Short format references are given here. For more information see www.local-level.org.uk/picnic.html

'Sit down and feed, and welcome to our table.' $^{1}$ 

Food must have germinated community, early in our anxious pre-history. Morsels taken together

Commensality without tables

serve to feed recognition and seed co-operation, stirring the chemistry of collaboration while meeting a need. Our shadowy anthropology reveals us sharing language, group-minded in the

firelight, knowing shared experiences, then gathering in the morning

shaping objects for communal benefit. Such as a table, for example:

solid to be returned to.

Mary Douglas tells us:

Meals require 'a table, a seating order, restriction on movement and

'The meal puts its frame on the gathering.'2

1. Shakespeare, W. As you like it, 2.7

# People don't carry stuff': the inconvenience of community

hampers. The standard approach is a few chosen provisions, adequate for the individual's perceived need on the day, transported in bags that can be folded or even discarded after consumption. If you had a hamper, you'd have to lug it round or keep an eye on it. People brought things to Cumberland Market, but I didn't see any cumbersome handsome

girls. The picnic, Jessie? She loves it, listen to the rasp of her east London voice: 'It brings trying to pass on to anyone who could use it. The personification of history, she stands offering shopping basket, a football in one hand. She's lived here since 1939. Ethel joined her, telling me course of the afternoon I came across her again, trying to distribute toys to a group of young her past to the indifferent future. What changes in community does she represent? During the wanted them to inherit her ball. She had lots of stuff in her basket and at home that she was Jessie enlisted me to attract the attention of the boys who were having a kickabout, as she might have been cows grazing here in her lifetime. We joke lightly about cud-chewing customs. she came to live here originally because her in-laws owned the local dairy. Perhaps then there It wasn't just food that people brought along: Jessie was pottering around with a wheeled

Victoria's record of jaunts during holidays in Scotland: Nowadays knowing the conveniences around us we can travel light, and nineteenth century picnic paraphernalia would seem painfully labour-intensive. Here's an extract from Queen people together, there's all different nationalities.

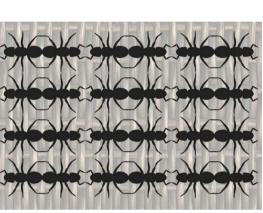
welcome and refreshing." 66 lit a fire and prepared our tea. The kettle soon returned, and the hot tea was very We stopped, and while Grant ran back to get from a small house some hot water in the kettle, we three, with Brown's help, scrambled over a low stone wall by the roadside, and

precisely for the purpose. Let us hope that the diligent Grant got back around the same time as the kettle, although as a mere vassal he seems to be less valued than the vessel. Burnett notes 2d. 67 And then came the hamper: that in the 1860s excursions might include taking your own tea and having a kettle boiled for Note it was not 'a' kettle but 'the' kettle, which 'returned': they must have had one with them,

strapped to the outside... a spirit stove, cutlery, unbreakable Betelware plates, cups and saucers and a folding table 'For the affluent, picnic-baskets could be elaborate affairs with compartments for bottles,

be strapped to the boot. Picnic was absorbed by motoring, as was local community, and both survive, reshaped but recognisable. In the nineteen thirties motor-cars were manufactured with chrome racks for picnic hampers to

23

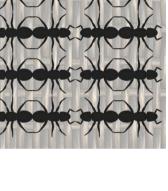


'Ant Basket', Gemma Orton 2011

66. Victoria Queen of England (2005). More leaves from the journal of our life in the Highlands. Kessinger, p36.

67. Burnett 2003, p31

68. Burnett 2004, p212. There's that table again.



2. Douglas, M. (1972). Deciphering a meal. Daedalus 101: 61-81, p66.

But picnic is different. At seaside family picnics as a child, I seldom sat – I ate wandering around

or standing on the fringes of the group, not tempted to perch, kicking away the slack ropes of

order and mealtime protocol. Picnic seems to offer an escape from 'the usual identities and

hierarchical relationships in the group'.  $\ensuremath{^3}$ 

spill out of its frame? The gaps between picnickers are not set by form or code, not by the logic

threat in their rejection of

to follow?

predictably ordered; but here they are not. There is a faint anarchic is the table, a delinquent challenge to civilisation. What traces are ther

of furniture, the shape of the room or the geometry of place-setting.

We expect diners to be

What then is commensality without tables? What sort of gathering, when community seems to

on alternative occupations,

Latin, 'mensa': something

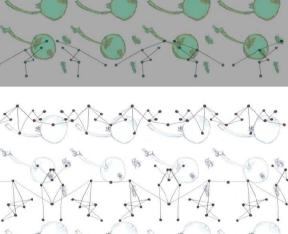
to make things together,

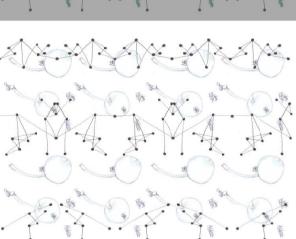
3. Hubbell, A. (2006). How Wordsworth invented picnicking and saved British culture. *Romanticism*, 12: 44-51, p48.

Sketches of cutlery, Gemma Orton 2011 Sketch of blossom, Gemma Orton 2011 order, ambiguity and icnic community Images by Gemma Orton Kevin Harris

'Cherries 3', Gemma Orton 2011

'Cherries 2', Gemma Orton 2011







#### community Picnic: order, ambiguity and

**Kevin Harris** 

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Published by Local Level, 2011

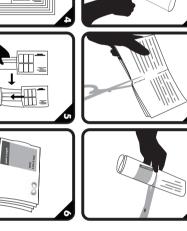
Text: Kevin Harris

Images: Gemma Orton

Fifty numbered copies of this work were signed by the

creators and sold to raise funds for Crisis.







'Cherries', Gemma Orton 2011

8. Yeo, S. (1977). A new life: the religion of socialism. *History workshop journal*, 4: 5-56, p28.

6. Pettigrew, J. (2006). The picnic. Jarrold; Sitwell, O. (1944). Picnics and pavilions. In: Sing high! Sing low! Macmillan; Burnett, J. (2003). Eating in the open air in England, 1830-1914. In: Eating out in Europe, Berg: 21-37. Gwen Raverat offers a variation on the water picnic in the 1890s, in this case travelling by water to a picnic and having to be rowed past naked buried her head in it, and gazed earnestly into its silky depths, until the crisis was past, and the river was decent again.' boys bathing in the river: 'The Gentlemen were set to the oars... and each Lady unfurled a parasol, and, like an ostrich, Raverat, G. (1952). *Period piece.* Faber p108.

10. Taillon, P.M. (2002). What we want is good, sober men.' Journal of social history, 36: 319-338, p329.

Trotti, M.A. (2011). The scaffold's revival: race and public execution. *Journal of social history*. 45: 195–224, p204.

maintain a watchful eye and

into intemperance and

steadying hand on men who otherwise might backslide improvidence. 10

က

recreational time with the families where women could

on dances, picnics, concerts, ice cream socials, and train excursions. By organizing "wholesome" entertainments, auxiliary wives encouraged husbands to spend their

9. McDougall, M.L. (1978). Consciousness and community: the workers of Lyon, Journal of social history, 12: 129-145, p139.

picnic as a morally-uplifting or pro-social distraction. Picnic seems to have been part of the countryside for a picnic - or 'the pages of brotherhood journals were filled with announcements of and reports moral rescue of the railroad brotherhoods of late nineteenth America: In the suburbs, one could easily walk to a pleasant spot in the

ong uneducated workers'

stories, songs, games, and picnics to spread their message an

a meeting of a secret society';9

1,000 participants.8 This role Jougall has studied the lives Lyon, some of whom 'used picnic as a site for politically-charged awareness-raising and fund-raising. In Glasgow in of working class militants in the suburbs of nineteenth century might carry implications of offstage subversion. Mary Lynn McI 1895, a labour movement picnic is reported to have involved : had 'Picnic Committees';

 outings for formal clubs or associations such as student groups, scouts and guides, Less surprisingly, among the undercurrents of this history we can find:

workers associations and so on. This was developed to the point where some associations

with a negro minstrel entertainment, patent medicine sales, food providers, and even ending with a ball that night."7

In 1879, some of the reports of a double execution in New Kent County, Virginia, included than a hanging, complete sharp, as in the case of sins of spectacle. This might be just a co-location of different activities, with people sharing prepared food as they await the action. But the contrast can be quite commentary that the blacks behaved more like it was a picnic public executions:

health, education, sport, religion, gender relations and politics have all been associated with eating in company in a natural setting. Picnic gets implicated by association in the pleasures and recreational activity - not hunting picnics, shooting, Picnic has often been integrated into other activities and purposes - dance, music, commerce, fishing, harvest and hiking picnics. Osbert Sitwell identifies 'water-parties' as 'a subdivision of tries and cultures. And just out of necessity - has been enjoyed by people of all social classes for centuries.<sup>6</sup> for all the English-tradition hype, much of it is reflected in other coun there are plenty of genres. Jane Pettigrew describes seaside picnics, I the picnic proper'. According to John Burnett, eating in the open as a

encompasses all ages and

This confused mix involves people from different social backgrounds,

#### **Collecting and sharing**

announced as: medium-rise housing in a diversely-populated neighbourhood in north central In June 2009 a picnic took place in Cumberland Market, a large square surrou London. It was nded by mixed

collection. There will be activities for adults and children throughout the visitors are invited to bring food to eat and share.  $^4$ stalls designed by artist duo Juneau Projects and inspired by Henry Wellcome and his `an event for the local community at which local residents will display their collections on afternoon, and

Reflecting Wellcome's involvement, the theme of the event was 'collecting and sharing'. In the centre of the square is an area with play equipment, a fenced area for ball games, a community building known as the H-Pod (the home of West Euston Time Bank), and a section of grass about activities on the day. 70 by 50 metres. With the H-Pod as the base, the grassed area was taken over for stalls and

their own flower pots (with seeds to plant); and a grander stand offering a glimpse of the treasures of the Wellcome Collection itself. The event, food and all activities were free of charge. About 300 cup-cakes were prepared by Time Bank volunteers and provided for participants. an opportunity for young people to make their own cardboard electronic guitars and xylophones for a quick creative blast; specimen jars (an allusion to the sponsoring museum) of pickled Stalls offered watercolour portraiture; jewellery created by local people, in small display cases; vegetables for immediate or subsequent consumption; an invitation for participants to make

### Defining picnic: variations on a theme

Dorothy Wordsworth. expression of freedom and return to nature. It might mean a rare escape for stunted working sustenance during an excursion by rail, automobile, bicycle, or in the pioneering footsteps of class children from the stifling tenements, a Sunday School outing perhaps; or decadence, un dejeuner sur l'herbe; part seasonal occasion of celebration or combined with the tradition of a meal for a hunting party, to become a convenience meal for the well-heeled in outdoor pursuit - before the regatta or rugby match for example or even before an uncomfortable impromptu refuelling. It is part fete galante with a tinge of bohemian the opera. It can be a meticulously programmed or choreographed set of social ingredients and accoutrements. Originally it was an indoor contributor party, which somehow Opening our *jonquette* we find that picnic reaches us from the past with a disordered clutter of `Undo the hamper Joe.'5 amily outing; part simple encounters, or

The event was produced by <u>General Public</u>
 <u>Agency</u> for <u>Wellcome Collection</u>, and
 presented in association with <u>West Euston</u>
 <u>Time Bank</u>.



Dickens, C. Pickwick papers, 1836-1837, chapter 4.

2



Kevin Harris 2011

relationships that have been taken from somewhere to be looked at. It is not a unified structure, Community is not an integrity or universal truth or a petrified archaeological treasure. It is not an exhibitionary representation that renders the world as framed and labelled. Nor an array of it neither possesses nor provides privileged access to cultural truths. We're better off reflecting on community as something that takes place, rather than as an object that enchants.

programmatic, more fluid ways?

In the present age of 'secondary orality,' which depends unavoidably on writing and print, we are group-minded self-consciously and programmatically.  $^{104}$  Is that about to change? As we begin to Here's a designated picnic table at an official beauty spot. Note the scratched initials scarring the shed the habits of the organisation society, will we come to see community in unstructured, less describes it, `oral folk were group-minded because no feasible alternative had presented itself.` technology, is inescapably part of our sociality. Before writing was widespread, as Walter Ong surface. They offer a jumbled message – of someone leaving a mark and trying to fend off anonymity; of resistance to order and control, a hint at wildness still not suppressed; of response to the suggestion of official beauty; and of how the alphabet, this all-consuming

Both seem to have been subject to formal organisation for a few hundred years, culminating in a late industrial dislike of disorder, and an impulse to Picnic and community reflect societies. define and to programme.

Checking the ground, heading back.

#### Have your cake and share it

venue, for community without unity - an ephemeral, unprogrammed, fluid, participative gathering of whoever can make it. Meet up and join in. Bring something to share – your skills, your experience, your willingness, your difference. Just purge the urge to impose some unifying So perhaps that's the transition we're after, that we have to be after - that's the menu and meaning. This is community as contributory picnic.

Wait, we're not used to community doing this. Community is supposed to be the opposite, the concentration of commonality, not the inclusion of difference. But it is *difference* that makes agora meaningful. And it is by accommodating individualism and ambiguity that community

the sources of the objects they collect and display, and the dominant culture that they present, opening up the hamper of issues of contested 'ownership', meaning, and interpretation. all-important concept of *cultural mediation'* (original emphasis). Museums face this because of

Community offers a framework for conformity, but does not require it. In Brent's words:

and it is the desire, not the thing, that commands engagement. $^{105}$ 'It is the desire to overcome the lack, the adversity of social life, that is itself community,

want but you can share as well. understanding of community as an encounter of individuals investing in shared experience, as something that fulfils the young person's uncomplicated assertion, `everyone can get what they contact zone, as contributory. Something that is more than network but less than enclosed, will find there is space for a sense of community in which we can have our cake and share it: an condition, something constantly negotiated, inevitably challenging and challenged. Perhaps we Community then is a form of energy, a desire for collective agency; it is both process and

together for a time, and then we move off. The grass is already beginning to spring back. We have not noticed the erosion of public. But a society with a radically diminished public realm, Picnic accentuates the ephemerality of place-and-company. We share food and conversation about by the loss of connectability: with a depleted sense of publicness, will face a crisis of generalised agoraphobia, a crisis brought

their absence. Qualities of orientation, proximity and grouping, and their behavioural counterparts, gathering, lingering and the general gymnastic of a rhetorically conducted social existence, are missing. $^{106}$ 'Characteristics of sociable space that had been taken for granted become conspicuous by

Allowing people the space to negotiate their own escapable distances, around food or music or sport, sheltered by ambiguity, without programme or prescription - this creates its own value. One participant at the Wellcome event summed up:

associate with or have much connection to.' 'This kind of event is fantastic because what it does, it brings people out into a very safe place where they can engage with other people who they wouldn't necessarily normally

mustered, recognised, given the chance to contribute and share: all this is meaning indoors, at tables, most of the time. Picnic does not deny disorder, it accommodates it. The gathering takes value from being assembled out of routine – collecting and connecting, being unhampered. Without spreading the rug for ourselves and sharing something from time to time Mostly we want reassurance. We don't want community all the time, just as we prefer to eat

4

105. Brent 2009, p242

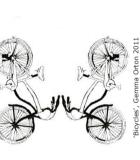


'Initials', Gemma Orton 2011

106. Carter 2002, p210.

Hubbell 2006, p48-49.
 Hubbell, A. (2003). 'I picnic lonely as a cloud... Times Higher Education, 7 March, http://is.gd/Mp6Vxo.

18. Hubbell 2006, p45.



17. Battiscombe 1949, p3.

Csergo, J. (2003). The picnic in nineteenth-century France. In: Eating out in Europe, Berg: 139-159, p143. 16.

Battiscombe, G. (1949). English picnics. Harvill, p3; Burnett 2003, p32; Sitwell 1944, p142. 15.

> might read this "picnic" as Wordsworth's final offering to his war-torn, disunited country: a new custom for creating the bonds of identity within a community and between the community and the land.<sup>20</sup> a meal that enables participants to perform ritualised social bonding with each other. We

> > S

concludes with: Hubbell's analysis dwells on Wordsworth's poem The excursion, which

non humanity and perform heir community to their 'In picnicking, individuals could generate a sense of their comr community on a small scale. Individuals could also reconnect

decades in history when, as he claims, 'nineteenth century picnickers were participating in the high Romantic project of repicnic may seem a tad Reaffirming community and defining the national landscape were part of this programme: otions.' Nothing less. The demarcation of transportation and serving roles in the practice of creating society from the ashes of wars, revolutions, and social disrul pernickety. But Hubbell is here concerned to identify just a couple of

prepared foods are brought to a picturesque spot by Mr Wardle's servants, but served out by members of the hunting party.  $^{18}$ definition will allow us to discriminate between a medieval hunting feast, where an army of servants transported prepared, and served huge, elaborate dishes to an army of aristocratic hunters, and a Picnickers must seek the leisured pleasures of the excursion and eating at a specific of necessity or field Victorian picnic such as the one described in The Pickwick Papers, where portable, workers taking a break. The modern picnic party must provide its own provisions, place. They cannot be travellers simply making a wayside stop transport them to the place, and wait upon itself. This narrow been set out for us by Andrew Hubbell:

dispersed through notions like bottle-parties and foodie groups. A more modern definition has contributor feasts took place among the ancient Greeks which were nothing to do with eating Battiscombe adds that contributions could include providing entertainment, and asserts that outdoors. 17 Originally then, picnic took place indoors, but this contributory meaning is now

'to eat together away from one's home... to spend pleasurable time together and share expenses by contributing financially to the meal or by bringing something to eat.  $^{16}$ 

choice rather than necessity,' echoing Osbert Sitwell's remark that 'one has a home and eats out of doors by choice.  $^{15}$  This emphasises the tasteless irony that the pleasures of picnic, like most of the benefits of community, are denied to homeless people. Burnett's definition appears to She has explored the allow the possibility of the solo picnic; but convivial company is usually implied. Picknickers 'together' or 'sharing' is certainly part of Julia Csergo's understanding. promiscuous etymology and describes the original meaning as:

National Park in 1937.11 In the 1930s two racially segregated national parks were opened in the southern United States, including contested plans for 'the first black picnic ground and auto campground' in Shenandoah Picnic has also been associated with some powerful social issues, like nation-building, or racism.

11. Young (2009). 'A contradiction in democratic government'. *Environmental history*, 14: 651-682, p659.

#### Defining picnic: picking at history

simply being outdoors. In medieval towns and villages, community was readily reflected in the occupation of the neighbourhood for day to day needs, which we can now often avoid. If this and defend the status quo: behaviour. Perambulation (or Rogation) processions served to maintain boundaries and rights, time.  $^{12}$  Rough music processions used disguise, reversal and cacophony to reassert norms of essentially conservative, reaffirming commonality and custom, and signalling the passage of processions, many of which addressed order and disorder. Like most rituals, th History helps us to appreciate the connection between the strength of local social interaction and realisation of community was mostly informal, it was also ritualised in feasts, festivals and iese were reflected in the

commitments within the parish and acting as a reminder of its geographical, legal, ecclesiastical and social boundaries. <sup>13</sup> and affirmed parochial jurisdiction and property rights, drawing the lines streets, back alleys, gardens and private dwellings of towns, the procession delineated ecclesiastical and social boundaries. Traversing through fields and empty spaces of the rural countryside, as of social well as via

associated with commensality: everyone ended up down the pub. It seems that different kind of society for the idea of picnic to emerge. routinely involved walking, companionship, alehouses, dancing, music and `merry-making'.¹4 Clearly, people ate in company away from their homes much of the time, but it needed a it. In late medieval and early modern England, feasts were reassertions of social bonds and commitments to formalised community. Recreation on market days, holy days and Sundays Furthermore, commensality did not depend on spectacle; but it could readily be associated with commensality was already universal in the medieval parish, it did not have to These occasions encompassed both informal and formal community, and were inevitably be given form. at everyday

12. Howkins, A. and L. Merricks (1993). 'Wee be black as hell'. *Rural history*, 4: 41-53.

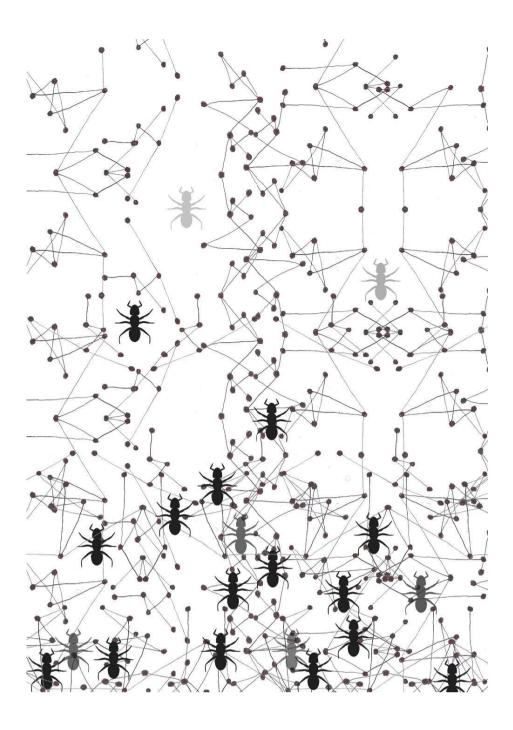
13. Ben-Amos, I.K. (2008). The culture of giving. Cambridge UP, p177.

14. Capp, B. (2003). When gossips meet. OUP.

## Defining picnic: loading up with meaning

although the term is applied loosely to any outdoor refuelling. Reviewing the English tradition, Georgina Battiscombe defined it as 'a party of pleasure which includes a meal eaten out of doors'. More recently Burnett has described it in terms of 'food consumed in the open from Picnic is generally seen as a deliberate social outing, having its own pleasurab le purpose,

7



In museum studies there have been efforts to associate the concept of community with radical democracy and resistance to dominant cultures.  $^{100}$  But it is questionable whether we use museums - or our sense of belonging to community - in that way at all. Research suggests that the most satisfying exhibitions for visitors will be those that resonate with their

the world... they certainly do not intend to have their narrative radically revised. Instead, they want their narrative to be confirmed.  $^{401}$ experiences and provide information in ways that confirm and enrich their existing view of

at, to be returned to. of many museums may depend rather too nicely on the café franchise: people eating in public while they're here to look at things. We collect by the doorway, we peer and observe, we leave it all behind. Who's stuff is this? Things that have been brought here from somewhere to be looked Nowadays also, we tend to visit museums to meet up and eat or drink together, and the survival

I take and release the experience of drifting past the cupboards and curiosities, I take and release my own version of some droplets of knowledge, I practise a kind of sharing that is not about consumption. Museum turns private ownership into a curiosity. When I step outside again, turns private experience into a curiosity. piercing the source of private experience to reveal a sense of collective value. Momentarily it public value cascades around me, making me feel connected. Community somehow works by

# Community as contact zone: 'different is good'102

Some scholars of museum studies have dwelt on the term `contact zones,' which was coined by Louise Pratt to describe

102. http://youtu.be/Etf7FBvdw3Y

as they are lived out in many parts of the world today. of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts

She goes on to describe an educational example, where:

or her in it. Along with rage, incomprehension, and pain there were exhilarating moments of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom - the joys of the contact zone. The sufferings and revelations were, at different moments to be sure, experienced by every student. No one was excluded, and no one was safe.  $^{103}$ Virtually every student was having the experience of seeing the world described with him

hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect; a systematic approach to the This requires what Pratt calls 'ground rules for communication across lines of difference and

39

100. Witcomb, A. (2007). 'A place for all of us'? In: Museums and their communities. Routledge: 133-156, p133.

we snould not be surprised to find picnic so loaded with intent and meaning. It's a purposeful activity, which came to be practised widely later in the century by all social classes at a time when the English believed the sun never set on their empire. Using remarkable new technologies

(bicycle, rail, eventually automobile) to travel into the countryside and take their meals there -

humbly or with extravagance - would have been a way of partaking in and asserting this extraordinary sense of dominance over the planet.<sup>21</sup>

101. Doering, Z. and A. Pekarik, (1996). Visitors to the Smithsonian Institution. *Visitor studies*, 9: 40-50, p47.

Shared pleasure? Of aunts and ants

and being away from it symbolically, as well as transformations in the ways we find and share our food, will continue to influence picnic and hence what it tells us about community.  $^{22}$ 

ours? The question is complicated when picnic features in transnational reunions: among

requires us to be elsewhere in order to recognise and celebrate the *here* that we want to call

playing temporary migrant, strengthening the belonging `away from home'. What is it that

how community can be witnessed, may be better witnessed, off-site. Here is th This idea of excursion, of travelling away while reasserting some home-based

Mexican migrant hometown associations in the twentieth century, huge annual

many as 3,000 participants. Fluid understandings of what is meant by home ar

nd domesticity, picnics drew as

Picnic may also be seen as a way of contriving temporary adversity in order to demonstrate how well it can be dealt with collectively. Some accounts are poignantly reminiscent of painful local picnics that went wrong: meetings in draughty halls on wet evenings. Surtees and, later, Raverat offer us sombre tales of

all: nettles, ants, cow-pats... besides that all-penetrating wind. thistly grass... There were so many miseries which we young ones had uncles, in coats and cloaks and mufflers, were wretchedly uncomfortable on the hard, cramped seats... it was still worse when they had to sit down to have tea on the damp. The aunts sat huddled in furs in the boats, their heavy hats flapping in the wind. The never noticed at

Gerald Durrell joins in:

your first cucumber sandwich...<sup>,23</sup> light a fire with damp wood, the howling gales, the light snowfall, just as you're munching 'How I remember it from my youth! All the thrill of ants and sand in the food, trying to

simpler summary of picnic: `a moment of shared pleasure centring on a meal setting'. <sup>24</sup> Make yourself comfortable. Such memories represent what we might call 'classic picnic' in the twentieth century, group ventures that might bring delight or end memorably in shared disaster, in an age of disintegrating certainties. Csergo prefers to focus on the positive and brings us up to date with a eaten in a natural

21. Being in the landscape can be celebrated nowadays, and food taken the while, without any grasping for lofty meaning, since the romantics got that bit out of the way for us. My favourite micro-private version of picnic comes in an unsigned record of a solo night walk across the mountains of the Fisherfield wilderness in Scotland (which I have covered myself, in daylight): 'At 4.00 a.m., I reached the bealach under A'Mhaighdean, after a tedious and tricky descent down steep rocks from Ruadh Stac Mor. Dawn had arrived but it was still snowing hard. I ate an early breakfast of peanuts and felt much better' (Wilson, K. and R. Gilbert (1980). The big walks. Diadem, p29).

identity, hints at

ie picnicker

22. Fitzgerald (2008). Colonies of the Little Motherland. *Comparative studies in social and the comparative studies and the comparative studies in social and the comparative studies i* Motherland. Comparative studies in society and history, 50:145–169, p152; Morley, D. (2000). Home territories. Routledge; Adler, K.H. and C. Hamilton (2010). Home and homecomings. Wiley-Blackwell.

23. Raverat 1952, p280-281; Durrell, G. (1979). *The picnic and suchlike pandemonium*, Fontana, p18.

24. Csergo 2003, p155

103. Pratt, M. L. (1991). Arts of the contact zone. *Profession*, 91:33-40.

95. Wrightson 2007, p20.

94. See for example Capp 2003; Mennell 1983; Muldrew, C. (2000). From a 'light cloak' to an 'liron cage'. In: Communities in early, modem England, Manchester UP: 156-177; Rosser 1994; Withington and Shepard 2000; Wrightson 2007.

93. Plant, R. (1974). Community and ideology. Routledge, p30-31.

Desirable to some but not to others, was the decline of confined community a lost cause? It seems Henry Wellcome did not think so. As an employer he demanded loyalty from his staff and he set out to sustain it, with ambitious plans for his company's drug production plant in Dartford,

Historians tend to be more cautious, while acknowledging the social impact of changes that came seems fair to say there was plenty of individualism to go round. I like to think that the Breughels of nation states, changes in religious practice, legal practice, property rights, childbirth customs, and so on – oh, and the preparation and consumption of food.  $^{94}$  While the sense of cohesion irrepressible individualism. The two are not mutually exclusive, and the tensions between them define the early modern period - in the growth of the market and of literacy, the emergence may have been widespread and assumed in medieval and early modern neighbourhoods, it and their predecessors confirm this: at their community events, people go round doing the oddest things. Community was always challenged by, and always has to make room for,

30. http://is.gd/4WZu32

enough to get damp bums.

probably bottled water.

Things not to be forgotten at a Picnic' according to Mrs Beeton, include a stick of horseradish

This is meat city: our young vegetarians might not have stayed long

and 'a bottle of mint-sauce well corked'. She adds reassuringly, 'Take 3 corkscrews.

Nowadays the single most common item that picnickers would take is

This might surprise Mrs Beeton, who notes:

Water can usually be obtained so it is useless to take it.'

oies, 2 pigeon pies, 6 ces, 6 baskets of salad, 6

emphasis on organisation: being highly organised, and organising others, is simply inappropriate

behaviour in the contemporary context. Being networked is far more

connect almost effortlessly as a group. The approach reflects relaxed and convenient food and company, and contrasts in very recognisab

the mobile phone, which meant they were able to adjust their plans

numbers varying from four to about eight. The group was fully networked through the power of

The friends might do this once or twice every summer, while at school together or home from university. Others might join them as they became available or the mood took them, with

'Mike would end up sitting on a plastic bag, the rest of us would have wet bums and

They met up again beyond the checkout, and walked to the park half

be bothered to take rugs and blankets:

accept it.

only you would eat.'

be passed round:

important, and rather than

le ways with the Victorian anticipation of available

at short notice and still

A joint of cold roast beef, a joint of cold boiled beef, 2 ribs of lamb, 2 shoulders of lamb, 4

roast fowls, 2 roast ducks, 1 ham, 1 tongue, 2 veal-and-ham p medium-sized lobsters, 1 piece of collared call's head, 18 lettu cucumbers.<sup>30</sup>

The Victorian approach comes across in the first few lines of Mrs Beeton's 'BILL OF FARE FOR A

PICNIC FOR 40 PERSONS':

standing out as a special occasion, picnic is 'a cheap alternative to going out to lunch together.

palpable, free, self-conscious individuals who derived their freedom and consciousness of themselves precisely from the decline and loss of closer, communal forms of social relationship... The loss of community understood in this way was, therefore, a necessary condition of the emancipation of the self conscious, self-directing individual.  $^{93}$ 

and municipal committees, philanthropic societies and so on emerged to play a role in shoring up before the twentieth century, which sought the basis of human association not in tradition, habit church historically, individualism bullied community out of the way. The culprits are widely believed to what Raymond Plant refers to as 'the loss of the old communities' while nurturing independent be industrialisation and globalisation, which gradually choked out the lives of families, streets, neighbourhoods, whole towns. Institutions like factory, corporation, working men's club, churcl The popular narrative about community usually includes reference to assumptions about how, ways of life. Plant argues that a current of thought had emerged and gained momentum long and custom but in the contract of 'free' persons -

the process of discovery of differences and commonalities.

everyone can get what they want but you can share as well. There were some things that

Some items might be shared, fruit for example, so these were bought collaboratively and would

everyone could get their own food – Tim was vegetarian, I was vegetarian, the others

weren't, it made it easier.'

Two young friends described to me their kind of picnic. They would arrange to meet with a few

others outside the supermarket in town. Then they would all go into a select goods independently:

the shop together, but

a mile away. They couldn't

- a disparate array of people who have in common something which they or others regard as significant and defining; or
- the people co-resident in a locality
- 'us versus them' (confrontational or excluding community)

community as

What could we say, and what might we lose, if we had specific words for our various concepts of 'community' in English? It might enable us to talk in different ways, for example, about

employees in a single location to form a 'live-work community': 'A plan of the site, termed Wellcomeville, was drawn up in 1911. It shows the Chemical Kent. The vision, presumably inspired by Ebenezer Howard, included accommodation for his

park for staff.'96 Works and research laboratories alongside cottages, and a clubhouse, sports field and

96. Wellcome Trust, <a href="http://is.gd/aqRo2a">http://is.gd/aqRo2a</a>

seem like that to all of us: dense overlapping and reinforcing ties has since come into question. Later in the century Barry Wellman found community to have been more liberated than lost or saved, although it may not more successful. Perhaps this aspiration to create the all-embracing community can be seen community. The idea that people *would choose* to get their support and socialisation through part of the culmination and demise of the grand-scale, paternalistic, organisational approach to example an orchestra. But the plans were never fulfilled, although the new town movement was Henry Wellcome already offered many perks and unifying opportunities for his staff, including for

indeed, may have increased their reach – for those who seek solidarity in tidy, simple hierarchical group structures, there may now be a lost sense of community.  $^{97}$ Although urbanites have not lost their communal access to people and resources – and

dependent on informal visual recognition, but the knowing of names is regarded as fundamental to the determined rhetoric of cohesive community.  $^{98}$  Is this the nonsense of the order-impulse intensity of social contact in local neighbourhoods may mean 'community different', but not again? The Wellcome picnic was certainly felt to represent a sense of community, but as one participant said, 'A lot of people here I know by sight but I don't always know their names.' Less necessarily community lost. assumptions about the formal nature of local ties. Contemporary neighbouring is surely far more Survey questionnaires often ask if neighbours know each others' names, revealing particular

## Collective value: community as confirming

and misleadingly referred to as if it were `an existing and unified structure, there to be consulted and relied on.  $^{199}$ way we see the world. Museum is commonly seen as possessing authority, expertise and some a confirming device, like a newspaper, or a museum, which we turn to for reassurance in the If the notion of totalising, concerted community is disconcerting, community can still be seen as kind of privileged access to 'truths' in the cultural domain; just as 'the community' is constantly

37

97. Wellman, B. (1979). The community question. *American journal of sociology*, 84: 1201-1231, p1227.

98.

18. In a similar way, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion which reported in 2007 placed emphasis not on social interaction generally, but on 'meaningful' interaction, closing out significant areas of fundamentally important, seemingly trivial, engagement between citizens

99. MacDonald 2005, p219; Brent 2009, p245.

'Morph', Gemma Orton 201:

Six lobsters and fifteen cows

the country's millennium gift to itself. Local events were strung along the 960km Paris northsouth meridian, with tables for more than two thirds of the distance covered by a unifying red capital's reputed taciturnity, orchestrating conviviality in spite of the stereotype: and white table cloth. The Independent's reporter scoffed that the event had o Probably the largest (and longest) picnic in history was staged in France in 2000, described as vercome the

'Parisians talked to one another. They talked to tourists. They shared their food with one another. They shared their food with foreigners.  $^{25}$ 

share it 'in the spirit of the picnic' (now there's a phrase we might want to return to<sup>26</sup>): A BBC report described a lone participant with a large quantity of food because she wanted to

slices of ham, cherries and wine. 'There may be tourists, with just a sandwich. I can offer them mixed salad, cheese, 10 slices of ham, cherries and wine  $^{\prime 27}$ 

a photo-op complete with grassed-over roadway, fifteen cows being milked, professional More recently, picnic has been central to a choreographed international tourism promotion for New South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 by 6,000 ticket-winners in the South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 by 6,000 ticket-winners in the South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 by 6,000 ticket-winners in the South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 by 6,000 ticket-winners in the South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 by 6,000 ticket-winners in the South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 by 6,000 ticket-winners in the South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 by 6,000 ticket-winners in the South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 by 6,000 ticket-winners in the South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 by 6,000 ticket-winners in the South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 by 6,000 ticket-winners in the South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 by 6,000 ticket-winners in the South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 by 6,000 ticket-winners in the South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 by 6,000 ticket-winners in the South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 by 6,000 ticket-winners in the South Wales ticket-winners for

entertainment, and television coverage: picnic at hanging bridge. the grassed zone. This will include local and regional fresh fruits, breads can also bring their own breakfast treats and picnic gear.  $^{28}$ Each winning ticket holder will be offered complimentary NSW produce when they enter and yogurt. They

The budget was said to have been \$1 million, with an anticipated value of ten hear from a participant is 'community' friends seem faint, but the ingredients of food and excursion are there, backed tourism dollars. The traces back to the outings of Dorothy Wordsworth and her community'. In the BBC's coverage of the harbour bridge event,<sup>29</sup> one of the first words you times as much in up by a claim for brother and

'It's a sense of community. Everyone's here having a good time.'

At this point you can be sure Jim Royle was slouched before the screen grunting 'community my arse.' A politician appears before the camera. Sydney needs the boost, we're told, tourist economic prosperity. This is community as attention-seeking. What is it about numbers are down. So picnic is a device for 'community', which in turn is used

'Luncheon Bottles', Gemma Orton 2011, after Manet.

25. http://is.gd/xcmwnt

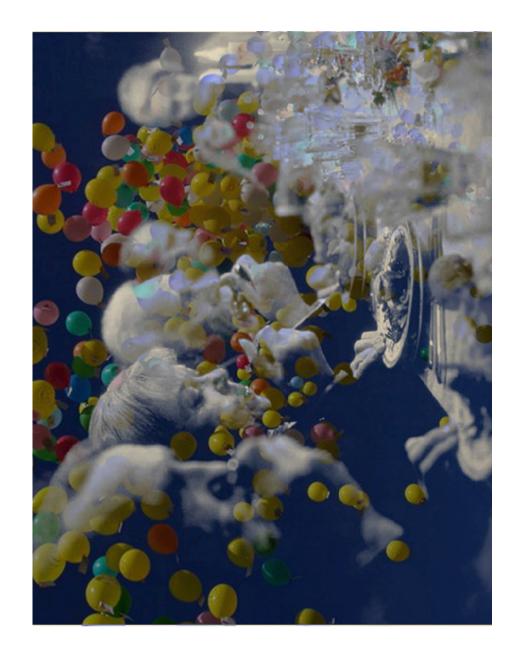
26. . But we won't.

27. http://is.gd/tDbke0

28

29. http://is.gd/caunZv

community that as a device for

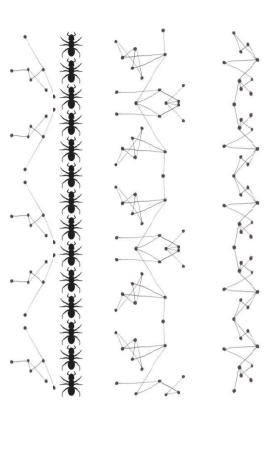


# Community and individualism, 'community different'

industry. Our politicians and journalists invite us to do penance before the curling monochrome prints of streets where doors were always left open and everyone knew everyone else. The problems of social policy. packaged as universally flawless, somehow recoverable, and key to the resolution of expensive problem is not that this mythology is entirely misleading – it isn't, not entirely - but that it is community historically within reach, through the living-memory images peddled by the nostalgia The contemporary media-political rhetoric on the C word is problematic partly because it finds

Speakers of these languages can simply differentiate, for example, the meaning 'us but not you' from 'us including you but not them.' Precision in language is not always an advantage; but there are times when it would be handy to know who was included in a phrase like 'we're going down the pub'. I have heard that some Australian aboriginal languages have four words for the concept 'we'

'Networking Ants', Gemma Orton 2011



35

39. The comment is reported on the solo dining website, <a href="http://is.gd/dgetFT">http://is.gd/dgetFT</a>

38. Putnam, R. D. (2000). Bowling alone. Simon & Schuster.

communitarian fervour. It's as if the accumulated distaste that anyone would go bowling alone $^{38}$ 

has found its more natural target. We can't have people dining alone

want to hear about ourselves as a society,

just occasionally (as with restaurant critics) feared, the lone diner has become the focus of

naturellement - the communal table. A representative of one London restaurant known for its

communal tables is reported as saying:

Increasingly, true commensality is promoted in restaurants by the introduction of -

Perhaps this is a reaction to a transformation in sociability that is going on in and around the

home, with many more single-person households and smaller new-built homes with tiny illequipped kitchens and dining spaces, or none at all. A study of time-use in Belgium found a

Ξ

'If you view yourself as a community restaurant then what you're doing is giving the community you serve the chance to meet and get into conversation with one another place for ideas to congregate.  $^{39}$ 

, it contradicts the story we

the social energy associated with eating. Often pitied, sometimes preyed upon, rarely envied but

37. Lupton (1994), p678

of disquiet at the sight of a

of the food itself, but for

Perhaps this is provoked by

Bell, D. & G. Valentine (1997). Consuming geographies. Routledge, p15, 100. 36.

of reward, a way of

35. Harris, K. (2008). Older people and neighbouring: the role of street parties. Streets Alive, http://is.gd/bpwr1M.

33. Howarth, G. (1993). Food consumption. In: Ageing, independence and the life course. Jessica Kingsley: 65-77, p77; Lupton, D. (1994). Food, memory and meaning. Sociological review, 42: 664-685, p680. 34. Cattell, V. (2001). Poor people, poor places, and poor health. *Social science and medicine* 52: 1501-1516, p1511.

It's common for the exchange of food to feature in people's accounts of mutual aid and social activities.<sup>24</sup> Participants in street parties, talking about diversity and cohesion<sup>35</sup> highlight the role

activities.34 Participants in street parties, talking about diversity and

com + panis, sharing bread

In Consuming geographies, Bell and Valentine connect food consumption with community in two

of conversation-starter: 'People are proud of their food, saying "do you know how to eat it?""

ways: as a fundamental way of shoring up a sense of (usually ethnic) community identity, and as social glue' – through pubs as social venues, corner shops, barbecues, street parties and so

on. Food, they note, 'can be a form of resistance, a form of discipline

creating "community" or a way of refusing or denying it. '36

Deborah Lupton carried out a study of childhood memories of food, and found not only that

memories were generated around meals more than food, but also that:

The event was generally not remembered for the unusualness

the social relationships around which the food was consumed.

But we do not always eat in company, and some people feel a sense

lone diner in the public realm, as if they were some kind of outcast.

Sharing food, chewing the cud

People interact around food. We use its preparation and its consumption as the basis for shared

experiences, as a social act. Food is inextricably interlinked with group membership and kinship.  $^{33}$  The basis of companionship is revealed by the etymology; com + panis, sharir

relish even records a picnic on the prairie: contemporary, to celebrate the association of food and drink with conviviality. Mrs Beeton in her short life epitomised both organisation and food. We need D His irrepressible ckens, a near

Ine baskets contained roast fowls, buffalo's tongue (an exquisite dainty, by the way), ham, bread, cheese, and butter; biscuits, champagne, sherry; lemons and sugar, for punch; and abundance of rough ice. The meal was delicious, and the entertainers were the soul of kindness and good humour.'31

items to a modest gathering in the local park, where our technology facilitates with unspecified others. It's hardly far-fetched to suggest that over this period, country spot requiring detailed organisation of the participants and of the fare, casualisation and individualisation could similarly have affected attitudes to community. individually in a supermarket, without Beetonian forethought, and take our personal packaged Mrs B's incomparable guidance. One hundred and fifty years on, we are more In the 1860s it seems to have been unremarkable to contemplate a picnic for (presumably not including staff), quite likely with a journey of some hours to a likely to shop 40 guests approximeeting with or without specific remote the processes of

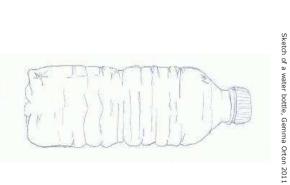
chartfree exploration. activities. People collect around specimens. They gather near the entrances, ar At Cumberland Market the picnic settles in sight of stalls of objects displayed and creative ound the stalls, in

And it's hard to get away from tables: anticipated more stalls or something like a market, perhaps food to buy or a system for sharing. Expectations of the Wellcome event had varied. Some thought there would be a barbecue, some

and share. 'I thought there might be a trestle table and you'd put what you brought on it and mix

the smiles, in the weak sunshine, reflecting across inviting gaps. Baby Tola plays trumpet on he bottle, cheeks out, eyes to the skies, three little fingers tapping at the top. A few dozen people straggle across the grass and stand at stalls that suggest edge without definition. Picnic takes I linger at the fringes watching, as the weather clears. After an hour or two it's possible to see ys trumpet on her

style, gatecrashing village feasts in sixteenth century Flanders, the painter sketching furtively on the edge of a wedding party, at a village fair or pre-lent carnival.<sup>32</sup> When he reports back in his painted works, we find he does not give us community in the simple singular. There is no fraud cohesion or ordered line to the dance. Breughel's community is asymmetric, partial and oblique Let's take a moment to consider Pieter Breughel and his patron Hans Franckert, garbed in rustic



- 32.

groom...' http://www.learn.columbia.edu/bruegel/pd f/Bruegel van Mander.pdf

31. Dickens, C. American notes, 1842, ch13.

32. Breughel's first biographer, Carel Van Mander, published a short text in 1604 in which he noted: 'With this Franckert, Breughel often went on trips among the peasants, to their weddings and fairs. The two dressed like peasants, brought presents like the other guests, and acted as if they belonged to the families or acquaintances of the bride or of the

88. Campbell, D. (2010). London in the blitz. Observer, 29 August 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/aug/29/blitz-london-crime-flourish-blackout

violence. British journal of criminology 41(4), 618-638 (p628).

87. Van de Port, M. (1998). Gypsies, wars and other instances of the wild. Amsterdam UP, p105.

6. Withington, P. and A. Shepard (2000).

Introduction. In: Communities in early modern England, Manchester UP, p6; Rosser 1994, p441. This age of neighbourliness was characterised by rates of lethal violence far higher than we see today. Typical estimates referring to the late Middle Ages range between 20 and 40 homicides per 100,000, while respective data for the mid twentieth century are between 0.5 and 1 per 100,000. Eisner, M. (2001). Modernization, self-control and lethal 86.

85. Brent, J. (2009). Searching for community. Policy Press, p261.

For Brent, incompleteness, division and changeability are part of the context of community, and

much of the fulfilment, the positive difference it makes to people or the achievements with which it is credited. How explain the craving for community, even as we grasp at individual freedoms

Another instance is the myth of exemplary social cohesion during world war two, a time of widespread looting and corruption when the crime rate in London increased by 57 per cent. $^{88}$  It is unhelpful to screen such reality out of our history. We need an understanding of community that acknowledges wildness and does not exclusively privilege order.

'Stories that convey meaning and significance must be kept free of ambiguity, equivocality and multiple interpretations.  $^{87}$ 

ominously to the perils of drunkenness and to the unacceptability of clamor or violence.  $^{66}$  I write So when it came to the convivial medieval banquets, according to Rosser, 'countless rules allude deny and stifle the rest as a temporary aberration. The disturbances in fact began with a display this as news comes in of widespread looting in the streets of London (August 2011). Apparently theme of anthropology. We seem unable to tolerate stories that challenge our sense of meaning of community - collective expression of concern over insensitive policing - but all subsequent behaviour was insistently contrasted with the norms and ideals of community. Mattijs van de establishment makes furious effort to repair that part of social reality we want to see, and to and significance:

'On the contrary, conflict was intrinsic to such relations, and the precepts and practices of

for so long that its label has faded. It took a youth work practitioner, Jeremy Brent, to take it out and check the sell-by date. Reflecting on how weakly communitarian policies connect with young people when they (the young people) have to 'behave' to prove their innocence and when they will disrupt things as they assert themselves, he notes: 'Community involves, and is not an

of disorder *invalidates* community. Brent rejected community as 'a claim to order' but wanted to see it replaced by community as 'a site of ambiquity.'<sup>89</sup> see it replaced by community as 'a site of ambiguity.

elaborate work of art performed on a bare stage, which contrasts drabness and colour, control and expression, limitation and discovery, caution and adventure, disguise and revelation, austere defences against the seduction of the senses are breached by chance, and the commensality. Members of a small, puritanical sect in Norway, who defy indulgence in worldly between ordered and creative approaches to shared experience as expressed through can gain insight from the ways in which we gather around food. Isak Dinesen's short story,  $Babette's\ feast$  – and more powerfully the film by Gabriel Axel<sup>90</sup> – rotates around the contrast commensality, is that it is folly to construe community as something set and impregnable stability and transformation. One of the insights on offer, which can be credited to the power of artificiality of some of their relationships is challenged. The feast that Babette contrives is an pleasures, find themselves the subject of an expansive dinner prepared by a French maid. Their This brings us to another brace of concepts in tension - order and creativity - and here too we

90. http://is.gd/J5gdtj

89. Brent 2009, p241.

# Enchanted looking: community as object, as endangered species

community from outside. They give us the chance to repeat the mantra of community, to hear how it resonates, to listen cock-eared to our own reassurance, to gaze at glass-cased community with glassy eyes. Community as treasure: Occasions like street parties and the Wellcome picnic are displays, they invite us to look at

'So often when we are being shown encased objects in an exhibitionary space, we are being invited to a form of "enchanted looking."  $^{\circ 1}$ 

that both calms us to reflection and startles us with scarcity. Fears of its impending extinction regeneration industry or Sydney Harbour Bridge. Sometimes community is exhibited as a are easily raised. curiosity to be learned from, as moral pointer; or as the endangered panda of our social impulse, Some public events present community as commodity, the manufactured community of the

distant third. 92 English localism may have begun to move away from communitarian notions The idea of 'community' - far from being the magic solution to a long list of social problems which governments would like to see resolved by someone else at no cost – is possibly a community down your gullet based on coerced consensus, but still the media-politics pistons are programmed to ram minority interest. Most people are more concerned about house and family, with 'community' a

91. Macdonald, S. (2005). Enchantment and its dilemmas. In: *Science, magic and religion*. Berghahn, 2005, 209-227, p224.

92. Richards, L. (1990). Nobody's home OUP.

'Celebratory Feast', Gemma Orton 2011, after the Babettte's feast by Gabriel

denying them is counter-productive. But unlike Sennett, he is not persuaded that the necessity

Neither Sennett nor Brent explains the human appetite for community, nor does either make that discourage it? It is undeniable that through collective endeavour, individuals are empowered; and that empowerment is enriching individually and for society.

Port, who studied wildness and violence in war-habituated Serbia, notes this as a repeated absurd causeless violence has shattered the fragile façade of civilising assumptions.

community were invariably crystallised through attempts to resolve or contain it.'

Attempts to sanitise community are part of an ancient politics of association. Historians note that even in late medieval England, generally thought to have been characterised by harmonious and tight-knit over-lapping local relationships, community 'did not preclude conflict':

answer to, conflict. 185

42. Bell and Valentine 1997; *The Times*, 25 November 2003, http://is.gd/I55iFu; Burnett 2004, p163.

Valentine, G. (1998). Food and the production of the civilised street. In: *Images of the street.* Routledge: 189-200, p195. 43.

i is not an appropriate public

disembodied form of

Participants at the Wellcome event certainly thought that the practice had increased significantly

consumption is civilised - tomato sauce dripping down the chir spectacle. 43

'The street may be a site of consumption but only a particular

Burnett identifies an increase in street eating in mo

now less associated with work or poverty than in the past:

in their lifetimes.

risotto, paella and curries: it is now apparently "cool" to eat such things and to drink from a can in city streets or on park benches. "44

'The range now extends to burgers, hot dogs, pizza and chicken and even to packaged

Maybe the economy depends on it. According to a BBC News report, the business intelligence company Datamonitor has warned that social convention may be constraining the trend for eating and drinking in the street: 'The firm says such stuffiness needs to be combated if busy Britons are to use their daily commute time - the longest in Europe - to refuel."

So it's an urban issue and an economic one. Wait, here's another viev

dern cities, noting that it is

Burnett 2003, p33; Burnett, J. (2004). England eats out. Pearson Education, p315.

45. http://is.gd/l6lZ0h

rassment of audience to

disrespect for the social meaning of the meal? In some circumstances, especially in fine weather eating in public may be sanctioned. The pavement restaurant legitimises visible chomping under the eyes of passers-by. Spaghetti may flap its sauce against my cheek or I might draw a fishbone clumsily from my teeth at the last moment, with the embar

To the extent that there are taboos about eating on the street, Valer

contend with. I am paying for the privilege.

itine notes how they imply

particular understandings of 'public' and 'private'

What's the problem here? Is it the smell or the litter (implied or visible)? Is it the aesthetically we disconcerted by off-putting sight of a stranger's open mouth and its contents; or are

We had our meals and that was it. We didn't eat in the street.

entieth century, 'eating in grumbling *Times* columnist describes eaters in the street as 'a potent cause of urban decay'. Perhaps more likely symptom than cause, I suggest, but the very forcefulness of views on the We are where we eat, say Bell and Valentine, and some people are all over the place. A the street was unthinkable. <sup>42</sup> At the Wellcome picnic one lady in her eighties said, topic can be revealing. In England in the late nineteenth and early tw

Eating in public: dining on the hoof

individualised during the same period. The researchers put this down mainly to changes in living arrangements. Other factors such as the increased availability of products for self-catering, they claim, 'have little impact on commensality patterns in practice. "<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, the notion that past 40. Mestdag, I. and I. Glorieux (2009). Change and stability in commensality patterns. *Sociological review*, 57: 703-726.

generations were comparative paragons of virtue in the practice of domestic cooking is questioned in recent research. $^{41}$ 

significant decrease in family commensality between 1966 and 1999, while ea

ting became more

41. Meah, A. and M. Watson (2011). Saints and slackers. *Sociological research online*, 16.

Plated', Gemma Orton 2011

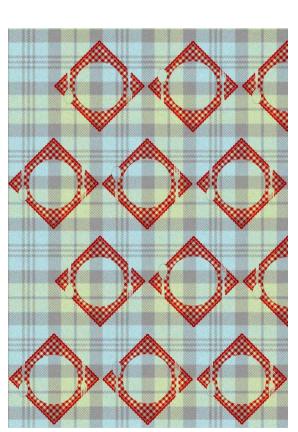
Food changes hands, as ideas change minds. When there is conversation, our morsels and shape the meanings that we want to share, that are shared with

hands move bits of us somehow

still attached to them.

in the same truly ancient language.

they are released: waving chunks of bread or clusters of grapes, our hands accompany. Meanings take shape. Even baby Tola, sucking at her bottle, is pushing or pulling at something At the dinner table, cutlery adds its weight to the conversation and subdues our hands. At picnic,



 $^{3}$ 

12

Let's be bold then and claim that picnic is essentially convivial. A cluster of picnickers spills conviviality across the careful carefree distances, within hearing and view, as crumbs from a flapped rug. A toddler unharnessed will bridge the gaps, bread crumbling from her fingers, smiles opening up before her.

15

not on your own, so it's social 'You're inclined to think of going on a picnic with somebody, isn't it?' (Wellcome picnic participant)

and the practice appears paradoxical, given the status of the monastery as a refined example of To be sure, commensality is not to be confused with conviviality, 50 as a moment's reflection on the monastic convention of silence at mealtimes will remind us. Perhaps that tradition amounts from commensality, if it is not suppressed. For Leon Kass 'it is shared speech, even more than that conviviality will arise to little more than an enforced routine kind of penance. Grim occasions they must have been, community of place, faith and practice all in one. The point is surely the shared food, that makes a community of diners.  $^{\it 61}$ 

Grignon, C. (2001). Commensality and social morphology. In: Food, drink and identity. Berg: 23-33, p24.

50.

51. Kass 1999

Weichart, G. (2007). 'Makan dan n bersama': feasting commensality. Anthropology of food, S3, http://is.gd/bUl43H, para 32.

49.

'Eating is normally done quickly and in a few minutes several plates of cooked food as well as a couple of sweet dishes would have been consumed. Once the body and mind are satisfied, a person is ready to move over to relatives or neighbours for a conversation or

jokes.'

conversation is constrained by the balancing acts required with plates on knees and awkward configurations of chairs. In Gabriele Weichart observed mealtimes in Indonesia and noted that while sitting at tables facilitates communication during the meal', when a buffet is served, such situations,

Commensality and conviviality

viewing' (hanami) and 'moon-viewing' (tsukimi) are celebrated by large party outings of families Certainly, eating in public can be sanctioned by convention. The Japanese traditions of 'flowerthe moon in autumn, with be a 'community-viewing' kes be the start of a and company colleagues, admiring the cherry blossom in spring and t appropriate 'flower-viewing' or 'moon-viewing' food. If there were to I food in England - not the burger, please - could the Wellcome cup-cal tradition?

are  $\it not$  valued, public culture is at stake. In this light, picnic can be seen as a convention that defies these taboos through order and purpose, choice of location and the trappings of If social relations are valued then, eating in public seems to be suspect; and if social relations civilisation (a rug, a hamper, a plate). everything else, to that order. Community was how you experienced the prevailing social order. I was once invited to a street party which came to be dominated by square dancing, hay bales and all. The militarism was overwhelming – ordinary conscripts willingly submitted to orders from a commander and performed drills in step. It is an exaggerated illustration of how street parties can be experienced as a form of order imposed as a condition of membership.

(government, council, church, teachers, extended family, parents, and other institutions such as Scanning these images, it's difficult to discern many smiles on the children's faces. This adds to the niggling impression that they have been corralled into this arena, been told that they will afterwards, will have been told that they had enjoyed themselves. And surely, for many, that's the BBC and the police) and it was culturally eccentric to question them to any extent, inviting the swiftest retribution. The world had an order to it and street parties conformed, like almost enjoy themselves, are prohibited from escaping or improvising their own entertainment, and how the world was. There were hierarchies of authority which knew what was best for you loudspeakers, and setting up the tables, and were most likely down the pub by tea-time.

Typical images from the mid-century events show children sat at a row of tables along a street. Bunting and flags distinguish the occasion. Adults, mostly if not exclusively women, stand round, street parties. The traditional notion of a street party fitted comfortably on to neighbourhoods reminiscences, had performed their roles in securing the bunting, sorting the wiring for usually at the children's backs, policing the territory. The menfolk, we're reminded in that were assumed already to be cohesive.

another street, the organiser was very uncertain whether or not to agree, 'because she did not know what sort of people lived down there,' and feared that 'there might have been an "upset" if the "wrong sort of people" were allowed to come to the party. $^{83}$ 

an age when people tended to be more localised, territoriality could be intensely re-enforced

In these accounts there are no echoes of today's yearning for 'community' in the sense of neighbourliness. Community cohesion seems not to have been part of the rationalisation for

83. Broady, M. (1956). The organisation of Coronation street parties. *Sociological review* 4: 223-242, p231.

When, for example, it was proposed that a small party should include residents from

## Order and community: a site of ambiguity

ideally without decimating our environment. swiftly. Army ant colonies are super-organisms and by over-populating their neighbourhoods Social animals can take order to disconcerting extremes. In the unlikely event that army ants high levels of organisation. Picnic seems like a modest way to celebrate disordered community, Humans, widely believed to be social animals also, benefit from having checks on the impulse to they create environmental disorder on such a huge scale that they have to emigrate daily. were to encounter a picnic, even one of Beetonian proportions, their efficiency would engulf it

passage in which he links the modern compulsion for 'the purified myth of community' with the disproportionate use of vindictive violence by communities against delinquents: Richard Sennett's famous attack on community in The uses of disorder includes a sermonlike

becomes a situation in which the ultimate methods of aggression, violent force and so that they have little experience of disorder as well, the eruption of social tension reprisal, seem to become not only justified, but life-preserving. 'Having... so little tolerance for disorder in their own lives, and having shut themselves off

express solidarity in a counterfeit sense of community in order to avoid new experiences, 'in Social Behaviour Act. Sennett explains community as a myth of solidarity developed as a way of 'resolving the fear of otherness.' People who share very little with each other, he writes, can It seems remarkable that this text was published more than thirty years before the UK's Anti-

'It is inescapable that the people involved in this desire for coherence  $\it actively$  seek their own slavery and self-repression.  $^{64}$ 

This caustic message, suggesting that community is a failed contrivance – elsewhere Sennett calls it 'destructive *gemeinschaft'* - has sat at the back of the community development cupboard

84. Sennett, R. (1971). *The uses of disorder*. Penguin, p45, emphasis added; p41, original emphasis.

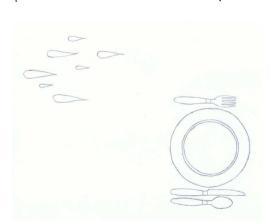
 $\omega$ 

spirited' behaviour, yet remains unformulated in our education and is seldom articulated. The collective use of public space, for picnic or other purposes, would become impossible if behaviour was not moderated by consideration for others: This vague but deeply-felt need to defend the quality of the public realm drives much 'public-

desires with the rights and desires of others, and... the preservation of the kind of social space in which public life remains possible 148 to do with the maintenance of personal safety, the reconciliation of personal rights and concerns for the ordinary users of public spaces. Among other things, such concerns have of, others' presence, actions, and entitlements. This process inevitably raises a range of Public life presupposes life-in-public and thus a constant engagement with, and evaluation

46. Kass, L. R. (1999). The hungry soul. Chicago Press, p148.

47. http://gu.com/p/2bhmk



Sketches of place setting and raindrops , Gemma Orton 2011

48. Dixon, J, et al. (2006). Locating impropriety. *Political psychology*, 27: 187--206, p191, emphasis added.

then either avert their gaze or observe him objectifiedly in the act. 'A man eating as he walks down the street eats in the face of all passersby, who must

people eat.' Felicity Cloake wrote on a *Guardian* blog of 'watching a woman eat a bowl of cereal on an early tube into work. And I wondered, is it ever acceptable to eat on public transport?" A participant at the Wellcome picnic acknowledged that 'it doesn't always look Her article sparked numerous comments, some defending the practice with libertarian vehemence, others berating it. Among them, this fizzing rebuke: good, seeing

contributing to congestion and carbon emissions... Fried food that stinks trodden into the seats of the bus or train, creating a cleaning cost to the cost in the first place. That puts people off using public transport, who otherwise drive on their That packaging billows around the bus or train, making the place resemble a landfill site. have paid my fare. What are my choices?... Fried food that stinks of shit provider. That cost is passed on to all passengers, whether they contribu layers of packaging. These are invariably left behind by the fat, selfish bastards that eat it. Craving for reconstituted battery farmed chicken deep fried in lard is really unpleasant. I Eating fried food that stinks of shit makes people feel ill, or even worse, ıted or not to the bus or train usually comes in of shit gets own in a car, really hungry.

Sketch of apple core and cherries with ants, Gemma Orton 2011

Network 3', Gemma Orton 2011

one of the participants at the Wellcome picnic: others into account. Hence the ongoing collective responsibility for public space, articulated by live-and-let-live' school and those who refer to an ineluctable need to take the The opposing views expressed in comments on Cloake's article reflect the contrast between the presence of

Everybody has the opportunity and to some degree a responsibility to make the area a

space in which public life remains possible.

# Curtains in the countryside: on social change

mutual examination. Being somewhere specific together, with a clear purpose like eating, focuses or refocuses attention on described by Surtees and charged context where Who are the picnickers? Nineteenth century gatherings such as those Chekhov brought friends and extended families together in a sociallybehaviours, clothes, taste and conversation were all part of the fierce the relations of the participants:

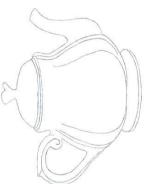
solidarity; but it happens because commensality first allows the limits of the group to be redrawn, its internal hierarchies to be restored and if necessary to be redefined. $^{52}$ 'Consuming food and drinks together may no doubt activate and tighten internal

picnics would have jeopardised the upholding of propriety (unlike *le dejeuner sur l'herbe*): in nineteenth century England, maintaining the distinction between backstage and frontstage most have established codes of at table. Few Victorian certainly mattered. Surtees hints comically at one of the ways in which the distinction was In other societies, the wealthy who could afford to be waited on may behaviour at picnic, albeit codes less stringent than those for meals maintained:

Presently a battue of corks proceeded from the curtained corner where the warm-water jug for the knives was concealed from public view... Here as everywhere in Victorian England we find the consuming themes of separation and trying defend the sturdy structures of social class from the risk of subversion, so that community could remain in its place - being just about caste; and just-about chaste. Massive feats of engineering and religion arose to keep corruption at bay. What chance that a curtain could defend the social to be beyond corruption. It would have required devices such as curtains in the countryside to order, en plein air? If social change is going to play out, then the consumption of food is an obvious site to watch. It might not be picnic to begin with: Burnett found nineteenth century picnics to be 'extensions of a domestic party in the controlled setting of people of one's own class, for example in the separate and their ladies were served enclosures at race meetings or at shooting parties where the "guns" at distance from the beaters.

dancing and entertainment accompanied tea and light refreshments' often ending with firework displays. <sup>54</sup> On these occasions 'visitors brought their own food and drink or bought refreshments But elsewhere he describes eating and drinking in English pleasure gardens `where music, served in booths or supper "boxes"". This was surely not picnic, being

Sketch of a teapot, Gemma Orton 2011



52. Grignon 2001, p24.

53. Surtees, R.S. (1860). Plain or ringlets? Methuen, p28.

using food and gathering in the cause of cohesion.

royal wedding were welcomed by republicans who took the opportunity to stage anti-royalist jubilee would be legitimate justification; as was the so-called 'millennium' in 2000, for many people." In Liverpool, numerous street parties took place in 2007 for the city's  $800^{\rm th}$ community'. There were claims that the promotion of street parties associated with the 2011 nationalist rallying summons to community recalls Hubbell's analysis of the Romantic picnic, street parties.  $^{80}$  The dominant tone is invariably traditionalist and patriotic though, and the nation, connecting themselves momentarily to history without necessarily feeling part of it. Occasions like VE day, the festival of Britain, the coronation, royal weddings, and the royal neighbourhood street parties nationwide in what was called 'a simple but profound act of

Consistent with the modern tradition of street party, older people in particular tend to expect

(USA); where town or city festivities take on a local dimension (eg Brazil) and more gatherings more similar to picnics (eg Australia); where topographies encourage communal activities in 'blocks' (USA); where town or city festivities take parties. Others have emerged for instance where the climate and relaxed social cultures have encouraged outdoo 79. This is not the only tradition of street movement (Reclaim the Streets) . http://www.thebiglunch.com/, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/apr/30/n ot-the-royal-wedding-republicans 80.

Vetwork', Gemma Orton 2011

similar: if you're from round here, you're included. Most picnics have a more deliberate sense of neighbourhoods, street parties must offer greater potential for generating community cohesion. enabled ordinary people to participate, at an appropriate distance, in the grander affairs of the The Wellcome picnic resembled a street party in part because the conditions of invitation were In twentieth century England the street party was predominantly a celebratory device which selection. And although there are factors obviously influencing who lives near whom in our

anniversary, and in 2009 the 'Big Lunch' was launched as an attempt to stimulate

some kind of officially-decreed justification for a public event, such as the outbreak of peace, a royal commemoration, or a significant civic occasion. Where there is no such official branding, there seems to be a sense of discomfort, as these comments from street parties held in 2007

too closely associated with

54. Burnett 2004, p163; Burnett 2003, p30.

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neighbours were 'previously barely acknowledged' and it was the street party which signalled permission for inhibitions to be shed. A review of coronation street parties in Liverpool confirms

that local social relations in mid-century England could be laced with tension:

largely, a cohesive experience for those left at home. In shared adversity, people would be

motivated to interact and support one another. And yet apparently, at least in this case, which has taught us that the experience of a protracted and devastating war was in itself language of armistice. At first glance we seem to be in the familiar mythology of the home front, We must pass over the combination of 'shells' and 'bursting' as a perverse peculiarity of the the children something to remember.' And indeed many memories are held and valued, like this

Neighbours burst from their shells to talk to other neighbours, previously barely acknowledged, arms around shoulders; munching, swigging, adding to the laughter or quietly remembering special thoughts.<sup>82</sup>

82

http://timewitnesses.org/english/~alsmith.html. http://photosforthefuture.thehistorychan street party in Birmingham, at the end of the second world war, mentions the intention of 'giving Furthermore, these were primarily events for children. The description for one image depicting a

one from Romford, Essex:

and standing; but the justification had to come from some established higher office. In this

sense, the commemorative street party would have been reactive, not proactive. As a treat for organising a day-trip or a street party, with the implied or explicit consent of others of their class

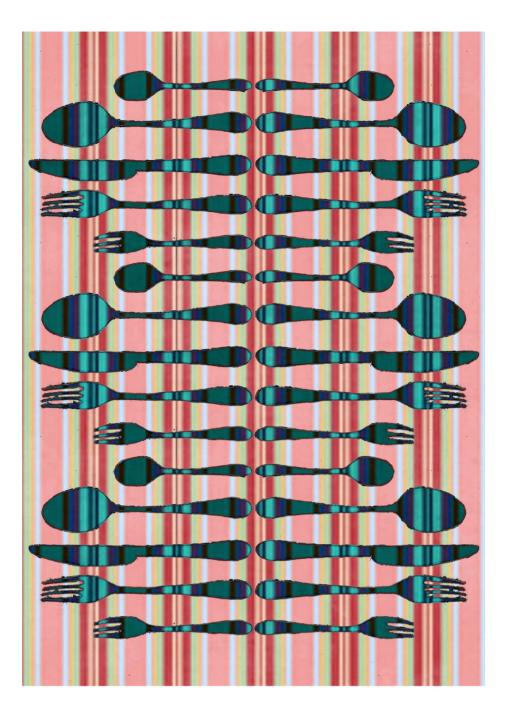
the masses, it served to reaffirm the status quo. This is community as echo.

For many of that generation, public events had to be externally ignited: ordinary people didn't generate public events themselves, it was not their place to do so. They might play a role in

81. See Harris, K. (2008). Older people and neighbouring: the role of street parties. Streets Alive, http://is.gd/bPWr1M.

The older people were all supportive but some would not come. It reminded them of royalty events mainly. Some would say "it's for the kids.""

'Some older people expect a more traditional sort of sit-down children's party. Some were bemused because there was not "royal cause" for the event.  $^{81}$ 



#### Something snug and well-selected

the idea of picnic was invented to test society's ability to keep the mess at bay. An advance colony of servants marches across fields and rocks to prepare the site. Writers like Surtees and servants, tempting themselves to disorder: Chekhov suggest how the well-to-do seem to be pushing the limits of their dependence on Nineteenth century accounts of picnics betray the age's preoccupation with organisation, as if

eating with one spoon. such matters, and there was no scrambling for plates, no begging for forks, no two people `... though there were a few of the usual casualties of moving, such as the salt coalescing with the sugar, and the pickles bursting into the pie, the servants had the rectification of

poured the wine on the carpet [carpet?] and on their own knees, split the salt, while it was dark all around them and the fire burnt more dimly, and everyone was too lazy to up and put more wood on. $^{77}$ papers fluttering in the wind, no one knew where was his glass or where his bread. They `As is always the case at picnics, in the mass of dinner napkins, parcels, useless greasy and everyone was too lazy to get

journal offering a view one hundred and fifty years ago: Community may seem like a response to disorder, but Richard Sennett wants to have a word with us about that in a moment. Before he does, here's an anonymous contributor to Chambers

stock have been decided three weeks before the day of the meeting, at a lottery... I have been one of a party of three hundred, whose various contributions to the common `I have sat at rich men's feasts, which were partaken of in the open air, whereat powdered monster-meetings of any sort. seems, somehow, to signify something snug and well-selected, and quite at variance with have joined mighty pleasure-companies of the people, where everybody kept his food in his pocket-handkerchief... but these things too, I consider foreign to the picnic, which cushion to sit upon, and a napkin folded upon his plate: but I scarcely call that picnicking. footmen have waited upon us decorously, and a bishop said grace; where everyone had a And I

usually to be distinguished from monster-meetings, being neither spectacle nor co-extensive with 'public'. Could this effect be carried off at local level, say, in your street? Communities of interest sometimes appear to be similarly snug and well-selected, and are

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77. Surtees 1860, p27, Chekhov 1929, ch.7.

78. Chambers Journal for 6 June 1857, cited by Battiscombe (1949, p90-94).

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'Ants', Gemma Orton 2011

Rosser, G. (1994). Going to the fraternity feast. Journal of British studies, 33: 430-446, p438, 432.

60.

Thomas, K. (2009). *The ends of life*. OUP, p223-224. 59.

Wrightson, K. (2007). 'Decline of neighbourliness' revisited. In: Local identities in late medieval and early modern England. Palgrave, p34. 58.

of family and friends at

the local community and moved towards the selected company

to stimulate harmonious and to bring about a 'historically relationships to be legitimately forged, often between participants of markedly different background or economic status.  $^{60}$ cohesive local social relations through commensality, Rosser makes clear that the medieval fraternity feast was demonstrably not a form of social magic worked to bring about a 'histor 'The feast's defining rhetoric of honorable equality and commensality enabled new And as if alluding to nationally-templated street party days, devised

impossible harmony

entertaining, were now designed with differentiated room space, and equipped with all the Friday night suppers or Sunday dinners... Their houses, once so ill-equipped for domestic So here again we find questions of community implied in a table setting. Sometimes it had the to Gervase Rosser, these es, cutlery, and tea sets. he fraternity feasts of place of honour; it could be purpose, process and outcome, as with the medieval England, ritualised and yet socially opportunistic. According necessary apparatus, in the form of dining tables, linen, glass occasions amounted to social politics in action:

neighbourliness was very much part of the reality of the times. <sup>58</sup> Keith Thomas, reflecting on social developments in early modern England, notes the effect of the privatisation of the home: from the mid-sixteenth century on, 'the prevalence of attitudes inimical to the practice of good the middle classes increasingly separated themselves from the collective celebration of

between social classes might become eroded in urban public space around food and drink: the spectacular, the commercial and, significantly, the public. But it illustrates how distinctions

both sexes (though not by respectable unaccompanied ladies) and open could pay the usual 1/- admission charge.  $^{65}$ Pleasure Gardens were a significant social development in that they were patronised by to all classes who

55. Burnett 2004, p4.

We would hardly expect our social institutions to remain unchanged over time; nor should we expect picnic or community to evade the influence of those changes. Robert Putnam claims that

picnicking trends in America betray particular social changes: single measure of social activity in this survey: playing cards; having friends over to the house; dinner parties; having dinner with your family; going to club meetings; card American went on two picnics per year. Reductions of that order characterize almost every in 1975 the average American went out to a picnic 5 times per year. In 1999, the average

Elsewhere Putnam concludes with alarm: 'informal outings, like picnics... seem extinction.'56 But hey, it's just possible that picnic will accommodate social char reinvented, and persist; and in so doing, will continue to reflect fluid understandings of nge, be on the path to

games, and so on.'

### Home and privacy: community is outside

community as it is for picnic. The home has a gravitational role in local social relations. It is point of departure and return, for

business, as well as nightly for sleeping.' In the absence of restaurants, bars, served as public meeting places for entertaining and transacting business.  $^{\rm 57}$ chamber: 'in constant use, for cooking, for eating, for entertaining guests, for at home could only be at best an uncomplicated affair. Even in the later medieval period, hon were equipped to do no more than boiling and perhaps roasting. Baking and other processes communal. In the free towns of late medieval Europe, even the bourgeois house comprised little Through most of human history, the limitations of dwellings have meant that t more than a work area and living quarters, and the living quarters consisted of required interaction with others beyond the home and in many cases would have been and hotels, houses val period, homes he sharing of food a single large

century, bringing with it the associated innovation of privacy. It would be surprising if these profound social changes left no impression on people's experience of community. In England The notion of a `family home' was still to come, emerging in the Netherlands in the seventeenth

> 56. Putnam, R. (2001). Social capital. OECD, http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/25/6/1825 http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/28848.pdf, p6; Putnam 2000, p100.

57. Mennell, S. (1983). All manners of food. Blackwell, p47-48; Rybczynski, W. (1986). Home. Simon and Schuster, p26-28.

24

73. Sardar, Z. and J. Ravetz (1996).

Cyberfutures. Pluto, p29. The term
'genuine community' is used by Zygmunt
Bauman, to mean 'comprehensive and
lasting' (Bauman, Z. (2000). Liquid
modernity. Polity, p201).
'Comprehensive?

72. Well I haven't.

71. Kilvert's diary, 13 Oct 1871, cited by Battiscombe (1949, p107); Chekhov, A. (1929) The duel. In: Select tales of Tchehov, v2. Chatto and Windus.

70. A more recent commentator relates the disappointing story of 'an inexperienced group who carried five pounds of groups who carried five pounds of grotaces for a week around Dartmoor, but never found the energy to peel and cook them.' Rowlandson, J. (1993). Food and the fellwalker. In: Food, culture and history, v.1, London Food Seminar, 17-28, p.23. The story was originally reported in The Great Outdoors

69. Surtees 1860, p27.

'cyberspace provides an easy simulation for the sweaty hard work required for building real communities... In a cyberspace community you can shut people off at the click of a mouse and go elsewhere. One has therefore no responsibility of any kind'.73

Some commentators believe that the same attitude should determine our understanding of community, perhaps distinguishing 'genuine community' from superficial or 'inauthentic' forms. These arguments swirled around the unexplored new world of virtual space, in the 1990s, with

about the appeal of awkwardness. Today we can pop in to a supermarket or corner shop and choose (collectively or individually) from a wide range of prepared food and drink. We don't need to lug spuds round the countryside, or steal them, nor do we need to collect kindling and timber, Surtees' reflections on the need for picnic to entail a little trouble and enterprise raise a question prepare a fire and cook them. We're no more likely to do this than we are to read Wordsworth's

'I've been on many picnics over the years. They'd be with extended family. Everybody'd bring something to share. Culturally food is a big part of our [Jewish] lives. It's probably everywhere. I don't think people are so keen on the idea of carrying stuff. People don't not as strong a tradition as it was, because of the availability of purchased food carry stuff.' (Wellcome picnic participant)

order 'to boil potatoes which had been brought with us'. Picnickers in Chekhov's  $\mathit{The}$   $\mathit{duel}$  were consuming fish soup, and I'm ready to believe it was prepared on site.  $^{71}$  Nowadays, few of us can Wait, potatoes? Yes indeed, people took the basics and had time, energy and inclination to prepare a meal as if in their own kitchen.  $^{70}$  Food takes energy as well as providing it. The diarist Francis Kilvert describes 'rival attempts to light fires' during a picnic party in Herefordshire, in be bothered with the labour-intensive boy-scout approach:

the trouble and enterprise of life, gathering sticks, lighting the fire, boiling the pot, buying or stealing notations  $^{69}$ 'We hold that a pic-nic is not a pic-nic where there are well-arranged tables and footmen to wait. It is merely an uncomfortable out-of-door dinner. A pic-nic should entail a little of

Choosing to eat out of doors when 'one has a home' implies an acknowledged degree of hassle and a calculation that it is an acceptable investment in an experience. Surtees offers a view on The effort involved in a full-scale traditional picnic is off-putting to the contemporary urbanite.

by certain forms of community; and on the other, the notion that commonality implies 'real' community, whatever that is, requires 'sweaty hard work'? There seems to be a confusion between, on the one hand, lifestyles that are characterised by some forms of particularly Davies has encapsulated a sense of how digital media puts pressure on our understanding: sanctions and suppressions could be fierce. These are perhaps more easily avoided online. Will responsibilities. Detachment from such communities was almost always harder to achieve - the gruelling collaborative labour, mining for example, which came to depend on and were supported This line of thinking is still surprisingly widespread. Where does the assumption come from that

is that we want fewer obligations, more immediate satisfaction, less contact with strangers in public spaces and more with those we already know. 174 in public spaces and more with those we already know. inescapability of social relations... The assumption underlying the digital model of progress community depends on some sense of continuity and co-dependence, and a sense of the

healthy form of community, detachment needs to be a realistic option. We need only refer to the awkwardness of being gay or disabled, or experiencing domestic violence, in traditional tight-knit communities, where `an outer conformism smothered individual tragedies': This helps us to recognise that while social relations in general may be 'inescapable,' in any

them; people endured years of intolerable relationships, sometimes retreating into total silence against their partner. None of this was ever avowed in public. $^{75}$ Women hid their bruises and denied the cancer eating their body until days before it killed

This is community by denial. The escapability of the structure does not necessarily invalidate the

and stable, predictable co-presence. Perhaps this is connected historically to a protestant ethic that leads us to value some things according to the effort put into them. It seems eccentric to people put themselves to some inconvenience, to make their experience of community somehow resilience. As Alison Gilchrist puts it, communities are 'actively constructed by their members, not merely arising from local circumstances.' The question arises, is there an expectation that ourselves and allow others to have a claim on the common result. This is community as of comfort can add value to common interests and shared energies: we invest something of precisely what we expect our designers to eradicate. It seems that resistance to the seductions valid? Usually these nuances of community are underpinned by a robust theme of commitment, Davies suggests that what is needed is an ethics of *inconvenience*, even though inconvenience is

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74. Davies, W. (2006). Digital exuberance. *Prospect*: 32-35.

75. Seabrook, J. (2005). The end of the provinces. *Granta*, 90, 225-241, p237.

Gilchrist, A. (2004). The well-connected community. Policy Press, p2.

'SpoonFork', Gemma Orton 2011

65. Carter 2002, p125, original emphasis.

Groucho Marx is said to have sent a telegram of resignation to the Friar's Club of Beverly Hills, saying he did not want to belong to any club that would have him 64.

Carter, P. (2002). Repressed spaces. Reaktion, p185, emphasis added. 63.

> which takes the pace off all the lives that enter into it, contriving a common mingling pace, a conversational pace. Agora and it shuns bunting and avoids street party where the pulse is higher. Picnic too declines spectacle, it shuns bunting and avoids sensation, it requires a common pace. It is configured, but not artificial. Picnic is an exercise in portable sociability. Community here is mustered, it is in the gathering, it is not apparent until - unlike, say, carnival or We may also think of agora, and of community, as a place of friction community deny any contrast with everyday life, posing as quotidiar people mingle and spread the rug.

specifically a product of this new social space. He was attached to the goings-on there... a kind of attached flaneur. <sup>65</sup> Carter notes that the agora attracted a particular type -

place, but had as its object a mutual recognition, including the recognition of otherness. 63 In this universalised through coerced belonging. Human beings have probably always been suspicious of crosses urban spaces where some some people would exclude themselves from it, deflected by the signs that community has been reading, agora was systematically and insistently inclusive. Nonetheless we can suppose that people meet and others feel uncomfortable. He notes that agora 'was not simply a gathering in Groucho's paradox of this totalising impulse, an instinct that finds immortal mocking echo In a book exploring the meanings of agoraphobia, Paul Carter

unlikely because when people stood at the stalls, they faced away from the square, towards the surrounding homes. But they were *there*: 'this is so important because it brings out people who - in fact theatricality was The space at Cumberland Market was programmed, but people did not have to know how to behave. It was more agora than arena: the event was not theatrical wouldn't make contact in any way.'

and familiarity, for occasional use. It allows us now and then to slump in sight of wilderness, to chomp at grub in front of others necessarily familiar, and not to have regard for the crumbs.

## Outdoors in company: disport and gladness

from across the city. Low railings surrounding the park allowed the bustle to attract attention, and if people came to see what was going on, there was nothing off-putting to discourage the anything other than behave in a civil manner towards fellow-citizens. This non-territorial, The style of the event implied no expectations on the participant that they would have to do welcoming, non-prescriptive 'feel' can be hard to create at neighbourhood leve some business within the neighbourhood, without risking an unmanageable influx of freeloaders The Cumberland Square venue was ideal for the Wellcome picnic, attracting passers-by who had discourage them.

butter and a penny bottle of lemonade in the park,' with her friends. That was I spoke to Ethel, now in her nineties. She remembered as a child just having a bit of bread and picnic.

antiseptic. It satisfied the instinct for an unmanipulated experience of outdoors-with-others, against the trend of stimulus diversity. Parks and markets also offer this value, where space The Wellcome event was a temporary occupation of public space without the sense of coercive its uses are under-prescribed: control or some hidden persuader's agenda. The space was not imagineered, sanitised or where space and

design or strategy.'61 'markets have the potential to offer precisely such a space, in their haphazardness, serendipity, physical openness, a typically long local association with a local community and place, the lack of a profit-driven company in charge and an often-limited overarching

As far as residents were concerned, this was in contrast to previous council-owned events in The Wellcome picnic took place under the aegis of a community organisation, which trouble had been `pre-empted' by importing `three van loads of police'. exploit most if not all of the assets that Watson cites for markets, without reso and was able to rting to spectacle.

was de rigeur to record the stylisation of social activities. Not having a table, a tableau was sure to help. Thus a hunt gathering was described, as if all observed behaviour were programmed, by Gaston de Foix in Le livre de chasse in 1387: Perhaps it is helpful to consider the limits to the formalisation of picnic. In medieval France it

'Some should eat sitting, and some standing, and some leaning upon their elbows, some should drink, some joke, some play, in short, do all manner of disport and gladness.  $^{62}$ 

informality, implying a degree of organisation of collective life which our young contemporary picnickers would struggle to match. Today we store picnic in a dry place, between impropriety Like many attempts to prescribe community, this comes across as the organisation of

> 61. Lofland, L.H. (1998). The public realm. Transaction, p216-217; Greenhalgh, L. and K. Worpole (1995). *Park life*. Comedia; Watson, S. (2009). The magic of the marketplace. *Urban studies*, 46: 1577–1591, p1590.

62. Gaston de Foix, Le livre de chasse, 1387, translated between 1406 and 1413 by Edward Duke of York as The master of game. Quoted by Battiscombe (1949), p23.