

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

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

trying to pass on to anyone who could use it. The personification of history, she stands offering 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 shopping basket, a football in one hand. She's lived here since 1939. Ethel joined her, telling me girls. The picnic, Jessie? She loves it, listen to the rasp of her east London voice: `It brings 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

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

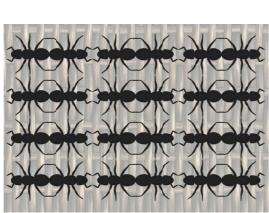
kettle, we three, with Brown's help, scrambled over a low stone wall by the roadside, and lit a fire and prepared our tea. The kettle soon returned, and the hot tea was very welcome and refreshing."66 We stopped, and while Grant ran back to get from a small house some hot water in the

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

a spirit stove, cutlery, unbreakable Betelware plates, cups and saucers and a folding table strapped to the outside...  $^{68}\,$ `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

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'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.

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

Sketches of cutlery, Gemma Orton 2011 Sketch of blossom, Gemma Orton 2011

'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

1. Shakespeare, W. As you like it, 2.7 meeting a need. Our shadowy anthropology reveals us sharing language, group-minded in the nensa': something firelight, knowing shared experiences, then gathering in the morning to make things together, serve to feed recognition and seed co-operation, stirring the chemistry of collaboration while shaping objects for communal benefit. Such as a table, for example: Latin, 'n

Meals require 'a table, a seating order, restriction on movement and on alternative occupations, solid to be returned to. Mary Douglas tells us:

'The meal puts its frame on the gathering."

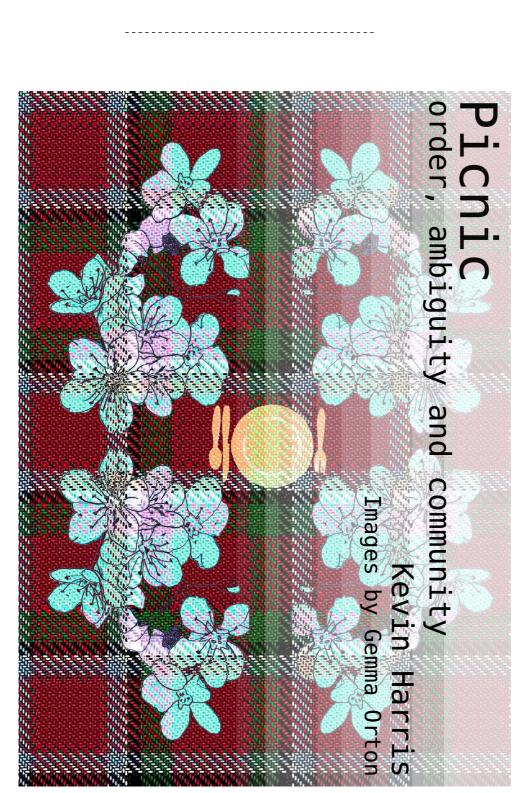
But picnic is different. At seaside family picnics as a child, I seldom sat - I ate wandering around or standing on the fringes of the group, not tempted to perch, kicking away the slack ropes of order and mealtime protocol. Picnic seems to offer an escape from 'the usual identities and

hierarchical relationships in the group'. $^3$ 

spill out of its frame? The gaps between picnickers are not set by form or code, not by the logic of furniture, the shape of the room or the geometry of place-setting. We expect diners to be predictably ordered; but here they are not. There is a faint anarchic threat in their rejection of the table, a delinquent challenge to civilisation. What traces are there to follow? What then is commensality without tables? What sort of gathering, when community seems to

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

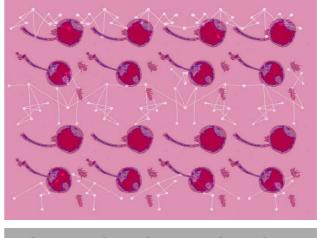
3. Hubbell, A. (2006). How Wordsworth invented picnicking and saved British culture. *Romanticism*, 12: 44-51, p48.

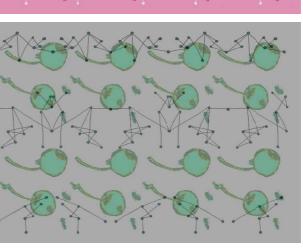


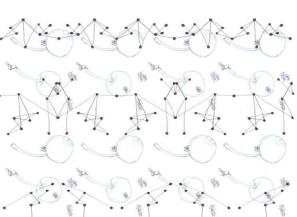
'Cherries 3', Gemma Orton 2011

Cherries 2', Gemma Orton 2011

'Cherries', Gemma Orton 2011









#### community Picnic: order, ambiguity and

**Kevin Harris** 

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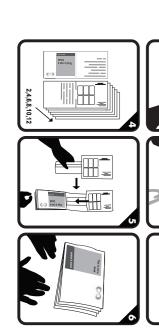
from proboscis

Text: Kevin Harris

Images: Gemma Orton

creators and sold to raise funds for Crisis. Fifty numbered copies of this work were signed by the





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

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

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

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

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 boys bathing in the river: 'The Gentlemen were set to the oars... and each Lady unfurled a parasol, and, like an ostrich, buried her head in it, and gazed earnestly into its silky depths, until the crisis was past, and the river was decent again.' Raverat, G. (1952). *Period piece*. Faber, p108.

> a watchful eye and on dances, picnics, concerts, ice cream socials, and train excursions. By organizing "wholesome" entertainments, auxiliary wives encouraged husbands to spend their the pages of brotherhood journals were filled with announcements of and reports steadying hand on men who otherwise might backslide into intemperance and recreational time with the families where women could maintain improvidence. 10

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picnic as a morally-uplifting or pro-social distraction. Picnic seems to have been part of the moral rescue of the railroad brotherhoods of late nineteenth America:

1895, a labour movement picnic is reported to have involved  $1,000~{\rm participants.}^8$  This role might carry implications of offstage subversion. Mary Lynn McDougall has studied the lives In the suburbs, one could easily walk to a pleasant spot in the countryside for a picnic - or of working class militants in the suburbs of nineteenth century Lyon, some of whom 'used picnic as a site for politically-charged awareness-raising and fund-raising. In Glasgow in stories, songs, games, and picnics to spread their message among uneducated workers' a meeting of a secret society'

some associations and guides, outings for formal clubs or associations such as student groups, scouts workers associations and so on. This was developed to the point where

had 'Picnic Committees';

Less surprisingly, among the undercurrents of this history we can find:

In 1879, some of the reports of a double execution in New Kent County, Virginia, included commentary that the blacks behaved more like it was a picnic than a hanging, complete with a negro minstrel entertainment, patent medicine sales, food providers, and even ending with a ball that night."

in the pleasures and Picnic has often been integrated into other activities and purposes - dance, music, commerce, as in the case of 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 people sharing sins of spectacle. This might be just a co-location of different activities, with prepared food as they await the action. But the contrast can be quite sharp, public executions:

This confused mix involves people from different social backgrounds, encompasses all ages and, fishing, harvest and hiking picnics. Osbert Sitwell identifies 'water-parties' as 'a subdivision of the picnic proper'. According to John Burnett, eating in the open as a recreational activity - not picnics, shooting, for all the English-tradition hype, much of it is reflected in other countries and cultures. And just out of necessity - has been enjoyed by people of all social classes for centuries. $^6$ there are plenty of genres. Jane Pettigrew describes seaside picnics, hunting

#### Collecting and sharing

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

visitors are invited to bring food to eat and share. " collection. There will be activities for adults and children throughout the afternoon, and 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

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

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

#### Defining picnic: variations on a theme

sustenance during an excursion by rail, automobile, bicycle, or in the l class children from the stifling tenements, a Sunday School outing perhaps; or simple expression of freedom and return to nature. It might mean a rare escape for stunted working the opera. It can be a meticulously programmed or choreographed set combined with the tradition of a meal for a hunting party, to become a convenience meal for the decadence, *un dejeuner sur l'herbe*; part seasonal occasion of celebration or family outing; part an uncomfortable impromptu refuelling. It is part *fete galant*e with a tinge of bohemian well-heeled in outdoor pursuit - before the regatta or rugby match for 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 pioneering footsteps of of social encounters, or example or even before 'Undo the hamper Joe.'5

The event was produced by General Public Agency for Wellcome Collection, and presented in association with West Euston

lime Bank.



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

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104. Ong, W. J. (1982). Orality and literacy. Routledge, p134. Ong notes that 'Print is curiously intolerant of physicial incompleteness. It can convey the impression, unintentionally and subtly, but very really, that the material the text deals with is similarly complete or self-consistent' (p130). One predictable response to this is for the writer to



Photograph, Kevin Harris 2011

relationships that have been taken from somewhere to be looked at. It is not a unified structure, it neither possesses nor provides privileged access to cultural truths. We're better off reflecting 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

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

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 define and to programme.

your experience, your willingness, your difference. Just purge the urge to impose some unifying 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, So perhaps that's the transition we're after, that we have to be after - that's the menu and

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, all-important concept of *cultural mediation'* (original emphasis). Museums face this because of opening up the hamper of issues of contested `ownership', meaning, and interpretation.

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

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

Community then is a form of energy, a desire for collective agency; it is both process and 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 understanding of community as an encounter of individuals investing in shared experience, as

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

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

One participant at the Wellcome event summed up: This kind of event is fantastic because what it does, it brings people out into a very safe

sport, sheltered by ambiguity, without programme or prescription - this creates its own value. Allowing people the space to negotiate their own escapable distances, around food or music or

associate with or have much connection to. place where they can engage with other people who they wouldn't necessarily normally

gathering takes value from being assembled out of routine - collecting and connecting, being 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 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 lose some of that reassurance, and a few moments of humanity.

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on community as something that takes place, rather than as an object that enchants.

20. Hubbell, A. (2003). 'I picnic lonely as a cloud...' Times Higher Education, 7 March, http://lis.gd/Mp6Vxo.

disunited country: a

between the

'a meal that enables participants to perform ritualised social bonding with each other. We

new custom for creating the bonds of identity within a community and community and the land.<sup>20</sup>

might read this "picnic" as Wordsworth's final offering to his war-torn,

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

19. Hubbell 2006, p48-49. 18. Hubbell 2006, p45.

'Bicycles', Gemma Orton 2011

in history when, as

Nothing less.

hunters, and a

describes it,

Picnic and community reflect societies. Checking the ground, heading back.

#### Have your cake and share it

meaning. This is community as contributory picnic.

105. Brent 2009, p242.



'Initials', Gemma Orton 2011

106. Carter 2002, p210.

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

#### Defining picnic: picking at history

and defend the status quo: 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, these were realisation of community was mostly informal, it was also ritualised in feasts, festivals and 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 History helps us to appreciate the connection between the strength of Perambulation (or Rogation) processions served to maintain boundaries and rights, local social interaction and

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

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

prepared foods are brought to a picturesque spot by Mr Wardle's servants, but served out 'In picnicking, individuals could generate a sense of their common humanity and perform he claims, 'nineteenth century picnickers were participating in the high Romantic project of redispersed through notions like bottle-parties and foodie groups. A more modern definition has transport them to the place, and wait upon itself. This narrow definition will allow us to discriminate between a medieval hunting feast, where an army of servants transported The demarcation of transportation and serving roles in the practice of picnic may seem a tad community on a small scale. Individuals could also reconnect their community to their place. They cannot be travellers simply making a wayside stop of necessity or field Reaffirming community and defining the national landscape were part of this programme: Victorian picnic such as the one described in The Pickwick Papers, where portable, pernickety. But Hubbell is here concerned to identify just a couple of decades prepared, and served huge, elaborate dishes to an army of aristocratic Picnickers must seek the leisured pleasures of the excursion and eatir workers taking a break. The modern picnic party must provide its own creating society from the ashes of wars, revolutions, and social disruptions. by members of the hunting party. 18 been set out for us by Andrew Hubbell:

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 '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.  $^{16}$ contributor feasts took place among the ancient Greeks which were nothing to do with eating of the benefits of community, are denied to homeless people. Burnett's definition appears to 'together' or 'sharing' is certainly part of Julia Csergo's understanding. She has explored the Battiscombe adds that contributions could include providing entertainment, and asserts that allow the possibility of the solo picnic; but convivial company is usually implied. Picknickers outdoors.  $^{17}$  Originally then, picnic took place indoors, but this contributory meaning is now promiscuous etymology and describes the original meaning as:

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

16.

17. Battiscombe 1949, p3.

ig at a specific

provisions,

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

15.

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

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

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

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museums - or our sense of belonging to community - in that way at all. Research suggests that In museum studies there have been efforts to associate the concept of community with radical democracy and resistance to dominant cultures. <sup>100</sup> But it is questionable whether we use

the world... they certainly do not intend to have their narrative radically revised. Instead, they want their narrative to be confirmed.  $^{\prime 01}$ experiences and provide information in ways that confirm and enrich their existing view of the most satisfying exhibitions for visitors will be those that resonate with their

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

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, I take and release the experience of drifting past the cupboards and curiosities, I take and turns private experience into a curiosity. public value cascades around me, making me feel connected. Community somehow works by piercing the source of private experience to reveal a sense of collective value. Momentarily it

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

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

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:

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.  $^{\prime103}$ of wonder and revelation, mutual understanding, and new wisdom - the joys of the or her in it. Along with rage, incomprehension, and pain there were exhilarating moments 'Virtually every student was having the experience of seeing the world described with him

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

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

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- 100. Witcomb, A. (2007). 'A place for all of us'? In: Museums and their communities. Routledge: 133-156, p133.
- Doering, Z. and A. Pekarik, (1996).
   Visitors to the Smithsonian Institution Visitor studies, 9: 40-50, p47.

102. http://youtu.be/Etf7FBvdw3Y

simpler summary of picnic: `a moment of shared pleasure centring on setting'.  $^{24}$  Make yourself comfortable. disintegrating certainties. Csergo prefers to focus on the positive and ventures that might bring delight or end memorably in shared disaster, in an age of a meal eaten in a natural brings us up to date with a

21. 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 rocked of a colo pich woll. tedious and tricky descent down steep rocks from Ruadh Stac Nor. 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 much better') Scotland (which I have covered myself, in daylight): `At 4.00 a.m., I reached the (1980). The big walks. Diadem, p29). daylight): 'At 4.00 a.m., I reached the bealach under A'Mhaighdean, after a record of a solo night walk across the mountains of the Fisherfield wilderness in

22. Fitzgerald (2008). Colonies of the Little 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

Such memories represent what we might call 'classic picnic' in the twentieth century, group Gerald Durrell joins in: picnics that went wrong: meetings in draughty halls on wet evenings. Surtees and, later, Raverat offer us sombre tales of well it can be dealt with collectively. Some accounts are poignantly reminiscent of painful local Picnic may also be seen as a way of contriving temporary adversity in order to demonstrate how Shared pleasure? Of aunts and ants our food, will continue to influence picnic and hence what it tells us about community.<sup>22</sup> and being away from it symbolically, as well as transformations in the many as 3,000 participants. Fluid understandings of what is meant by Mexican migrant hometown associations in the twentieth century, huge annual picnics drew as 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 how community can be witnessed, may be better witnessed, off-site. Here is the picnicker playing temporary migrant, strengthening the belonging 'away from home'. What is it that This idea of excursion, of travelling *away* while reasserting some home-based identity, hints at humbly or with extravagance - would have been a way of partaking in extraordinary sense of dominance over the planet.  $^{\rm 21}$ when the English believed the sun never set on their empire. Using remarkable new technologies activity, which came to be practised widely later in the century by all social classes at a time We should not be surprised to find picnic so loaded with intent and meaning. It's a purposeful (bicycle, rail, eventually automobile) to travel into the countryside and your first cucumber sandwich... light a fire with damp wood, the howling gales, the light snowfall, just as you're munching cramped seats... it was still worse when they had to sit down to uncles, in coats and cloaks and mufflers, were wretchedly uncomfortable on the hard, How I remember it from my youth! All the thrill of ants and sand in the food, trying to all: nettles, ants, cow-pats... besides that all-penetrating wind. thistly grass... There were so many miseries which we young ones had never noticed at The aunts sat huddled in furs in the boats, their heavy hats flapping in the wind. The have tea on the damp, home and domesticity, ways we find and share and asserting this take their meals there -

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95. Wrightson 2007, p20.

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

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

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

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 to define the early modern period - in the growth of the market and of literacy, the emergence irrepressible individualism. The two are not mutually exclusive, and the tensions between them 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,

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

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 neighbourhoods, whole towns. Institutions like factory, corporation, working men's club, church what Raymond Plant refers to as 'the loss of the old communities' while nurturing independent historically, individualism bullied community out of the way. The culprits are widely believed to be industrialisation and globalisation, which gradually choked out the lives of families, streets, 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.
- 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)

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 community as

employees in a single location to form a 'live-work community': Kent. The vision, presumably inspired by Ebenezer Howard, included accommodation for his

Works and research laboratories alongside cottages, and a clubhouse, sports field and park for staff.  $^{\prime 6}$ 'A plan of the site, termed Wellcomeville, was drawn up in 1911. It shows the Chemical

96. Wellcome Trust, http://is.gd/aqRo2a

more successful. Perhaps this aspiration to create the all-embracing community can be seen as 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 Wellman found community to have been more liberated than lost or saved, although it may not dense overlapping and reinforcing ties has since come into question. Later in the century Barry community. The idea that people would choose to get their support and socialisation through Henry Wellcome already offered many perks and unifying opportunities for his staff, including for like that to all of us:

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. 497 Although urbanites have not lost their communal access to people and resources - and,

assumptions about the formal nature of local ties. Contemporary neighbouring is surely far more 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 Survey questionnaires often ask if neighbours know each others' names, revealing particular again? The Wellcome picnic was certainly felt to represent a sense of community, but as one intensity of social contact in local neighbourhoods may mean `community different', but not participant said, `A lot of people here I know by sight but I don't always know their names.' Less

## 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.  $^{\rm 199}$ 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 way we see the world. Museum is commonly seen as possessing authority, expertise and some

37

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

98. 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 concept between the content of the conten trivial, engagement between citizens

MacDonald 2005, p219; Brent 2009, p245.

'Morph', Gemma Orton 2011

Nowadays the single most common item that picnickers would take is probably bottled water. and 'a bottle of mint-sauce well corked'. She adds reassuringly, 'Take 3 corkscrews.' This might surprise Mrs Beeton, who notes:

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

O

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 enough

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

to get damp bums.

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 pies, 2 pigeon pies, 6 medium-sized lobsters, 1 piece of collared calf's head, 18 lettuces, 6 baskets of salad, 6 cucumbers.30

and convenient food and company, and contrasts in very recognisable ways with the Victorian emphasis on *organisation*: being highly organised, and organising others, is simply inappropriate behaviour in the contemporary context. Being networked is far more important, and rather than rough the power of The Victorian approach comes across in the first few lines of Mrs Beeton's 'BILL OF FARE FOR A standing out as a special occasion, picnic is 'a cheap alternative to going out to lunch together The friends might do this once or twice every summer, while at school together or home from connect almost effortlessly as a group. The approach reflects relaxed anticipation of available notice and still university. Others might join them as they became available or the mood took them, with numbers varying from four to about eight. The group was fully networked th the mobile phone, which meant they were able to adjust their plans at short PICNIC FOR 40 PERSONS':

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

They met up again beyond the checkout, and walked to the park half a mile away. They couldn't be bothered to take rugs and blankets:

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

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

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 together, but others outside the supermarket in town. Then they would all go into the shop select goods independently:

Six lobsters and fifteen cows

'Luncheon Bottles', Gemma Orton 2011, after Manet

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

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

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

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

More recently, picnic has been central to a choreographed international tourism promotion for by 6,000 ticket-winners for

entertainment, and television coverage: picnic at hanging bridge. a photo-op complete with grassed-over roadway, fifteen cows being milked, professional New South Wales, as Sydney Harbour Bridge was taken over in 2009 Each winning ticket holder will be offered complimentary NSW produce when they enter

tourism dollars. The traces back to the outings of Dorothy Wordsworth The budget was said to have been \$1 million, with an anticipated value of ten times as much in can also bring their own breakfast treats and picnic gear.  $^{\prime 28}$ the grassed zone. This will include local and regional fresh fruits, breads and yogurt. They backed up by a claim for and her brother and

hear from a participant is 'community': friends seem faint, but the ingredients of food and excursion are there community'. In the BBC's coverage of the harbour bridge event, $^{29}$  one of the first words you

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

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

25. http://is.gd/xcmwnt

26. But we won't.

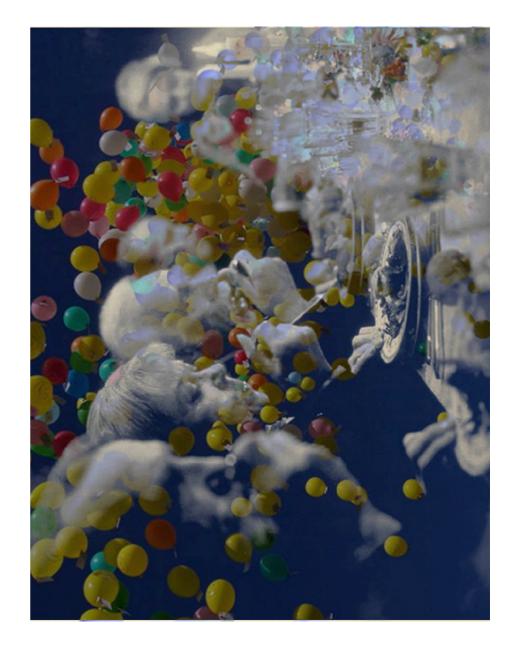
27. http://is.gd/tDbke0

28.

http://is.gd/yUiMS6

29. http://is.gd/caunZv

it about community that



# Community and individualism, `community different'

prints of streets where doors were always left open and everyone knew everyone else. The community historically within reach, through the living-memory images peddled by the nostalgia industry. Our politicians and journalists invite us to do penance before the curling monochrome The contemporary media-political rhetoric on the C word is problematic partly because it finds 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

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 Speakers of these languages can simply differentiate, for example, the meaning 'us but not you' I have heard that some Australian aboriginal languages have four words for the concept 'we'.

'Networking Ants', Gemma Orton 2011





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39. The comment is reported on the solo dining website, http://is.gd/dqetFT

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

has found its more natural target. We can't have people dining alone, it contradicts the story we

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

communitarian fervour. It's as if the accumulated distaste that anyone would

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 -

want to hear about ourselves as a society.

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

community you serve the chance to meet and get into conversation with one another

place for ideas to congregate. $^{39}$ 

'If you view yourself as a community restaurant then what you're doing is giving the

But we do not always eat in company, and some people feel a sense of disquiet at the sight of a

'The event was generally not remembered for the unusualness of the food itself, but for

the social relationships around which the food was consumed. 77

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

37. Lupton (1994), p678.

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

35.

33. Howarth, G. (1993). Food consumption. In: *Ageing, independence and the life course*. Jessica Kingsley: 65-77, p77; Lupton, D.

38. on, rarely envied but go bowling alone<sup>38</sup> lone diner in the public realm, as if they were some kind of outcast. Perhaps this is provoked by the social energy associated with eating. Often pitied, sometimes preyed upon, rarely envied bus

36.

Harris, K. (2008). Older people and neighbouring: the role of street parties. Streets Alive, <a href="http://is.gd/bPWr1M">http://is.gd/bPWr1M</a>. medicine 52: 1501-1516, p1511.

34. Cattell, V. (2001). Poor people, poor places, and poor health. Social science and (1994). Food, memory and meaning. Sociological review, 42: 664-685, p680.

> In Consuming geographies, Bell and Valentine connect food consumption with community in two 'as social glue' – through pubs as social venues, corner shops, barbecues, street parties and so ways: as a fundamental way of shoring up a sense of (usually ethnic) community identity, and Deborah Lupton carried out a study of childhood memories of food, and found not only that on. Food, they note, 'can be a form of resistance, a form of discipline, of reward, a way of creating "community" or a way of refusing or denying it.  $^{36}$

It's common for the exchange of food to feature in people's accounts of mutual aid and social activities.  $^{34}$  Participants in street parties, talking about diversity and cohesion $^{35}$  highlight the role of conversation-starter: 'People are proud of their food, saying "do you know how to eat it?""

kinship. 33 The basis of companionship is revealed by the etymology: com + panis, sharing bread 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 together.

Sharing food, chewing the cud

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

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

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

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

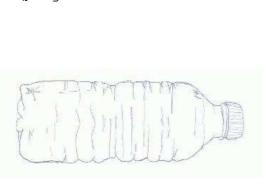
And it's hard to get away from tables: anticipated more stalls or something like a market, perhaps food to buy or a system for sharing. Expectations of the Wellcome event had varied. Some thought there would be a barbecue, some

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

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

painted works, we find he does not give us community in the simple singular. There is no fraud 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 Let's take a moment to consider Pieter Breughel and his patron Hans I cohesion or ordered line to the dance. Breughel's community is asymm ranckert, garbed in rustic etric, partial and oblique.

Sketch of a water bottle, Gemma Orton 2011



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

http://www.ieaiii.coom.pdf f/Bruegel\_van\_Mander.pdf /www.learn.columbia.edu/bruegel/pd

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

88

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

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 86. Withington, P. and A. Shepard (2000). Introduction. In: *Communities in early modern England*, Manchester UP, p6; Rosser 1994, p441. This age of Modernization, self-control and lethal violence. British journal of criminology, 41(4), 618-638 (p628). respective data for the mid twentieth century are between 0.5 and 1 per 100,000.' Eisner, M. (2001).

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

For Brent, incompleteness, division and changeability are part of the context of community, and denying them is counter-productive. But unlike Sennett, he is not persuaded that the necessity

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 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.

is unhelpful to screen such reality out of our history. We need an understanding of community

Stories that convey meaning and significance must be kept free of ambiguity, equivocality

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 this as news comes in of widespread looting in the streets of London (August 2011). Apparently deny and stifle the rest as a temporary aberration. The disturbances in fact began with a display theme of anthropology. We seem unable to tolerate stories that challenge our sense of meaning 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 of community - collective expression of concern over insensitive policing – but all subsequent 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. and significance:

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

tight-knit over-lapping local relationships, community 'did not preclude conflict':

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 answer to, conflict.'85

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 that acknowledges wildness and does not exclusively privilege order.

and multiple interpretations. 87

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

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

89. Brent 2009, p241.

90. http://is.gd/J5gdtj

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 commensality. Members of a small, puritanical sect in Norway, who defy indulgence in worldly 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 and expression, limitation and discovery, caution and adventure, disguise and revelation, elaborate work of art performed on a bare stage, which contrasts drabness and colour, control austere defences against the seduction of the senses are breached by chance, and the between ordered and creative approaches to shared experience as expressed through This brings us to another brace of concepts in tension - order and creativity - and here too we

# Enchanted looking: community as object, as endangered species

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

'So often when we are being shown encased objects in an exhibitionary space, we are being invited to a form of "enchanted looking."  $^{\rm 191}$ 

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

community down your gullet distant third. <sup>92</sup> English localism may have begun to move away from communitarian notions 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 which governments would like to see resolved by someone else at no cost – is possibly a The idea of 'community' - far from being the magic solution to a long list of social problems

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

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

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

ombated if busy

45. http://is.gd/l6lZ0h

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

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

consumption is civilised - tomato sauce dripping down the chin is not an appropriate public

spectacle. 143

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

To the extent that there are taboos about eating on the street, Valentine notes how they imply

particular understandings of 'public' and 'private':

Participants at the Wellcome event certainly thought that the practice had increased significantly in their lifetimes. Burnett identifies an increase in street eating in modern cities, noting that it is 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

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

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

Britons are to use their daily commute time - the longest in Europe - to refue

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

eating and drinking in the street: 'The firm says such stuffiness needs to be c

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 aesthetically fishbone clumsily from my teeth at the last moment, with the embarrassment of audience to ight draw a off-putting sight of a stranger's open mouth and its contents; or are we disconcerted by What's the problem here? Is it the smell or the litter (implied or visible)? Is it the eyes of passers-by. Spaghetti may flap its sauce against my cheek or I m contend with. I am paying for the privilege.

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

42. Bell and Valentine 1997; *The Times*, 25 November 2003, http://is.gd/155iFu; Burnett 2004, p163.

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

Eating in public: dining on the hoof

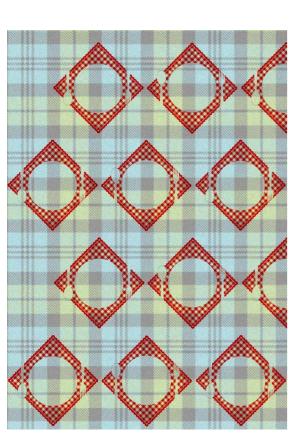
questioned in recent research.41 generations were comparative paragons of virtue in the practice of dor arrangements. Other factors such as the increased availability of products for self-catering, they claim, 'have little impact on commensality patterns in practice. 40 Meanwhile, the notion that past individualised during the same period. The researchers put this down significant decrease in family commensality between 1966 and 1999, mainly to changes in living while eating became more nestic cooking is

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 som At the dinner table, cutlery adds its weight to the conversation and subdues our hands. At picnic, g or pulling at something

still attached to them. Food changes hands, as ideas change minds. When there is conversation, our hands move morsels and shape the meanings that we want to share, that are shared with bits of us somehow

- 40. Mestdag, I. and I. Glorieux (2009). Change and stability in commensality patterns. *Sociological review*, 57: 703-726.
- 41. Meah, A. and M. Watson (2011). Saints and slackers. Sociological research online, 16.

'Plated', Gemma Orton 2011



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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.

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 (government, council, church, teachers, extended family, parents, and other institutions such as afterwards, will have been told that they had enjoyed themselves. And surely, for many, that's everything else, to that order. Community was how you experienced the prevailing social order 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

Bunting and flags distinguish the occasion. Adults, mostly if not exclusively women, stand round, usually at the children's backs, policing the territory. The menfolk, we're reminded in reminiscences, had performed their roles in securing the bunting, sorting the wiring for Typical images from the mid-century events show children sat at a row of tables along a street. loudspeakers, and setting up the tables, and were most likely down the pub by tea-time.

street parties. The traditional notion of a street party fitted comfortably on to neighbourhoods neighbourliness. Community cohesion seems not to have been part of the rationalisation for 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 When, for example, it was proposed that a small party should include residents from 'upset" if the "wrong sort of people" were allowed to come to the party.

In 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

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



## Order and community: a site of ambiguity

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

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

reprisal, seem to become not only justified, but life-preserving. so that they have little experience of disorder as well, the eruption of social tension becomes a situation in which the ultimate methods of aggression, violent force and '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 It seems remarkable that this text was published more than thirty years before the UK's Antiresolving the fear of otherness.' People who share very little with each other, he writes, can

own slavery and self-repression.'84  $^{\mathtt{N}}$ It is inescapable that the people involved in this desire for coherence *actively* seek their

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

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

'Network 3', Gemma Orton 2011

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

'Picnic Blanket', Gemma Orton 2011, after O'Neil

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

5

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

and the practice appears paradoxical, given the status of the monastery as a refined example of the monastic convention of silence at mealtimes will remind us. Perhaps that tradition amounts to little more than an enforced routine kind of penance. Grim occasions they must have been, To be sure, commensality is not to be confused with conviviality,  $^{50}$  as a moment's reflection on even more than viviality will arise from commensality, if it is not suppressed. For Leon Kass 'it is shared speech community of place, faith and practice all in one. The point is surely that con the shared food, that makes a community of diners.  $^{51}$ 

cooked food as well a conversation or as a couple of sweet dishes would have been consumed. Once the body and mind are 'Eating is normally done quickly and in a few minutes several plates of satisfied, a person is ready to move over to relatives or neighbours for jokes. 149

49. Weichart, G. (2007). 'Makan dan minum

bersama': feasting commensality. Anthropology of food, S3, http://is.gd/bUI43H, para 32. Grignon, C. (2001). Commensality and social morphology. In: Food, drink and identity. Berg: 23-33, p24.

50.

51. Kass 1999.

facilitates communication during the meal', when a buffet is served, 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 such situations,

#### Commensality and conviviality

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

if social relations 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 i are not valued, public culture is at stake. In this light, picnic can be seen as a civilisation (a rug, a hamper, a plate).

'A man eating as he walks down the street eats in the face of all passersby, who must then either avert their gaze or observe him objectifiedly in the act. " $^{46}$ 

A participant at the Wellcome picnic acknowledged that 'it doesn't always look good, seeing vehemence, others berating it. Among them, this fizzing rebuke: Her article sparked numerous comments, some defending the practice on an early tube into work. And I wondered, is it ever acceptable to eat on public transport?  $^{47}$ people eat.' Felicity Cloake wrote on a *Guardian* blog of 'watching a woman eat a bowl of cereal with libertarian

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

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 presence of The opposing views expressed in comments on Cloake's article reflect the contrast between the

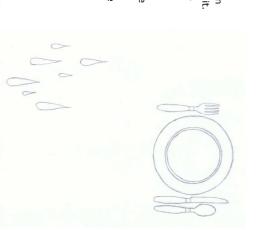
Everybody has the opportunity and to some degree a responsibility to make the area a

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

desires with the rights and desires of others, and... the preservation of the kind of social space in which public life remains possible. "8 to do with the maintenance of personal safety, the reconciliation of personal rights and of, others' presence, actions, and entitlements. This process inevitably raises a range of concerns for the ordinary users of public spaces. Among other things, such concerns have Public life presupposes life-in-public and thus a constant engagement with, and evaluation

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

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



Sketches of place setting and raindrops, Gemma Orton 2011

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

some kind of officially-decreed justification for a public event, such as the outbreak of peace, a

using food and gathering in the cause of cohesion.

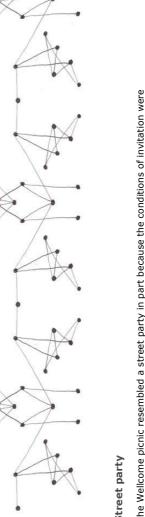
royal commemoration, or a significant civic occasion. Where there is no such official branding, Consistent with the modern tradition of street party, older people in particular tend to expect

there seems to be a sense of discomfort, as these comments from street parties held in 2007

recently in association with a political movement (Reclaim the Streets) 80.

gatherings more similar to picnics (eg Australia); where topographies encourage communal activities in blocks' (USA); where town or city festivities take on a local dimension (eg Brazil) and more 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

'Network', 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 community'. There were claims that the promotion of street parties associated with the 2011 royal wedding were welcomed by republicans who took the opportunity to stage anti-royalist In twentieth century England the street party was predominantly a celebratory device which jubilee would be legitimate justification; as was the so-called 'millennium' in 2000, for many 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 selection. And although there are factors obviously influencing who lives near whom in our neighbourhood street parties nationwide in what was called 'a simple but profound act of people.  $^{79}$  In Liverpool, numerous street parties took place in 2007 for the city's  $800^{
m th}$ anniversary, and in 2009 the 'Big Lunch' was launched as an attempt to stimulate

street parties.  $^{80}$  The dominant tone is invariably traditionalist and patriotic though, and the

nationalist rallying summons to community recalls Hubbell's analysis of the Romantic picnic,

52. Grignon 2001, p24

Presently a battue of corks proceeded from the curtained corner where the warm-water jug for the knives was concealed from public view...'53

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?

be 'extensions of a If social change is going to play out, then the consumption of food is an obvious site to watch. It iple in the separate ladies were served might not be picnic to begin with: Burnett found nineteenth century picnics to domestic party in the controlled setting of people of one's own class, for exan enclosures at race meetings or at shooting parties where the "guns" and their

at distance from the beaters.

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

1

Sketch of a teapot, Gemma Orton 2011

examination. Being

Who are the picnickers? Nineteenth century gatherings such as those described by Surtees and

Curtains in the countryside: on social change

Chekhov brought friends and extended families together in a socially-charged context where

behaviours, clothes, taste and conversation were all part of the fierce mutual

somewhere specific together, with a clear purpose like eating, focuses or ref

the relations of the participants:

ocuses attention on

of the group to be redefined. '52

sur l'herbe): in

nineteenth century England, maintaining the distinction between backstage and frontstage most

picnics would have jeopardised the upholding of propriety (unlike le dejeuner

certainly mattered. Surtees hints comically at one of the ways in which the distinction was

maintained:

In other societies, the wealthy who could afford to be waited on may have established codes of behaviour at picnic, albeit codes less stringent than those for meals at table. Few Victorian

'Consuming food and drinks together may no doubt activate and tighten internal

solidarity; but it happens because commensality first allows the limits redrawn, its internal hierarchies to be restored and if necessary to be 53. Surtees, R.S. (1860). Plain or ringlets? Methuen, p28.

54. Burnett 2004, p163; Burnett 2003, p30

http://photosforthefuture.thehistorychan /timewitnesses.org/english/~alsmit

29

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:

motivated to interact and support one another. And yet apparently, at least in this case, largely, a cohesive experience for those left at home. In shared adversity, people would be which has taught us that the experience of a protracted and devastating war was in itself We must pass over the combination of 'shells' and 'bursting' as a perverse peculiarity of the

language of armistice. At first glance we seem to be in the familiar mythology of the home front,

acknowledged, arms around shoulders; munching, swigging, adding to the laughter or quietly remembering special thoughts.'82

82.

Neighbours burst from their shells to talk to other neighbours, previously barely

street party in Birmingham, at the end of the second world war, mentions the intention of 'giving the children something to remember.' And indeed many memories are held and valued, like this

Furthermore, these were primarily events for children. The description for one image depicting a

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

sense, the commemorative street party would have been reactive, not proactive. As a treat for and standing; but the *justification* had to come from some established higher office. In this organising a day-trip or a street party, with the implied or explicit consent of others of their class For many of that generation, public events had to be externally ignited: ordinary people didn't

one from Romford, Essex:

generate public events themselves, it was not their place to do so. They might play a role in

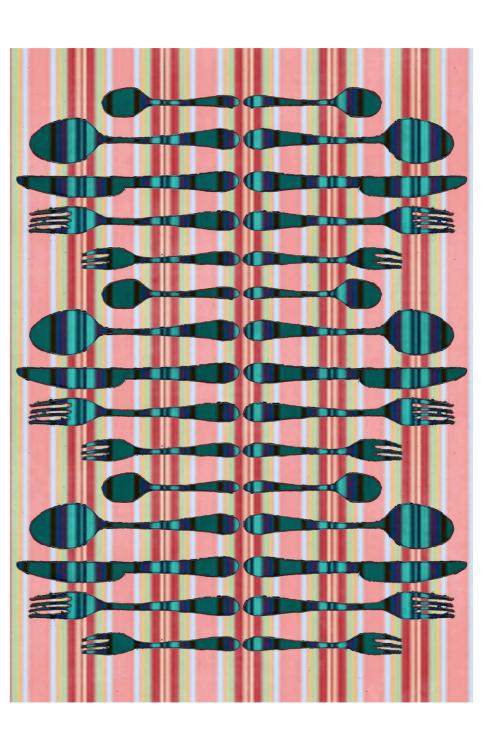
See Harris, K. (2008). Older people and neighbouring: the role of street parties. Streets Alive, http://is.gd/bPWr1M.

Network 2', Gemma Orton 2011

'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.  $^{\rm 81}$ 

royalty events mainly. Some would say "it's for the kids.""

The older people were all supportive but some would not come. It reminded them of



#### Something snug and well-selected

Nineteenth century accounts of picnics betray the age's preoccupation with organisation, as if 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 Chekhov suggest how the well-to-do seem to be pushing the limits of their dependence on servants, tempting themselves to disorder:

'... though there were a few of the usual casualties of moving, such as the salt coalescing

`... 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 such matters, and there was no scrambling for plates, no begging for forks, no two people eating with one spoon.'

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

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 journal* offering a view one hundred and fifty years ago:

'I have sat at rich men's feasts, which were partaken of in the open air, whereat powdered footmen have waited upon us decorously, and a bishop said grace; where everyone had a cushion to sit upon, and a napkin folded upon his plate: but I scarcely call that picnicking... I have been one of a party of three hundred, whose various contributions to the common stock have been decided three weeks before the day of the meeting, at a lottery... And I 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 seems, somehow, to signify something snug and well-selected, and quite at variance with monster-meetings of any sort.'<sup>78</sup>

Communities of interest sometimes appear to be similarly snug and well-selected, and are 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?

27

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.

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

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

relationships to be legitimately forged, often between participants of markedly different background or economic status. 60
And as if alluding to nationally-templated street party days, devised to stimulate harmonious and 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 'historically

impossible harmony'.

So here again we find questions of community implied in a table setting. Sometimes it had the place of honour; it could be purpose, process and outcome, as with the fratemity feasts of medieval England, ritualised and yet socially opportunistic. According to Gervase Rosser, these occasions amounted to social politics in action:

'The feast's defining rhetoric of honorable equality and commensality enabled new

'the middle classes increasingly separated themselves from the collective celebration of the local community and moved towards the selected company of family and friends at Friday night suppers or Sunday dinners... Their houses, once so ill-equipped for domestic entertaining, were now designed with differentiated room space, and equipped with all the necessary apparatus, in the form of dining tables, linen, glasses, cutlery, and tea sets.'59

from the mid-sixteenth century on, 'the prevalence of attitudes inimical to the practice of good neighbourliness was very much part of the reality of the times.'58 Keith Thomas, reflecting on social developments in early modern England, notes the effect of the privatisation of the home:

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

'Pleasure Gardens were a significant social development in that they were patronised by both sexes (though not by respectable unaccompanied ladies) and open to all classes who could pay the usual 1/- admission charge. <sup>55</sup>

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:

in 1975 the average American went out to a picnic 5 times per year. In 1999, the average American went on two picnics per year. Reductions of that order characterize almost every 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 games, and so on.'

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

# Home and privacy: community is outside

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

Through most of human history, the limitations of dwellings have meant that the sharing of food at home could only be at best an uncomplicated affair. Even in the later medieval period, homes were equipped to do no more than boiling and perhaps roasting. Baking and other processes required interaction with others beyond the home and in many cases would have been communal. In the free towns of late medieval Europe, even the bourgeois house comprised little more than a work area and living quarters, and the living quarters consisted of a single large chamber: 'in constant use, for cooking, for eating, for entertaining guests, for transacting business, as well as nightly for sleeping.' In the absence of restaurants, bars, and hotels, houses served as public meeting places for entertaining and transacting business. <sup>57</sup>

The notion of a 'family home' was still to come, emerging in the Netherlands in the seventeenth 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

56. Putnam, R. (2001). *Social capital*. OECD, http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/25/6/1825 848.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.

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3. 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? 73.

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 potatoes 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, v1, London Food Seminar, 17-28, p.33. The story was originally reported in The Great Outdoors magazine)

69. Surtees 1860, p27.

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'. $^{73}$ 'cyberspace provides an easy simulation for the sweaty hard work required for building

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

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 Surtees' reflections on the need for picnic to entail a little trouble and enterprise raise a question to lug spuds round the countryside, or steal them, nor do we need to collect kindling and timber 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)

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.<sup>20</sup> 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 order 'to boil potatoes which had been brought with us'. Picnickers in Chekhov's The duel were be bothered with the labour-intensive boy-scout approach:

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

and a calculation that it is an acceptable investment in an experience. Surtees offers a view on Choosing to eat out of doors when `one has a home' implies an acknowledged degree of hassle 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 responsibilities. Detachment from such communities was almost always harder to achieve – the 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 gruelling collaborative labour, mining for example, which came to depend on and were supported between, on the one hand, lifestyles that are characterised by some forms of particularly 'real' community, whatever that is, requires 'sweaty hard work?' There seems to be a confusion This line of thinking is still surprisingly widespread. Where does the assumption come from that

in public spaces and more with those we already know. $^{\prime 74}$ inescapability of social relations... The assumption underlying the digital model of progress is that we want fewer obligations, more immediate satisfaction, less contact with strangers community depends on some sense of continuity and co-dependence, and a sense of the

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

communities, where 'an outer conformism smothered individual tragedies': 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 This helps us to recognise that while social relations in general may be 'inescapable,' in any Women hid their bruises and denied the cancer eating their body until days before it killed

them; people endured years of intolerable relationships, sometimes retreating into total silence against their partner. None of this was ever avowed in public. 175 silence against their partner. None of this was ever avowed in public

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

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

question that insistence. that leads us to value some things according to the effort put into them. It seems eccentric to valid? Usually these nuances of community are underpinned by a robust theme of commitment, and stable, predictable co-presence. Perhaps this is connected historically to a protestant ethic resilience. As Alison Gilchrist puts it, communities are 'actively constructed by their members, not merely arising from local circumstances."<sup>5</sup> 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 Davies suggests that what is needed is an ethics of inconvenience, even though inconvenience is people put themselves to some inconvenience, to make their experience of community somehow

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76. 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.

> We may also think of agora, and of community, as a place of friction, which takes the pace off all the lives that enter into it, contriving a common mingling pace, a conversational pace. Agora and specifically a product of this new social space. He was attached to the goings-on there... a 'the agoraios, the person who hangs around the marketplace... This type of person was kind of attached flaneur. 65

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

people mingle and spread the rug.

community deny any contrast with everyday life, posing as quotidian – unlike, say, carnival or

Carter notes that the agora attracted a particular type -

people meet and others feel uncomfortable. He notes that *agora* 'was not simply a gathering place, but had *as its object* a mutual recognition, including the recognition of otherness. "3 In this universalised through coerced belonging. Human beings have probably always been suspicious of 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 1ο's paradox of this totalising impulse, an instinct that finds immortal mocking echo in Grouct membership. $^{\rm cd}$ In a book exploring the meanings of agoraphobia, Paul Carter crosses urban

square, towards the surrounding homes. But they were there: `this is so important because it brings out people who theatricality was to know how to behave. It was more agora than arena: the event was not theatrical - in fact unlikely because when people stood at the stalls, they faced away from the s The space at Cumberland Market was programmed, but people did not have 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 for the crumbs. chomp at grub in front of others necessarily familiar, and not to have regard

## Outdoors in company: disport and gladness

some business within the neighbourhood, without risking an unmanageable influx of freeloaders from across the city. Low railings surrounding the park allowed the bustle to attract attention, anything other than behave in a civil manner towards fellow-citizens. and if people came to see what was going on, there was nothing off-pu welcoming, non-prescriptive 'feel' can be hard to create at neighbourh The style of the event implied no expectations on the participant that t The Cumberland Square venue was ideal for the Wellcome picnic, attracting passers-by who had This non-territorial, utting to discourage them. hey would have to do

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

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

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

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

Perhaps it is helpful to consider the limits to the formalisation of picnic

In medieval France it

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: was de rigeur to record the stylisation of social activities. Not having a 'Some should eat sitting, and some standing, and some leaning upon their elbows, some table, a tableau was sure

Like many attempts to prescribe community, this comes across as the should drink, some joke, some play, in short, do all manner of disport and gladness.  $^{62}$ organisation of

informality, implying a degree of organisation of collective life which our young contemporary

ce, between impropriety

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.

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