020) explains, "The people started taking photos and started to immediately share them on their social media. The townspeople smiled, cheered and shared the proud spoons across the world". The Spoonville Movement may not have been anywhere near as successful without the use of online social networks. Social media spurred more children and adults to decorate and place spoons.

It is through social media that we also find discussion of what the outcomes of spoonvilles are, how it helped people with their mental health, spread joy and comforted people (Spoonville International Facebook Page). One participant said it kept her addictions at bay and helped get her through the lockdown (Boseley, 2020). Callanan (2020) explains further how spoonvilles intersected with mental health:

Everyone started to realise that a spoonful of love, unity and joy can make the people happier on their daily walks. Even though times were tough, the spoons had made the world a better place. A place to stop and smile, and to forget any gloomy, doomy times.

Whenever I make community art with people. I assume somewhere, somehow, I am doing good, but I don't know what all of the effects of my work are. Mulligan and Smith (2010) argue that the social impacts of community art, 'are like the tip of an iceberg'—they are unpredictable, indirect, and 'very hard to detect, let alone measure' (p. 108). However, there is substantial evidence that art-based practices are of benefit to people in social and mental health recovery and contribute to self-expression, relationships and social identity (Van Lith, Schofield, and, Fenner, 2013; Fancourt and Finn, 2019). When people provide their own stories of how art projects made them feel good or contributed to their lives, this is evidence of what the art did. From another perspective it could also be evidence of what that individual believed it did or evidence of the pedagogy of the artwork—the ideas and knowledge that artwork transferred to its audience and maker. I want us to be aware that art can transfer pedagogy but it will depend on the unique moment between the maker and the art, or the audience and the art. As Biesta (2017) explains, "the educational moment appears *inside* the artistic endeavour, in such a way that art *itself* can and is allowed to teach" (p. 38). In thinking about how I search for these projects online and how I choose what projects to investigate further, I realise I am looking for physical connections, the acts of physical making, the connections made through people using their bodies—minds and hands and feet, the connecting together of a real person to another in conversation about the physical art work. Ironically, I am searching through the non-physical, virtual world of the internet, to find these physical artworks.

### The Photograph: The Private Within the Public

It has become almost automatic for artists to photograph their artworks in public space and document their making online. In parallel, audiences seem to have the same compulsions to document what they see. The artwork is photographed then shared, sent off digitally to those involved in the project and an audience. Sometimes projects exist as a mixture of real materials and digital means. The conditions of social distancing and lockdowns created a need for new ways of organising collaborative community artworks using the internet. Online social connection often facilitated more participants and an audience for artworks, and for many artworks these processes of online sharing are integral aspects of the art. The artworks could be visualised as having four facets: making the artwork; the physical artwork in public space; the photograph; and social sharing of the photograph online. The artwork in internet space can also be considered public space.

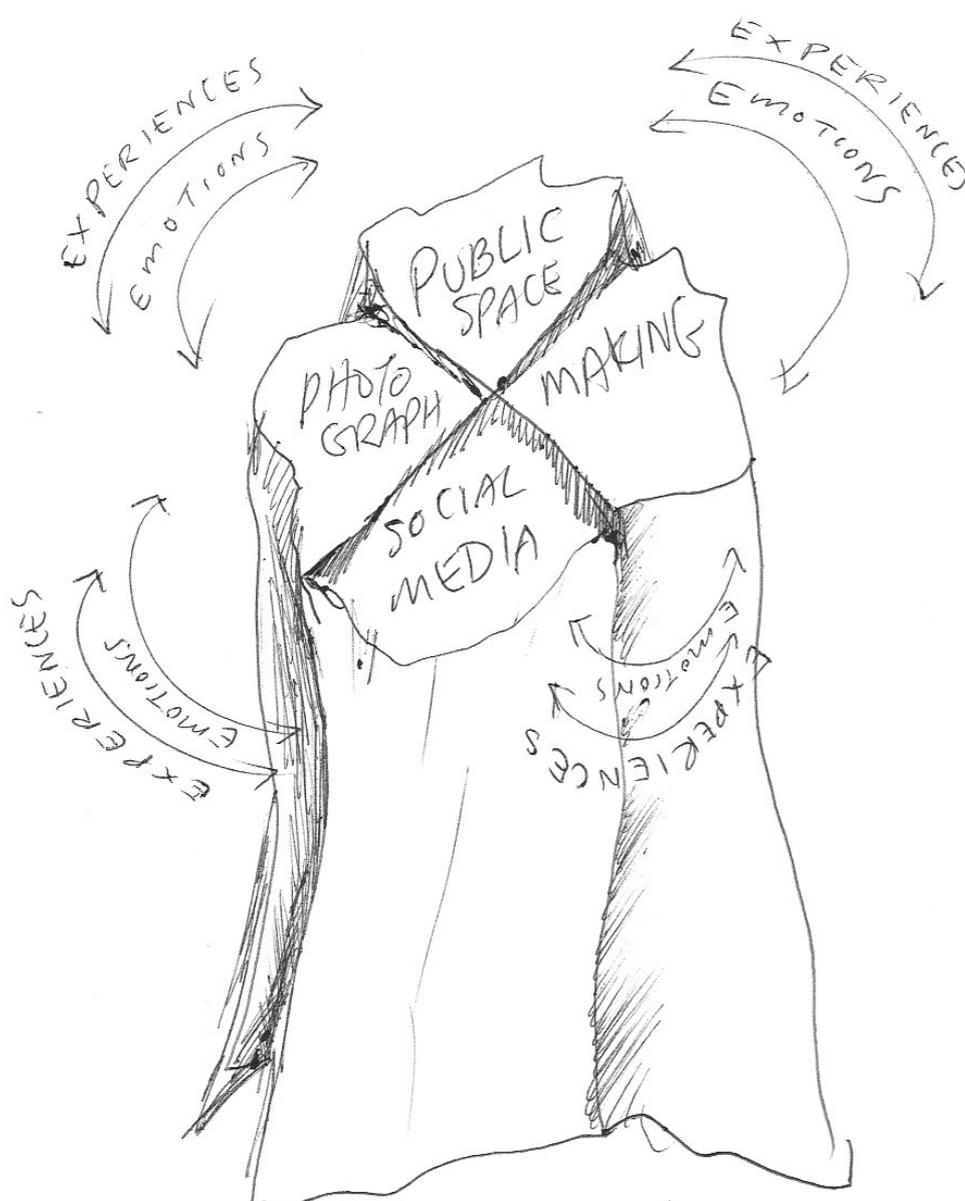


Image 5: Four facets

The idea of exposing (photographing) the artwork so that it can be recorded is important for people who place their art into public space. The photo is less—it is a one-dimensional recording of a three dimensional and multifaceted artwork with history and meaning, but the photo can be kept and shared. In this context the community projects in public space have a relationship with street art and graffiti, where photographing the artwork is part of the practice. Martha Cooper, who documented graffiti in the 1970s, emphasises the importance of the photograph for documenting ephemeral artworks for history. She recalls photographing an artist, Dondi, holding a photo album full of pictures he had taken of his graffiti. He told her that he didn't want to paint a train unless he had a camera with him (Cooper, Pricco, and Miles, 2020). In Dondi's instance, the painting will not be made unless it can be photographed and thus 'kept' in this way. The camera has to be present for the artwork to be made. It is an essential ingredient of the artwork.

I recently witnessed the installation of an intervention to a permanent public artwork (an intervention is a type of artwork which alters an existing artwork). The intervention included a series of actions that needed to be filmed in order to make a record of it. But the filming process also steered how the intervention was done. The intervention often paused to allow the photographer to change position and set up the camera. At times the intervention also repeated itself for a camera re-take. In many instances documentation of artworks affects how the artwork happens and can direct how the artwork unfolds. Public art has arteries going deep into the use of photographs and social media.

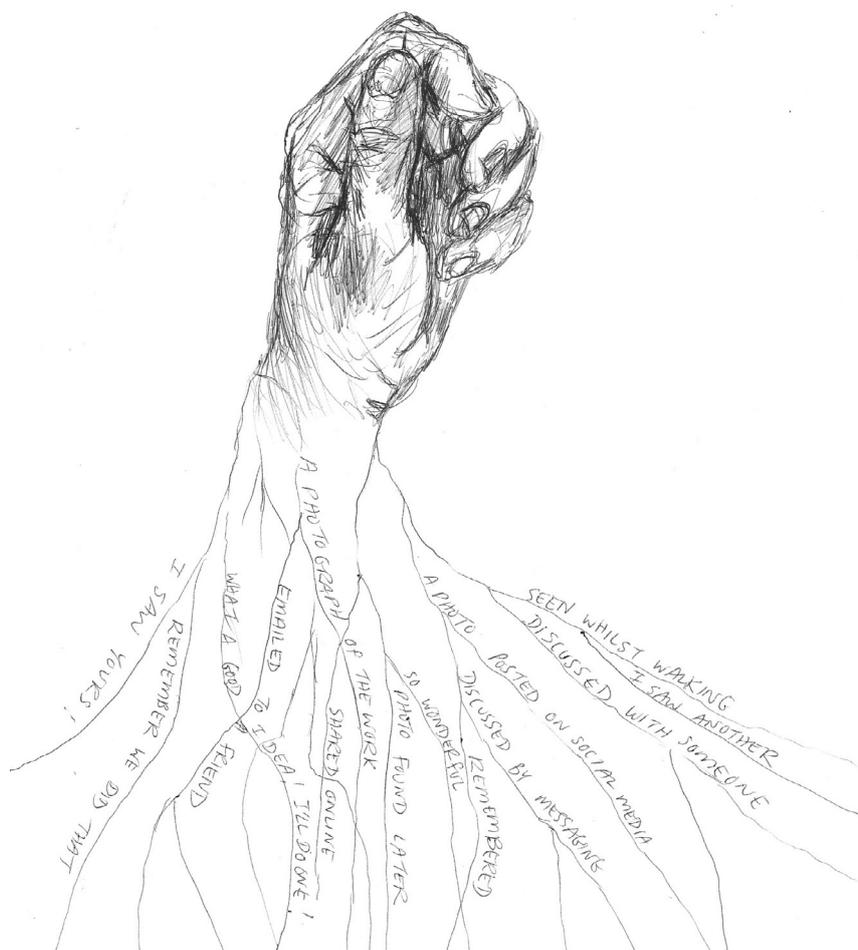


Image 6: Public art has arteries going deep into the use of photographs and social media.

Carol Vance (quoted in Miles, 2005, p. 101) questions the distinctions between public and private realms as possibly false, 'because neither has a hard boundary'. This is something to think about if we take the view that the photograph of the artwork is part of the artwork. The artwork is both private and public, often made at home beforehand or at least parts of it, then installed in public space it takes on social form. The photograph is taken and then becomes privately owned but is often publicly shared. Think again of the graffiti artist Dondi holding the photo album of his artworks in his arms, but then also sharing it with Martha Cooper.

The public sharing of the photographs on internet forums links the artwork with others of the same type. The spoon becomes part of a spoonville and part of the international spoonville artwork/movement/project. It is seen in relation to the others, and spurs people to go for walks to find the artworks or to make their own and contribute to both the larger project and their own personal one. The process of photography, the artefact of the photograph and the act of sharing it online have become facets of artworks that we place in public space.

Consistent in many community projects are materials, and the manual making of artwork—this is in order for it to *exist physically* in public space. Alongside this actual site and materiality of the artwork/s, there is often an online version of the project. Physical public space and virtual public space merge in these projects. We find out about the spoonvilles through connecting on the internet, but we can go and see them in reality in public space. Exhibitions like *Riding the Covid Wave*, organised by Brimbank Council Libraries, enabled people to share digitally in a virtual gallery, artworks that were made during lockdowns, which often exist in the real in private spaces at home.

Some of these facets are very personal and private instead of public. Consider the person making their spoon character, a process that may have been done by themselves. The yarn bomber who spends hours knitting the artwork by themselves. The person who witnesses the artwork, who takes a photo of the spoonville or yarn-bombing and then thinks about what they will do with it. These private moments, which are part of public art, mostly remain hidden. In fact, public art provides private moments to strangers, through being *public*. Small but poignant parts of the making process and the individual audience experience are private and personal, unable to be known, seen or heard by anyone.

This aspect of the private and the public also underlie any assumption that a public artwork has been made by a community. Most spoonvilles identify themselves as communities, according to their suburb or some other method of grouping (school, organisation, or place). But communities are made up of individuals who either join or don't join the community for their own personal reasons. Every spoonville, despite its 'everyone welcome' sign, is actually a group of individual artworks made by individual people. It also has an invisible border running between those who feel connection and those who don't feel connection with it.

## **Destruction**

There is evidence that some people did not feel part of spoonville communities. This was expressed through their destruction. Spoons were stolen, damaged, kicked, tossed about, and thrown into the river. Although this was small in comparison with the positive outcomes of the spoonvilles, these events were common and part of the artworks. These were private acts (although sometimes done by groups of people) and always covert; the destroyers did their work in public space but did not want to be seen. They were acts against the artworks and the communities of the artworks. They made children cry and adults' rail, as seen in these comments from various spoonville Facebook pages and news sources:

- ‘We had our Garfield Spoonville trashed a month or so ago and it looked so sad. A few of ours have been thrown over the railway line.’ (Spoonville International Facebook Page)
- ‘Residents are staying vigilant after a spate of vandalism on Spoonvilles this past weekend. The Spoonville in Randall Avenue Edithvale was completely destroyed on Saturday evening with local SES Chelsea Unit lending a helping hand to clean up the mess. In a separate incident, the Wahgunyah Crescent Spoonville in Langwarrin was also mildly damaged.’ (GameFace Community News)
- ‘It makes me sad as we started one at the park next to our house it made number 122 on the list. And we have had vandalism at our one to and it’s mostly done at night but sometime during the day and it’s children that are doing it and that makes me and my children sad.’ (Spoonville International Facebook Page)
- ‘We have 3 other spoonvilles within a close proximity to ours at home. They are all located in the same parkland. All but 1 were completely destroyed. Today my 3yo daughter and I rescued the remnants of the broken spoons and will put back together as best we can. Then I’ll put them back where they were.’ (Spoonville International Facebook Page)
- ‘The boys put spoons down at Rooks Reserve and apparently Micah’s was stolen a couple of weeks ago.’ (Spoonville International Facebook Page)
- ‘Mornington Peninsula Spoonville trampled in Fathers Day attack.’ (Caitander, 2020)
- ‘Pascoe Vale residents have banded together to rebuild their local Spoonville after it was vandalised not once, but three times since Saturday . . . Each time the spoons went missing, they were found in a nearby Moonee Ponds Creek.’ (Renkin, 2020)
- ‘Vandals trample village, steal homemade sign.’ (Caitlander 2020)

Metaphor is heavy in the words above. The spoons are represented as real villages and the terms used could describe real disasters. Spoonvilles take on the role of a miniature world where aspects of community and public life play out. Another example of this is seen in a story in which Maggie Coggan reports on the vandalism of the Edithvale Spoonville. In that piece she also tells the story of its reconstruction with the help of the local SES and ‘volunteer spoons’ that had been created to represent SES workers. Coggan’s story includes quotes from Phil Wall, SES police and media liaison officer, who uses the spoons and spoonvilles as a metaphor for the role of the SES in the community. Wall explains:

Because the role of the SES is to protect the community, and the Spoonvilles have become a really important part of the community, one of our members had actually created some volunteers as a fun way of protecting the villages . . . When we got to the destroyed site, there was a little girl crying and some other kids that were really upset. But we were all able to jump in and help fix the village up. (Wall, quoted in Coggan, 2020)

Coggan (2020) continues this metaphor when she writes that, “volunteer spoons have now been deployed to all Spoonvilles in the area, and with some attracting upwards of 500 spoon characters, Wall said there would be no room for the new recruits to slack off”. She ends the story by quoting Wall, who states, “We did leave the SES [spoon] member there to keep an eye on them” (Wall, quoted in Coggan, 2020).

Although this can be seen as a play or play on words, there is a close relationship to reality, as those involved in the spoonville view the spoons as representing their community. Members of the community play on the metaphor together. The destruction of the spoons is reported as devastating and heartbreaking, but it is both heightened and reflective of the

larger crises that communities face with the virus, including loss of life, loss of income and job security, the trauma of the lockdown, and the unknown future.

The ongoing destruction of spoonvilles leads to communities talking and working together to rebuild them. The destruction of spoonvilles relayed through the news media creates a larger awareness and discussion of spoonvilles. Spoonvilles are used to demonstrate how communities can come together and help each other adapt and rebuild during disasters. The vandalism of the spoonvilles seems to have provided more reasons to work together. This use of the spoonvilles as metaphors for community behaviour can also be seen as pedagogical role-playing of ideas about community. Through the spoons, people enact how they want people to work together. They use the spoonvilles to show others how they think people should behave and act. They use art to role-play ideas of 'community'. At the same time, through the same mechanism of metaphor, are the people who destroy the spoonvilles enacting an outrage towards the spoonville community? When they do so in a group, is this another community? Spoonvilles perhaps create communities delineated through the behaviours of contributing a spoon, not contributing a spoon, or destroying the spoonville.

Amongst the joy of the spoonvilles and the positive community discussion and connection, there was also vitriol for those who destroy the spoonvilles, sometimes focussing on imagined characteristics about the perpetrators including laziness, bad parenting and innate badness. Comments against people destroying spoonvilles included:

- 'People are bastards!'
- 'Pretty sure I know which 3 shits it would have been.'
- 'Absolute low lives with nothing better to do!'
- 'Their parents need to put a wooden spoonville on their asses and teach them some respect.'
- 'To the terrible humans who have been released from lockdown and think that destruction is fun, karma will get them.'
- 'Heartless assholes.'
- 'Bloody scum.'
- 'What the hell is wrong with the idiots of today, In bed all day and out all night up to no good!'

The above comments reveal little thought about the motives of the people or children who have allegedly destroyed the spoonville. I wonder why these children or adults felt outside of this community even when it was advertised as 'all welcome'. It could be evidence that some people did not feel part of the community.

It was difficult to find out why people had disliked spoonvilles, and if they had complained to councils about them. There is evidence that some people viewed them as litter. In some strange twist of fate, letters which are sent to the curators of public space (councils) complaining about public art, are not available to the public. But someone who complained to Hume Council about Fiona Cracknell's chalk drawings also placed a copy into her private letterbox and this private letter became very public when she gave it to a newspaper to publish (Beers, 2020).

Fiona Cracknell created chalk drawings on the footpath and driveway in front of her house and her neighbour's house (council land) in Gladstone Park (Melbourne, Victoria) during the lockdown. Cracknell began the project to assist with her own mental health after the loss of a loved one and during the lockdown drawings were used to raise money for mental health charities. The letter of complaint that she received called her 'pretentious', and warned that graffiti on council land is illegal and that it endangered local residents because

of the risk of slipping on the chalk (Beers, 2020). The complainant's anger alerts us to the fact that public space is also intrinsically each person's private space as well, as each of us carry desires and ideas about how it should be. Hume City Council's response to the complaint was that it was a particular time which allowed variations to rules:

Chalk messages and drawings on streets have been developed by children and adults alike during the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing hope and joy to Victorians during this difficult time. Council will not issue any fines for these drawings or ask for them to be removed. (Beers 2020)

### Can We Create a Community?

During the lockdowns in Melbourne, I worked with others on two projects that I imagined as creating communities. I worked on a banner project as discussed earlier. I also worked with my own school and two others to create a book of cartoons by the children and families about 'what we learned by learning at home.' I imagined that these projects created a community/audience of the people who participated in the project. I also imagined the participants seeing the contributions of others and feeling linked to each other. I felt that they would notice similarities with other people's experiences and I believed that these were what we needed to do—draw on our similarities, instead of our differences.

This is very much an imaginative process that lives on in the artist/educators mind—we assume this transfer of knowledge and ideas. We are imagining a public pedagogy, that we are creating a public (an audience or community) and enabling them to learn something. As Glenn Savage (2014) has pointed out, we frame this 'public' that we assume we have educated or 'moved' in some way. Were people really influenced in the way that we assume they were? Savage (2014) argues that 'public is the framing device we use to qualify the pedagogical' (p. 80). I am imagining the audience and quantifying them (as we often do for grant acquittals). We count spoons, banners and cartoons. We quantify how many people 'benefited', as those who received this transfer of something, this pedagogy—of ideas, emotions and knowledge that is moved from one person to another through the process of art-making with community. We may not be able to estimate the quality of interaction and pedagogy we created, but we can usually count the people involved—"Wahgunyah Crescent has 1600 Spoons" (September 30.2020, International Spoonville Facebook page).

Often community projects are limited by only benefiting one particular community. This division between us and them was brought very much to mind when I was editing the cartoon book, 'What we learned through learning from home'. Because three schools were involved, I was referencing each cartoon with the school it came from. However, I noticed that including the name of the schools on each cartoon divided the project into three schools and also made it evident that one school had contributed many more cartoons than the other two. Labelling the cartoons with their school drew attention to differences between the schools. If cartoons had not included their school name, the book would have been read as being by a community of families who experienced remote learning. I was very interested in how such a simple thing such as identifying the community groups created a division in the book. It worried me but I thought that if I removed the names of the schools' I was also removing the *community pride* (which may have contributed to why participants had submitted their cartoon). We had to weigh up which community identity—the individual school community or the community of the cartoon book—was more important in this situation.

The *Little Say of Sunshine* banner project also encountered this aspect of community identity, in that although it was widely advertised, and anybody could send in their words, it eventuated that only the community of Gallery Sunshine Everywhere (who organised the project)

and their contacts became involved. Although the project was widely advertised, only people who knew one of the Gallery members became involved in the project. Even if a project says ‘welcome all’, it doesn’t mean all people feel welcome and are able to be involved. There seems to be an invisible wall somewhere between inside and outside the community, which is difficult for people to cross.

Spoonvilles were open to everyone who could physically make and install a spoon, but they also invoked community through the name of the spoonville. Posting the projects online created additional communities which also included and excluded people. Those people who had no access, could not, or preferred not to use digital communication were excluded from the deeper context of the project. You also needed spoons and materials to decorate the spoons with. At some spoonvilles efforts were made to provide spoons for participants, but I am reminded that not all children have access to what was needed to decorate a spoon. Children don’t usually have their own money to buy spoons, markers, glue—the things you need to make a spoony. I also noticed in my research that spoonvilles were mainly in United Kingdom, Australia and the United States of America. This movement seemed particular to Western countries and English-speaking communities.

### Summary

Spoonvilles remind us that when art is placed in public space it is exposed to those who may not agree with it. Like other unauthorised interventions they can be viewed as vandalism and litter. I see the role of spoonvilles and other responses to the pandemic in public space as disturbing order and crossing the usual boundaries of who can contribute to art in public space.

The placement of art projects into public space is not unanimously accepted. Disagreement, disruption and contention (Baldini, 2014; Mouffe, 2008; Ranciere, 1991) are intrinsic aspects of democratic public space. A good thing about public space is that it provides a space in which to enact democracy (Mouffe, 2008; Cooper, Pricco, and Miles, 2020) and to test the rules about our rights to have our voices and ideas heard. We can demonstrate disagreement through protest, adding to public space or destruction. Think about the public sculptures that have been acted on during the Black Lives Matter movement.

Miffa Salter says that the city is constructed by power and money but we overlay it with social practices which are ‘part of a delicate web of repossession’ (Salter, quoted in Miles, 2005, p. 117). I like this metaphor, as you can often find that in a newly constructed suburb there is little intervention by the public, but as the suburb deteriorates, the public intervenes with posters, art intervention and graffiti. It seems to me that over time, people repossess what architects, builders and owners have laid down. I have perhaps taken the words of Jason Michael Lukasik (2010) out of context, “Public pedagogy entails the discussion of these disruptions of power in addition to the critiques of the power relationships in the first place” (p. 85). But I love the idea that spoonvilles, though seemingly small and powerless, are nevertheless, a disruption of power, in that they occupy land that isn’t usually allowed to be used for such things. Likewise, their destruction is also a disruption of the power that the spoonville ‘community’ held in taking over public space. Both creation and destruction of spoonvilles question power relations in public space.

Spoonvilles celebrated and shared a pedagogy of kindness and community vision—ways of being together and connecting with others during difficult times. These common ideas about the power of art perhaps live mainly in our imagination, with little evidence besides the testimonies of those involved in the artworks, who nevertheless claimed them to be emotive and transforming. The way in which public art, such as decorated spoons stuck into the ground, can harness metaphor to pedagogically share ideas about community life might also be far more powerful than we imagine.

## Endnotes

1. *The Little Say of Sunshine: Kind words Banner Project*, by Gallery Sunshine Everywhere, and Yesterday's Creatures. Funded by Brimbank City Council.
2. Ideas of what community projects in public space had the power to do: See Toni Noble 2020, p. 60.
3. See 'Toppled and Removed Monuments: A Continually Updated Guide to Statues and the Black Lives Matter Protests', on *Art News*, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/monuments-black-lives-matter-guide-1202690845/> and the Wikipedia page: 'List of monuments and memorials removed during the George Floyd Protests', [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_monuments\\_and\\_memorials\\_removed\\_during\\_the\\_George\\_Floyd\\_protests](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_monuments_and_memorials_removed_during_the_George_Floyd_protests)
4. During the lockdowns in Melbourne, people were allowed to leave their home (within 5 kms) for one hour of exercise each day. 421 Spoonvilles are registered in Australia, on the facebook site by Junell Wilson (the Australian founder of the movement).
5. These quotes are from the following sources: Spoonville Australia/Mt Martha Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/305661474093553/permalink/321569735836060/>; Spoonville Australia Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/305661474093553/permalink/334823257844041/>; Spoonville Australia Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/305661474093553/permalink/337280120931688/>; 'Pascoe Vale Spoonville destroyed by vandals', Allie Godfrey, 7 News, <https://7news.com.au/lifestyle/health-wellbeing/pascoe-vale-spoonville-destroyed-by-vandals-c-1285862>
6. I contacted two councils to enquire about complaints about spoonvilles with no success. Other complaints about spoonvilles found on social media include them being a source of litter and that they may encourage people to stand still together, when looking at them, thus compromising social distancing during lockdowns.
7. *What We Learned Through Learning at Home*, by the children, families and staff of St. Theresa's School (Albion), Mother of God School (Ardeer) and Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception (Sunshine), 2020, [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L4slw3yEn7t-3CIOhMVyAdxky9o8bW4y\\_/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L4slw3yEn7t-3CIOhMVyAdxky9o8bW4y_/view?usp=sharing)

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