

Australian Centre for Convivial Backyard Civilisation

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[A 12 minute June 2013 radio interview with Peter Willis, ACCBC Director]

Practice Story Offerings – Ian Wight April 2014 to December 2016

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Inspiration for Convivial Civilisation
An ACCBC Practice Story Offering

Once in a Blue Moon: Triangulating Conviviality

Ian Wight
April 2014

The invitation has been to share a story about an experience of **inspiration and enthusiasm for convivial civilization** in our own lives, which has in turn inspired us ‘to adopt the convivial life and to (enthusiastically) pursue that ideal in the world’. My story is about the inspiration provided by my wife, Nancy, in her enthusiasm to create a special, highly convivial, event for some circles of friends, at our place – named Kanangra - on Coles Bay, off the Saanich Inlet, on Vancouver Island BC, Canada.

We were interested in connecting with friends and neighbours - and in connecting them to one another - as part of our move to permanent residency at Kanangra, after long spells away, and much to-ing and fro-ing (inter-state) - between Manitoba and British Columbia - that had limited our ability to put down strong roots in the place.

It represented an extraordinary effort on our part, and we needed an extraordinary occasion, to anchor such an extraordinary gathering. Nancy’s inspiration was to capitalize on the August 2012 ‘blue moon’ – the comparatively rare occasion when a second full moon appears in the same month.

We are blessed with a beautiful waterfront home, sited in a way to afford a splendid clear view of every moon-rise over our bay. It is a time and place combination that is very potent, and almost primal. We never cease to be in awe of this natural ‘performance’, and we always welcome social ‘company’, to enhance the enjoyment. The ‘blue moon’ provided the ideal occasion to amplify the performance, and step up the socializing.

Nancy decided that we might invite a real mix of folks, that we might never otherwise think of bringing together. These included her friends from her church choir, our immediate neighbours, and some family and long-time friends. I was initially reluctant but any reservations were erased by Nancy’s enthusiasm; her instincts were spot-on, and I was gifted a truly exceptional experience of conviviality.

There was a ‘pot-luck’ (‘bring a plate’) element to address food and drink preferences, and a ‘party-piece’ element where folks were invited to contribute their talent – for singing, or reading, or story-telling – on the ‘blue moon’ theme.

Much originality sprang forth, much merry mirth-making. I recall highly poignant background music provided by a CD – entitled *Songs to the Moon* - by Nancy’s daughter, Merrie Klazek, a performance trumpeter. I also recall some excellent ‘moon cakes’ as

part of the eats. We all had a very good time, enjoying one another's company – bathed in the glow of a blue moon.

Although all this took place in a very rural setting, I found a particular book coming to mind – William Whyte's 1980 classic, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*. One of the key factors, or generators, of a rich social life in our home-places Whyte named as 'triangulation' – where a stimulus (a third party) provides the occasion for social bonding between two strangers. My wife's inspiration was to 'triangulate' some extraordinary bonding, among a diverse mix of people, by tapping into the occasion of a 'blue moon'. How convivial is that?

Reference: William Holly Whyte, 1980 *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* Washington DC: The Conservation Foundation

'triangulation': Where a stimulus provides a social bond between people. When an extraordinary factor becomes reason to talk to someone who is standing nearby. On such occasions people feel like they know each another. Strangers are more likely to talk to one another in the presence of such a stimulus.

Convivial and Friendly Places and Place Making
An ACCBC Practice Story Offering

Dreaming – A Labyrinth in Every Public Park
A Convivial (Place) Story

Ian Wight
May 2014

Once upon a time – to come, in a place very far away [Glasgow, Scotland] – but near to his heart, there was a city planner with a passion for place-making, for helping to conduce well-loved places, much enjoyed by all who frequented them – on their own, and together.... convivial places to their core.

The planner realized he was also a bit of a spiritual activist, because the place-making he had in mind aimed for places that brought together the best of what was desired physically and functionally by folk, but the places also – especially – were valued for the integration of conviviality and spirituality... where folks could commune, and have their very own spiritual experience – communing with something beyond them, but which touched them, and moved them.

One day, out of the blue, and out of the way, he encountered a labyrinth (which is very much NOT a maze) and had the experience of walking that labyrinth, meditatively – a work-out for his body, and his mind... plus getting in touch with his soul, and tapping his spirit. There was a lot of joy. It was a taste of the convivial, of enjoying being with himself, at his deepest. And he was inspired to try to make more of this experience, for others, with others. Could they too get excited about labyrinths?

He did some research. It revealed a labyrinth to be:

'an ancient symbol that relates to wholeness. It combines the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a meandering but purposeful path. It represents a journey to our own center and back again out into the world' <http://www.crystalinks.com/labyrinths.html>

He dreamt up a campaign of sorts – a community planning initiative, to plant the seeds of a movement, to create a labyrinth in every public park, where people could go for what Scottish people especially call 'a wee walk' (a 'dauner') and 'a wee think' (some dedicated thinking), and to possibly have 'a wee blether' (a good chat) about it – with others he might encounter, by 'hanging out' at the labyrinth. He might not have a dog to walk – to help him encounter others – but he could take his Self for a walk, and commune with others who had also had their soul renewed and their spirit fortified, by the simple experience of walking the labyrinth.

It was a great way of getting in touch with what was going on inside you, and what you were noticing outside you – especially in the company of others. You got to 'chew' on stuff that was bothering you - that you wanted to sort out, so you could move on. You got

to appreciate what you were grateful for, and think about passing some of that good stuff along - with a smile, and some cheer.

This planner-placemaker took his hopes and dreams to the church communities that were in the neighbourhood of each park. He mobilized their support to bring their representatives together with the park operators, and with artists in the crafting of labyrinths – to come up with a unique design for each - to sensitively reflect each ‘community of communities’ - that they could all get behind. Their congregations would be the source of most of the initial users of the labyrinth, and they would commit to care for it, and keep it special, and make it welcoming of others.

The labyrinths in every public park became hotbeds of spiritual communing and destinations for spiritual tourism. Mental health improved markedly; ecumenism became almost second nature; and all-round well-being flourished. These green spaces became sacred places for secular and non-secular alike - overflowing with conviviality, and full of spirit - which might have been why the only complaints came from the whiskey purveyors!

Practice Stories and Samples of Visual Art
An ACCBC Practice Story Offering

The Artistry Within Us All – To Be Convivial

Ian Wight
June 2014

There is an artist within us all - but it may not be visible, and it may not be in the conventional meaning of the term. Like many perhaps, I lost connection with my ‘inner artist’ for a time – for a few decades in fact (from around junior high school to middle age). I rediscovered it when I brought ‘place’ back into my life in a big way - after being somewhat ‘lost in space’ for too long.

I rediscovered it when I reconnected with place-making, and with the associated interest in how space is transformed into place. It is as much an application of art, as it is an application of science, and it naturally incorporated a large measure of humanity.

A key ingredient in place-making is contributed by artists – especially those with artistry in essencing... getting to the essentials... especially about what might be valued in common, deserving celebration and spotlighting. Visual artists especially can be inspiring, especially for those with a more technical, analytical disposition, such as many planners and engineers for example - helping to bring them out of their technical, analytic selves into a new communion with the otherwise objects of their technical expertise and rational analyses. Artists help us see the essence of things... especially things that are not easily visualized – such as neighbouring or community development.

I remember being inspired to re-inhabit my inner artist when I first came across the work by the Community Development Resources Association (CDRA), based in a poor area of Cape Town, in South Africa. They were mainly ‘resourcing’ communities with development ‘practitioners’ (I might have called them ‘community planners’). But these practitioners were accorded a particular status that gave me pause; they were represented as ‘artists of the invisible’... the invisible being what comes under the heading of ‘development’

This was a mind-set shift of major proportions for me at the time. It turned me on to a new ‘take’ on art, and the potential objects of such artistry: the art ‘object’ could be essentially invisible, on the outside, but very real and significant on the inside – on the insides of people, individually and collectively. I started to admit art into my practice (of planning) in a big way, and I began so see my role in place-making terms – or at least, in helping folks, by affording them optimum opportunities – to make a good place for themselves, that they could all call ‘home’.

I also began to appreciate some key dispositions for planners in such situations – dispositions captured in prepositions. Planners could settle for planning FOR people

(possibly putting themselves up on an expert pedestal), or they could choose to plan WITH people (operating more on a par with folks). But I could see that planners could also go further by seeking to enable planning BY the people themselves. And this took me into other realms of art. I came across the suggestion that ‘the group is the art form of the future’ (a notion that still rankles for my wife – a practiced solo-artiste in several fields). I think this notion could very much apply to us, here and now, displaying our artistry, in stories, about conviviality. At least, consider the possibility of it all. What common meaning are we about to make together?

A few years ago I came across a book that helped to solidify a lot of this emerging sense of the importance of cultivating our inner artist, and developing a personal sense of our artistry in unusual but essential – essencing – ways. *The Art of Possibility* has helped me, and helped me help my students, to see ourselves as artists, as artists of the seemingly abstract but effectively inspiring notion of ‘possibility’, and all the associated hopes and dreams (which are THE real ‘stuff’ of planning).

We are all potentially creative artists, making or generating possibilities – especially in situations where there might otherwise be only doom and gloom. Think of the possibility in conviviality - it might be invisible in concrete terms, but it is very real for those experiencing it. It is the essence of place-making.

And we here – of all people – should know all this in our hearts. For... we are all artists, of conviviality – and it is beautiful. Give yourselves a hand! The art is here and now, among us – what a picture!

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Convivial Caring For, and Appreciating, Trees

in Convivial Backyard Civilization:
An ACCBC Practice Story Offering

The Trees in Our Life – Primal Conviviality?

Ian Wight
July 2014

We are all, originally, ‘out of Africa’ – our collective ‘back-yard’. We as a species emerged in, and from, a thickly-forested jumble – a jungle – of trees. Our forbears emerged into a parkland of sorts, where the trees present had more individuality, in a more diverse landscape – a mix of trees and more open spaces, with vistas and horizons – that stretched our minds and hearts. They became part and parcel of our creation story, in a very practical way.

In these more campus-like settings we were positively enabled – perhaps for the first time - to contemplate, as we communed. We could now commune on a grander, brighter, more open, scale - under the influence of what might be regarded as the original ‘enlightenment’. We communed not only with our kin, but also with our kindred spirits – and especially with the spirits of the trees that shaded us, and nurtured us, and watched over us.

Our consciousness, and that of trees, co-evolved – with trees in the lead; teaching us – by their example; servicing us – with the raw material for tools; feeding us – with their fruits. There is a primal connection, that has been life-giving. As Patrick Geddes (1854 – 1932) (a Scottish biologist, sociologist, geographer, philanthropist and pioneering town planner) affirmed – ‘By leaves we live’. Today it is widely recognized that Earth’s forests of trees have become our planetary lungs. There is a living, breathing connection.

For us then, there is clearly a primacy to trees; they are associated with our very first place-making as a species. Could they also be considered to be our model for conviviality? Trees of every description found a way of living together, well, in their own communities – before we came along. What have they been teaching us? What more can we learn from them – for the future of civilization?

We should not be surprised if trees figure prominently in our own personal primal places. These are the formative places in our own lives, arising around mid-to late childhood, when some differentiation began to emerge between our limited self-centred ‘me-world’ and a world that included others, to which ‘we’ also belonged – where there was a sense of connection, to something greater than our small selves. It is a natural development in all of us, where the prime connection is natural - with nature, in Nature. The trees in our metaphorical back-yards help us maintain the connection, and ‘we’ are better for this.

My own ‘primal place’ is located in a wooded ‘glen’ in my native Scotland, on the edge of the small town where I was raised during the first two decades of my life. This glen

represented a back-yard of sorts for myself - a regular weekend haunt, where I could experience some real nature, with my then best friend.

The glen was rooted in a watercourse – a Scottish ‘burn’ – clear, spring-fed, babbling along, year-round. But its slopes were dominated by trees – a rich mix of mainly deciduous trees, with beautiful broad leaves, and a pleasing canopy – not too thick, not too thin – affording a distinct visual dappling to complement the auditory babbling. It was not a dark, foreboding, enclosing setting; rather, I vividly recall generous glimpses of blue sky to behold above, and spreads of yellow primroses to admire on the woodland floor below. I still feel most ‘at home’ in such woodland.

And for the first time in my life, with my now best friend (my wife Nancy) I now have such woodland in our own literal back-yard – no longer in Scotland for myself, but in a setting – in North Saanich, BC - with many Scottish reminders - in the street-names for example (‘Ardmore’... slopes of oak), in the prominent granite bedrock, and in the shallow over-burden of glacial till.

There is a new mix of trees in my life – Garry oak, arbutus, Douglas fir, and cedar. They shade and shelter us, and tower over us. Our collective conviviality now includes the eagles nesting outside our front door, and the family of otters who stop by regularly. We live in nature, with nature – and even when we are ‘inside’ we are in close communion with the former trees that now comprise our log-home.

Conviviality is an inter-species affair, especially where trees are concerned. There is a practicality to them, but there is also a spirituality to them. They foster contemplation in ourselves, that can extend to a wondering about their contemplation of us. Together – it might be maintained - we constitute a common field of caring consciousness, for our mutual enjoyment. How convivial is that?

Building Rapport
in Convivial Backyard Civilization:
An ACCBC Practice Story Offering

**Getting Along – Well, Together: Harnessing the Joy.
Building Rapport for Conviviality in our Big Backyards**

Ian Wight
September 2014

Conviviality for me engages a special quality of rapport - that is more than basic harmony or agreement between those constituting the rapport. It includes the quality of mutual joy – of actively enjoying one another, possibly exchanging many smiles and hugs, potentially experiencing a form of shared bliss. There is an essential happiness to being together - that generates a shared helping of wellbeing.

Convivial rapport involves us not simply ‘getting along’, but getting along well, together – on shared terms. Our whole person – body, mind, heart and soul - is mobilized, in fundamental ‘attuning’ to one another (becoming ‘one’), that may then be ‘scaled up’ – in forms of ‘neighbouring’ or ‘communing’, where rapport takes on the property of ‘compounding interest’ – with convivial civilization as a form of ultimate dividend.

Our literal and metaphorical backyards are the crucible for all this development; joy is the fuel, the spirit, that powers us - to seek to achieve such convivial rapport at ever-increasing scales. Our actual backyards are in effect our schools for conviviality – a kindergarten at the very least, certainly primary, foundational, a launch-pad – for graduating upward and outward. There are backyards all around us, to build rapport around – outer physical manifestations of our inner soul-worlds.

I received some intense schooling in conviviality, when on leave in Adelaide for four months earlier this year, courtesy of ACCBC. I also had my most intense experience to date of a real backyard, at the place we rented in Torrensville. It was easily the most expansive, most diverse, most well-defined backyard that I have ever experienced in my life; it was much larger than the house footprint, it was very well fenced – and effectively enclosed, and it offered lots of opportunities for a large range of activities... for use, for pleasure, for enjoyment, and for building rapport with our house-mates. It very much helped me to connect with the ‘backyard’ in ACCBC; it was a source of rapport.

I was able to pursue a very personal inquiry into a topic that has long intrigued me. In my professional life – in part as a city-region planner and place-maker – I have advocated conviviality as a worthy ‘macro-mission’ for planning, as much more meaningful, for example, than the current fascination with sustainability. I have also come across a particular representation of ‘backyard’ culture that positions it as a context for driving more parochial, than convivial, tendencies, namely, the NIMBY (‘not in my backyard’) phenomenon), with locals opposing new development that they interpret as unwelcome change. For example: residents of an established neighbourhood opposed to a proposal

for insertion of a group home for special needs youth; a district of neighbourhoods upset at having to host more than its share of 'locally undesirable land uses' (LULUs) such as a landfill, incinerator or meat-processing plant; or a local authority in a larger region upset at having to bear the brunt of the siting of a major regional facility – such as for tertiary sewage treatment. In my experience, in practice, these are generally not situations where much rapport is present, except in the form of 'us' versus 'them'.

Can the backyard metaphor - and its potential association with a constructive and generative notion of conviviality – be extended to progressively larger scales, to more positively tackle such otherwise divisive issues? I guess I'd like to see us try; it is the yearning in this yarning. And it seems to me that this will involve us ranging beyond our physical backyards - and the associated privileging of privacy and informality and autonomy – but, ideally, in ways where we can still be 'ourselves', only on a larger scale.

Could 'privacy' be complemented by 'civic-ry' – seeing ourselves more as citizens (citizenry) of something larger than our own home-base? Could our valuing of informality be channeled into a valuing of civic governance, rather than bureaucratic government? Could our desire for autonomy be matched by our unavoidable need for interdependence? Could we shift from black/white and either/or thinking, to more comprehensive, inclusive and balanced 'both/and' thinking and acting? Could the conviviality in our genes 'power' our 'getting along – well, together', harnessing the joy at the heart of convivial culture?

Perhaps we can begin by considering the 'scaling' of our back-yarding. For many of us it is a literal backyard that is privileged - and naturally so. But we can easily go further, building rapport up following a basic cellular structure. We can begin with a potential 'four-plex' cell... your backyard and your adjoining neighbours' backyards - on either side, and over the back fence. But what are the backyards at larger scales?

For example, many of us have experienced Brompton. What is Brompton's 'back-yard'? When we met there in May, were we actually enjoying Brompton's symbolic backyard, beside/behind the community centre? Or are there other contenders for such a scale of backyard status for the community of Brompton?

And what might be Adelaide's 'backyard'? Is it the Parklands, or a part of the Parklands? And what might be Australia's 'backyard'? Is it the 'outback'... literally out back of us, wherever 'us' might be? And is not Planet Earth our collective back-yard par excellence? It is the place where we really need to be getting along, well, together; a place for practicing not only entrepreneurship, but also convivial 'rapporteurship', on behalf of the planet we all call home.

Celebrations
An ACCBC Practice Story Offering

Convivial Celebration ~ Celebrating Conviviality

Ian Wight
October 2014

It is hard for me to imagine a true celebration that is not truly convivial. We have all experienced celebrations that have warmed our hearts, lifted our spirits - and fed our stomachs. They always involve being in good company, informally communing – many individuals, coming together, as one... for a time at least, while the festivities – and especially the feasting - last. They generally ‘mark’ a special – out-of-the-ordinary – occasion, marked in turn by much joviality, joyousness, rejoicing. Endorphins aplenty, colluding, colliding – in festive fusion; conviviality-affirming.

Celebrations are discrete time-limited ‘special’ occasions for imbibing community spirit, to fuel us, and to sustain that sense of ‘us’, when we are otherwise on our own, in the company of our selves, going about our every-day lives – possibly looking forward to the next occasion for celebration. The conviviality in celebration feeds a longing in us, for belonging, to something greater than our-selves, something meaningful – full of common meaning, that we all have a stake in the making. Celebrations may also function as a form of collective gene therapy - a bonding agent that holds us together, and nudges us on, evolvingly.

Celebrations are occasions for not only revisiting our creation stories (around our birthdays, or our marriages, or our rites of passage – for instance) but also for emerging our evolution stories, for telling stories to the future that we seek to collectively ‘will’. And this is where celebrations may have their most marked civilizing impulse, as a vehicle for social development on a grand scale; sociability inter-personified.

We are particularly interested in celebration in the context of convivial backyard civilization, with a de facto interest in advancing such a form of civilization. I often find myself challenged to ‘place’ this interest – especially the ‘backyard’ aspect, although I know this is meant both literally and metaphorically. I am mostly attracted to the metaphorical aspect, which leads me to placing ‘backyard’ in larger, wider perspectives. This includes that part of the public domain sometimes rendered as ‘civil society’, differentiated from (though also unavoidably integrated with) other parts of the public domain, such as ‘the public sector’ (government, the state) or the ‘private sector’ (commerce, business, the market).

Civil society is the place of ‘citizens’ - not tax-payers, not customers – but persons operating out of a sense of civic duty, to something larger than themselves – that serves them, while they serve it. Civil society is the venue I have in mind when I think of

convivial celebration: it involves free association, much gifting and sharing (reciprocity), oodles of decency, compassion in abundance – people in community seeking goodness, and aiming to have fun doing it! Civil society may embrace a panoply of backyards, especially ‘out back of’, or ‘in behind’, the edifices of big government and big business.

Settings for the celebration of convivial backyard civilization, based on my own experience, could be as diverse as: the pow-wows and potlatches associated with our First Nation peoples here in Canada (including the Pauquachin just across the bay from our home on Coles Bay on the Saanich Peninsula); the ‘block-parties’ staged by neighbours, fronting a common park or square (in the Laurier Heights neighbourhood of Edmonton, where my daughters were raised); the July 1st Canada Day celebration in my former neighbourhood (Osborne Village, Winnipeg, Manitoba) – when several blocks of a main artery are closed to traffic and given over to – of all things - a birth-day celebration (of their country’s birth), involving not only the ‘villagers’ but all their friends from other parts of the city (who may not have the good fortune to live in such an urban ‘village’).

I’m sure you have your equivalents in Adelaide and Australia – venues where civil society flourishes, at all scales; venues for convivial celebration, that are also celebrations of conviviality. Festive, jovial, cheerful, sociable – good for our genes, exercising our endorphins, in a feast of collective well-being.

Making and Keeping Friends
An ACCBC Practice Story Offering

Friendship – The Currency of Conviviality?

Ian Wight
November 2014

If it was only about etymology any story about any friend in our life would boil down to something willed freely, between you and another, in love. We are in the realms of intimacy and affection, holding one another in mutual esteem – a very special connection, an attachment that matters... simple, unqualified friendship. It is the coin of relationship, that no money can buy; the origin of the social capital that makes our worlds. Could it also be the currency of conviviality?

Our friendships are patently more than etymology. In real life, in practice, friends may come and go, be made and unmade, get kept and lost. Not so convivial at times, and perhaps ‘over-the-top’ on occasion – when ‘under the influence’ for example. The ‘exchange’ rate may fluctuate up and down; transactions may go fast or slow. Or is all this symptomatic of something else? Mere acquaintances, rather than full-on friends? Not so intimate, not so affectionate, not so loving.

Real friends and lasting friendships may be the bedrock, the foundation stones, for what might come to rate as civilization. Many degrees of civilization may be anticipated. The earliest may depend on a willingness to become at least acquainted with ‘the others’ in our midst, but also may depend on an acceptance that there will be differences – retreats as well as advances, un-makings as well as makings. An ‘uncontested’ civilization may be a bridge too far for too many too often - until enough of us get really good at authentic friendship. It might be then that convivial civilization may come within reach, but until then it will remain more aspirational and potential. How might we raise its currency, and become really invested in conviviality?

Friends become. What comes before friends? Friends have in common a former strangeness to one another; before they became friends they were strangers. Foreign bodies, beyond the pale. What changed, that changed them – from strangers to friends? What was enabling? The structures and processes underpinning civilization have probably been critically significant, in providing the conditions – the infrastructure – for manufacturing friendship, on a mass production scale... a critical friendly mass.

Cities have been the main production places, where mostly strangers have been able to profitably co-exist, where social capital could gradually accumulate, and where anything-but-strange friendship might flourish on a hither-to-unprecedented scale. In city neighbourhoods, through the simple informal process of ‘neighbouring’, willing strangers

are enabled to become willed friends – and to find one another, in places such as the Bowden Brompton Community Centre.

But the success of this communing process is – perhaps paradoxically – ultimately dependent on a clear demarcation of what is public space and what is private space - within each block, within each plot. And this is where the ‘backyard’ comes into its own, literally and figuratively. Friends commune on their own mutually-agreed terms, founded in trust and respect, with volition, out of their love for a place that is ‘in’ them, as they are ‘of’ it... that they make and maintain together.

As a city planner my operative backyard is more often than not ‘the city’, in all its urbanity; this is also my interface with civilization. It is where I practice my engagement with conviviality; it furnishes many of the stories I tend to tell, to the future – to the future I wish to will, in love and affection, in conjunction with others of similar mind and heart. I seek to make friends with this future, with a view to ensuring sustainability – ecologically, and to conducting conviviality – socially.

Within this ‘backyard’ I am particularly interested in people places, and their making, and their thriving. This is often within the setting of public spaces – but it could also be within private spaces – literal backyards - hosting communal activity, where communing is valued. I am probably most interested in stories of space-place transformation, where spaces become places. My places are integrations of the physical, the functional, the spiritual and the convivial. This is one of those stories I tell about myself, but I also hope I am telling it to a future that others – friends all - might hope for. We might all thus be enriched by our friendship – the currency of conviviality.

Welcome and Inclusion
An ACCBC Practice Story Offering

Welcoming Others: Convivial Inclusion

Ian Wight
December 2014

The invitation is to exchange practice stories about ways we have given and received welcome – in our own lives or in the life of people we know. The welcome in mind is being interpreted here as the welcome that positively includes ‘others’, especially new – and possibly ‘scary’ – *others*. These could be ‘the others’ that we might tend to regard as ‘them’ (in contrast to our ‘us’), or that we might - in the past, have been more likely to declare war on.

We are thus thinking of individuals that are essentially *new* for us, and *new* to our setting - living embodiments of ‘the Other’, that we might normally, and more naturally, *distance* ourselves from. But... putting on our ACCBC hats, and with a positively inclusive aspiration in play, the form of welcome we are being called to consider might therefore be rendered as *convivial inclusion* - in a backyard that we seek to share, in peace, joyfully.

I have had to work at being good at such ‘convivial inclusion’; I am naturally friendly, but can also be quite reserved. I have an essentially peaceable, peace-loving, and peace-making nature (after all, I am a 9 on the enneagram!) However, I recently discovered that – while an excellent disposition in many respects – this trait can have a downside if/when it translates to a seeming aversion to intimacy; I can get so focused on maintaining peace, that I can forget to be equally open to affording others the intimacy necessary for truly convivial inclusion.

I don’t mean to exclude the possibility of greater intimacy, but I have come to see the need to more explicitly include this possibility. Both exclusion and inclusion, at root, invoke the notion of ‘another’, or ‘other-than-us’, or – more impersonally - ‘the other’. My story has to do with a particular effort to dissolve such distinction, or at least to somehow transcend it - perhaps via some courageous reaching-out, positive acknowledgment, warm embracing, and genuine heart-felt welcoming.

My hunch is that all this can happen when we each consciously or effectively shift into another ‘gear’, or move outside our normal ‘comfort zone’, when we expand our sense of joy, when we move beyond judging - into the realms of curiosity and wonder. When have I actually registered being ‘included’ by another? And, when have I consciously and deliberately ‘included’ another? When was some intimacy at work, nurturing convivial inclusion? All of this is ‘up to me’: ‘I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul’ (from ‘Invictus’, W.E. Henley)

These musings are arising as I recall a specific occasion, in 2012, when I came to know myself – my mastery and my captaincy - a little better, as a result of an exercise in a workshop that was part of a six-day seminar (on the theme of *Evolving the We!*) The particular session was part of a day when the focus was on exploring 'The You'. It featured some intensive work on how we related to one another – getting at the essence of inter-personal relating. (Guidance was provided by Thomas Huebl – a highly gifted ‘inner scientist’, focusing on the nature of inter-relational ‘consciousness’). Here's an extract from my reflections report on the exercise:

*We then moved into some guided exercises, in dyads, witnessing and reflecting on instances of inter-relating, in terms of ease or difficulty. What exercised myself, revealed in dialogue with my dyad partner, included a range of ‘insightings’. I have a close relationship with **Peace**, and privileging peace-fullness within, that impels me to constantly scan for ‘perturbations in my field’. By contrast, my relationship with **Intimacy** lacks such attention; I sensed a need within, to similarly scan for opportunities or openings to deploy intimacy – to offer a level of relationship... that might be in order... that might be being called for.*

*I translated this into an intention around ‘being (more) transparent’ and ‘modeling transparency’. This meant a deeper/sharper awareness of what others are ‘saying’ (through their energy fields) and ‘not saying’. I could be putting more effort into ‘staying on-line with folks’, rather than ‘tuning out’ (if I sensed no ‘perturbations in my field’). The major learning from the exercise was realizing that I could/should shift from scanning **my** field (for perturbations), to scanning **the/our** field for opportunities or openings, to more fully realizing the potential in the moment.*

I hope my practice story may convey some particular learning about ‘welcoming others’ and ‘convivial inclusion’ on my part; I was challenged to be more ‘inclusionary’ with respect to others - with greater intimacy in mind.

I believe this 'learning' was at work in me big-time when I was on leave in Adelaide earlier this year. I threw myself into a lot of new possibilities; I 'included my self' much more than I have done during previous leave periods - 'including' the activities of the ACCBC! I still feel very close to you folks, even though I am now very far away – in Canada. Our conviviality means a lot to me. There is an intimacy to it.

Post-script: As I was thinking about this practice story, I came across a rather moving meditative practice, that is central for a movement of ‘eco-villagers’ in Sri Lanka - Sarvodaya Shramadana. The underlying theme is around peace, and the ‘understanding that there is neither *me* nor *mine*’. It might help in the practice of *convivial inclusion* (I have attached it on the next page for those who might be interested).

Sarvodaya Shramadana, Sri Lanka – Peace Meditation

Sitting in a comfortable position, silently honor your own religion or belief system. Recognize that every religion is a reflection of the truth.

Now become present in the body and notice the mind relax. Gradually become aware of the in and out breath as it moves through your nostrils. Do not change the breath; only observe it.

Notice that there is nothing you can call *I* or *mine* in this process. See that this air was and will be breathed by millions of sentient beings. So too are the warmth, the fluidity, and the hardness of the body all part of the universe. Feeling this connection to all life, realize that you cannot harm another without harming yourself.

Watching the mind, notice how sensations, perceptions, volitions, and thoughts arise faster than lightning. Observe the stream of consciousness as it flows. By returning to the breath, notice the mind becoming still.

Understanding that there is neither *me* nor *mine* in the body or in the thoughts, allow the entire world to grow closer to your heart.

As loving-kindness and compassion fill your mind, extend these qualities to everyone: people you know and don't know; people you like and don't like; and finally to everyone and all beings.

Allow this compassion to extend in all directions, and also to the past, present, and future. Through these waves of compassion, feel yourself connected to all things.

Then quietly return the awareness to your body and your surroundings.

Source: Karen Litfin, *Ecovillages – Lessons for Sustainable Community* (2013)

<http://www.polity.co.uk/book.asp?ref=9780745679495>

<http://ecovillagebook.org/ecovillages/sarvodaya/>

Contemplating Convivialities – Prime Places for CBC?

Ian Wight
February 2015

Like many of you perhaps, my antennae are always up for any inkling of ‘convivial’ stirrings in my world. And even if I don’t get out and about so much - to encounter others first-hand, in real time, in active convivial practice – I am always curious when I pick up any signals that conviviality is abroad in that wider world, beyond my immediate ken. I picked up one of those signals at Christmas, when one of my daughters gifted me a copy of a relatively new book, *Happy City*, by Canadian author Charles Montgomery, who happens to live quite nearby – just across the water from me, in Vancouver BC (Montgomery, 2013).

It now occurs to me that this may be a good ‘selection’ for a potential ACCBC ‘book club’, to complement the current practice-story sharing, for those interested in a deep exploration – together - of their own experiences of any book deemed to be particularly relevant to ‘convivial backyard civilization’. Based on my initial inspection I’d certainly recommend this one for such consideration; it would be fascinating to hear what others might make of it - and how it might inform further dialogical inquiry within the ACCBC. For starters, the book features a major chapter entitled – most intriguingly – ‘Convivialities’. How fascinating? ... I thought; here was ‘convivial’ being set in the same context as ‘locality’ or ‘municipality’ or local ‘authority’. Might there be a story here?

Actually... there is a story here... from my own practice – as someone interested in place-making and new civic approaches to local planning and community development. It goes back a few years, but also featured consideration of a future that has just passed – or, more optimistically, that might still be in the making. It involves another CBC – the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. CBC Radio’s *Ideas* program features a prestigious annual lecture series – the Massey Lectures. Robert Theobald¹ a British-born futurist, at the time dividing his time between Ontario, Canada and New Orleans, USA, was slated to deliver the 1996 Massey Lectures, but the CBC cancelled them at the eleventh hour (this is a story in itself, for another time perhaps).

Fortunately, a Canadian ‘alternative press’, New Society Publishers, issued the lectures Theobald had developed (in part through Internet discussion of early drafts) as *Reworking Success* (Theobald, 1997) – which might rate as another candidate for ACCBC ‘book club’ consideration. Why? Because Theobald was also thinking about ‘convivialities’, in a very comprehensive way – as part of the support structure for the future he was contemplating. Writing around the mid 1990s, with 2011 in mind, his book offers a future

¹ Theobald died in 1999, just after spending a few years in Australia. See obituary: The Australian Newspaper, 15/12/99 <http://web.archive.org/web/20070930003130/http://main.nrg.com.au/~connect/obituary.htm>

scenario - in the form of a call for fundamental social change. And a large part of what he had in mind involved ‘convivialities’, which I assessed at the time as rather necessary ‘neo-civic infrastructure’ (especially to reach beyond the ‘sustainability’ so prominent at the time). Convivialities represented the subsidiarity principle at work, and seemed to be the envisaged vehicles of conviviality in action – very appealing for me back then (somehow, a macro-mission around simply ‘sustaining’ people’s current livelihood did not seem as important as a macro-mission favouring people’s active enjoyment of one another’s company).

This particular aspect of Theobald’s ‘futuring’, with all its associated wisdom and meaning for myself, focused on ‘how society is organized’ (... in 2011, if his scenario came to pass). He identified *families* (defined as ‘any group of people who make a commitment to love and care for each other’) and *neighbourhoods* (small, geographically-based, ranging from 200 to 500 people) as the basic – relatively informal – building blocks: ‘the base of the political system’. Each of his neighbourhoods would elect a representative ‘to the next level of government... which typically links anywhere from ten to fifty (neighbourhoods) into a “conviviality” – a new word coined to describe this institutional level’ (Theobald 1997, pp 107-108).

Theobald envisioned *convivialities* as contexts for creating ‘the highest levels of self-sufficiency or local exchange, often using local currencies’. They in turn became the building blocks for what he called *communities*, looking at broader issues – especially those that exceeded the remit or capacity of the convivialities (The next, overlying, level of government was ‘the *bioregion*, linked by shared ecological realities’).

THE story for myself in all this was the place of ‘convivialities’, very much a ‘newly-coined’ term; I had never seen it before, but it immediately felt ‘right’. I like to think that I have since tried to ‘champion’ the term at every opportunity, though I would have to confess that it has not attracted much general usage in the interim – until Charles Montgomery’s Chapter 7 of *Happy City*.

But – I tell myself – ‘I can’t get too excited’. ‘Convivialities’ is the title of the chapter, but there is no direct, explicit articulation of the notion in the chapter in question. It feels as if such ‘articulation’ has been edited out in the interest of a greater ‘happiness’, more pleasing to a general reader. There is actually – therefore - no ‘happy’ ending to this story; ‘convivialities’ may have been coined as a term, but they are far from common ‘currency’. The case has still to be made; the main audience has still to be reached. But I will remain hopeful – at least as long as there is the ACCBC! Perhaps Theobald’s ‘2011’ will turn out to be ‘2021’ – or sooner!

References:

Robert Theobald, 1997 *Reworking Success – New communities at the millennium*. New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island BC & Stony Creek, CT
Charles Montgomery, 2013 *Happy City – Transforming our lives through urban design*. Anchor Canada (Penguin/Random House).

Volunteering for (the Cause of) Conviviality

Ian Wight March 2015

Are we volunteers for the cause of conviviality? Is this what we practice, naturally? By volunteering we are, naturally, of service to something beyond ourselves. Our contribution may be very specific – even clinical or technical, but it is never impersonal; it is always at least inter-personal, relational. It does not earn us any monetary income, but there is a return, a dividend. Social capital is created, especially from all the compounding interest. It is an investment in ourselves, in our collective wellbeing, in the places we share. Conviviality is in our own interest; it is a most worthy cause - because it can touch all of us, in our hearts. And it begins with us volunteering, sharing bits of our selves – our talents, our gifts - in what is ultimately the enjoyment of our own company. What more might this mean, for the cause of conviviality, and for advancing this cause?

Volunteering is a manifestation of our own volition; coercion, obligation and oppression are decidedly NOT in play. My Wiktionary tells me that volition comes from the French *volition*, which in turn comes from Medieval Latin *volitio* (“will, volition”), and in turn from the Latin *volo* (“wish, will”). Notice the emphasis on wishing and willing; one’s intention is paramount – one’s volunteering is attending to one’s intention, and intention goes to the heart of one’s self-identity. The website Edenics (Where Language Began) speaks to the root of ‘volunteer’ in terms of: That which is **VOLUNTARY**, done with **VOLITION**, is of the ‘heart’. The meaning-making involves mind and heart - a convivial conjoining.

This deeper meaning may sometimes get lost in the more common current association with ‘volunteering for military service’. This possibly dates back mainly to the warring conditions surrounding the formation of the building-blocks of today’s nation-states - hardly the most convivial of circumstances. We need to reach for a higher meaning for volunteering where conviviality is the cause in our sights. We need to harness the original meaning, around wishing and willing, with our best collective intentions in the driver’s seat. To do this we need to know ourselves very well, in our hearts and minds and souls; the associated deliberation and discernment on our own parts represents a form of ‘due diligence’.

The current ACCBC interest in volunteering has spurred, in myself, this unanticipated inquiry into the roots of volunteering, and its current positioning vis-à-vis conviviality. My practice in these matters has settled into to a pattern that involves some etymology exploration (see above) and some targeted ‘google’ searches – seeking convivial interpretations and perspectives. I am always surprised – often pleasantly – by what I find, (including wonderfully serendipitous connections to other ongoing scholarly inquiries). In this case I discovered a blog by Julie Bounford, a UK academic with a

background in voluntary sector work <http://jebounford.net> (See ‘References’ below, including ‘Conviviality with a cause’ and ‘Why ‘extreme’ volunteering is too extreme’).

Recent scholarship by Colin Rochester (2013), on voluntary action over time, directly embraces notions of ‘conviviality’ and ‘expressive behaviour’ - as fresh insight into the roots of volunteering (in contrast to ‘the restrictive archetype of volunteering as a philanthropic act’). There is a desire for ‘conviviality’ that is closely allied to recreational activities and the constructive use of leisure time’, leading Bounford to suggest that the act of volunteering might be regarded as a form of ‘serious leisure’. I like this, and I like the overlap with ‘recreation’. The latter is, ultimately, a venue for re-creating ones-self, reflecting a path of self-development – a growth intention.

Another scholar, Hemming (2011), is invoked in support for his finding that participation in volunteer groups provides ‘a sense of camaraderie and fellowship’; ‘a sense of belonging or identity’; and above all, ‘an excuse to escape’ and ‘an adult form of play’. It contributes to a sense of community. I was particularly impressed with Hemming’s characterisation of this as ‘expressive’ volunteering: folks are pursuing an interest ‘out of love’ (rather than for financial reward), and to ‘act upon their most cherished beliefs’ – what I would render as their deepest intentions. Such volunteering is fundamentally ‘self-expressive’, in contrast to ‘other-instrumental’. The latter can take over when a government, for example, cuts back on its own service-provision, in anticipation that ‘volunteers’ or the ‘voluntary sector’ will pick up the slack. The presence, or absence, of conviviality will mark the difference.

So what have I learned about volunteering in the context of conviviality? It is about service, but service that is volunteered from within, actively wished and willed, without any thought of monetary reward or compensation. It is a form of self-sacrifice, that should never be allowed to develop into self-sabotage. It involves a surfeit of self – that is in a sense ‘spare’, to be deployed in a way that is ‘to care’. In this respect it is like a surplus of personal ‘capital’ that is available to invest in good social works, in building greater social capital. While ‘self’ is central, it is ‘self as source’ – the source of the energy, the spirit, available for application elsewhere, in service to something greater, beyond immediate personal circumstance – other communities, future generations, other species.

Volunteering is almost constitutive of the convivial – cause and effect. It is ‘serious leisure’ that values communion. It manifests active attention to good intention, with no sense of obligation or reciprocation. It is fundamentally about, and necessitates, feeling good about one’s self, in one’s self. It should flow from healthy positive self-esteem, generated and sustained within, but to be harnessed for a greater cause, beyond oneself – a cause that embraces conviviality.

References: Rochester, Colin 2013 *Rediscovering Voluntary Action: The Beat of a Different Drum*. Palgrave Macmillan; Hemming, H 2011 *Together: How Small Groups Achieve Big Things*. London: John Murray; JEBounford ‘fringe-thoughts’ Blog <http://jebounford.net/> Why ‘extreme’ volunteering is too extreme <http://jebounford.net/2014/01/> ; The marketisation marvel in higher education <http://jebounford.net/2014/03/> ; Conviviality with a cause <http://jebounford.net/2014/04/>

Stories of informal mentoring (or close, friendly support)

An ACCBC Practice Story Offering
- Ideas, Clarification and Research

Convivial Mentoring and Mentoring Conviviality

Ian Wight
April 2015

The best mentoring is almost certainly convivial. As such, it is more than instructional, more than instrumental, more than transactional. Convivial mentoring taps into a common life-force - to relate well to others, to enjoy one another's company, to grow and develop together. There is an *élan vital* in play, lubricating the inter-relating. Or am I being naïve? Are my glasses – and my pro-conviviality world-view – a tad too rose-tinted?

I may be guilty of too much wish-filled thinking around conviviality; beyond our own backyard confines, it may not have the traction that I might wish for it. Sustainability – in terms of our collective relationship with the environment – has had its own traction issues, now over several decades; conviviality – in terms of our relationships with one another – could also require several more decades to really take root, to become truly societal.

Convivial mentoring may be desirable and possible right now – where there is a will and a wish, but there may be a bigger issue here for ACCBC consideration. Could we be being called to be mentors of conviviality, spreading our *élan vital* around, spreading our backyard civilisation? Have we a role to play, a responsibility to discharge, in mentoring conviviality? This certainly takes mentoring into new territory. What might guide us?

Mentoring appears to have Greek roots around a combination of wisdom and advice. Wisdom lies beyond knowledge (which in turn lies beyond information); it incorporates experience and insight. Advice is generally in the nature of guidance, possibly at the level of recommendation, but always for the recipient to take or leave. 'Mentor' is the agent noun of *mentos*, which has been associated with 'intent, purpose, spirit and passion' (Online Etymology Dictionary).

This suggests that mentoring is not simply an exchange in the realm of minds, but possibly also in terms of heart, and soul and spirit. There is also often an inter-generational inference, featuring a mature senior advising a young junior, but there is certainly the possibility of reverse mentoring, especially around computer technology, social media, and internet savvy. We may well wish to view mentoring in broader than conventional terms, including the notion of mentoring conviviality, and the notion of group mentoring in service of a greater societal good – such as conviviality.

I acknowledge that it will probably be easier for most folks to conceive mentoring as more individual-based, essentially one-on-one, and one-way (senior to junior). And this may be especially the case in our own literal backyards. But when we raise the collective stakes into the realm of civilization, the convivial may trump the individual, and more complexity may have to be entertained – including multiple, multi-directional exchanges; in effect, extraordinary communication – acknowledging an over-riding mutuality.

A more civilized world positively demands such conviviality. In my Google searching, one of the strongest connections of mentoring and conviviality that I encountered was in an examination of

homelessness and loneliness, with the subtitle ‘the want of conviviality’ (Lemos, 2000). What was also notable were the many echoes in the report of the ‘close, friendly support’ that has been associated with the April 2015 call (for practice stories on mentoring). Befriending and mentoring are referred to almost interchangeably, emphasizing the need for the informal support of family and friends.

They are the repository of mutual aid in our society and in all societies. They are where help is given and received without obligation... There is pleasure involved as well as support, a rarity in the professional world of social work. In our relationships and our activities with others we express and experience life’s emotional textures, which are in the end the distinction between sadness and happiness. No amount of practical and professional support from those paid to help will, on its own, get anyone across the bridge from sorrow to joy... All these encounters, transactions, exchanges, unknown acts of unheralded kindness and generosity and shared pleasures are what it takes to make up ‘the convivial life’ (Lemos, 2000, p. 1).

The report gets to the essence of conviviality in a way that seems to speak to the ‘mentoring conviviality’ perspective advanced earlier:

What is conviviality? Relationships of conviviality are distinct from other relationships by being relationships of chosen interdependence – more than an evanescent social contact; less than the absolute obligation that parents feel in caring for their children. Geographical proximity is generally, though not always, involved. For instance, if a neighbour calls on your goodwill not just because he is your neighbour, but because he likes you and you like him, then that is conviviality. Likewise, ties of blood can also be involved – though we all know people who are closer to their cousins than their siblings. Everyone wants those types of relationship in their lives. Everyone wants good friends and kind families. Likewise homeless people want conviviality – the desire for friendship and love. But, all too often, this ‘want’ ... rather than being an active desire for something... is also its polar opposite: a passive lack of something, in this case, of conviviality. ‘The want of conviviality’ also therefore describes its absence and explains the longing for conviviality (Lemos, 2000, p. 1).

Convivial mentoring will obviously be of value in such situations, at the level of the individual – in this case the lonely homeless person. But, underlying and overlying, there is ‘the want of conviviality’; to address this, those with convivial credentials may want to cast themselves in the vanguard of ‘mentoring conviviality’, to advance the civilization they cherish.

References:

Lemos, Gerard 2000. *‘Homelessness and Loneliness’ – The want of conviviality*. Crisis (London, UK)

***Making and Finding Convivial Places:
Building Convivial Backyard Civilization***
An ACCBC Practice Story Offering - Ideas, Clarification and Research

**Placemaking – It’s What We Do!
Conviviality in Action**

Ian Wight,
May 2015

For almost 20 years now I have been a champion of placemaking, coinciding with my initial advocacy of conviviality as something that was as important – if not more important, than sustainability – as a macro-mission for humanity. I now ‘hook’ my placemaking interest to a wellbeing interest – both are about ‘whole-making’; we are all in the whole-making (well-ing, whole-ing, heal-ing) business, and conviviality supplies much of the currency needed.

I now express my professional identity (I am a city-region planner) around a professing of planning as placemaking, as wellbeing by design. This kind of planning is not limited to professional planners however – the planning is occurring by and through people themselves, especially when they are being convivial. This month we are putting the spotlight on places, built or experienced, that we think build up convivial civilization. I want to suggest that placemaking is ‘what we do’ - just like culture, and that – at its best – it is a form of conviviality in action, our collective spirit at work.

I am now ‘retired’ from my university appointment as a city planning professor, and I am missing my connection with my planning students, who invariably appreciated my ‘planning as placemaking’ orientation – and stimulated my own interest in taking this further – out into the wider world. While on leave in Adelaide I was delighted to find some ‘kindred spirits’ in those associated with ACCBC, and I have been wondering about how I might ‘seed’ such interest in my new home, near Victoria, BC.

There is a comparatively new Greater Victoria Placemaking Network, which is a very good sign <http://victoriaplacemaking.ca/> I have also found possible ‘kindred spirits’ in the Program in Earth Literacies <http://earthliteracies.org/> They have asked me to propose a ‘program’ for their consideration, that might get ‘marketed’ in part to folks in the GVPN. So I’m busy trying to build a place for folks to pursue more intentional placemaking, and I’m approaching this as – potentially - convening a series of convivial conversations, that might lead to our own version of the ACCBC.

I’m thinking that this ‘program’ could be a vehicle for how I’d like to try to help more people to practice placemaking, and to realize how this is something that we all already do, in our every-day life, as I’m sure many of your own practice stories will attest. Perhaps someone there will want to ‘have a go’, in your own backyard; Adelaide is getting a good reputation for the City’s placemaking efforts <http://www.citiscopes.org/story/2015/how-adelaide-revitalized-itself-through-placemaking> Ideally, I would like to be able to ‘gift’ this to anyone who might like to run with it themselves.

I want to call the program, *Making a Place We Can All Call Home*, and to potentially position this as ‘spirit-in-action’, inspired in part by several ‘blessings’ from John O’Donohue <http://www.johnodohue.com/books> I usually like to contrast ‘place’ with ‘space’; place

encompasses the sacred and the secular, and ranges from the primal to the potent. For example, think about: What makes a house a home? What makes a space a place? Where did you - as a child - first identify with a particular place – perhaps your *primal* place?

The place in placemaking is mostly a product of our senses, especially our surface senses – sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, but it is also a reflection of deeper sensibilities – intangible, ineffable, but incontrovertible. It comes from within us; we have a sense of place, and we are very good at sensing place (and also knowing a ‘non-place’ when we encounter it).

When we engage in placemaking we are always doing it with others, even if that ‘other’ is our own higher self. There are qualities of place that we can credit, together, between us. John O’Donohue helps us appreciate this as our *Anam Cara* – the Celtic spiritual belief of souls connecting and bonding:

‘When you connect with another person and become completely open and trusting with that individual, your two souls begin to flow together. Should such a deep bond be formed, it is said you have found your *Anam Cara*, or soul friend’.

<http://www.basaltheritage.org/anamcaradesigns.com/meaningofanamcara.html>

Perhaps this represents the highest, finest expression of our conviviality.

My own special interest in placemaking is on a rather grand scale – a city-region for example, like Metro Adelaide. How easy is it for you to consider such a scale of place in terms of ‘home’? We are into wondering... What seems to bind us to such a place, in common, that we all might happily call it ‘home’?

Another angle on this involves wondering.... How big is our ‘back-yard’, how ‘big’ can we conceive our back-yard to be? Think of your own actual ‘back-yard’, literally or figuratively, the one you really care about, and care for. Now think of the ‘back-yard’ you share with others, in your immediate neighbourhood for example. Now think of the ‘back-yard’ that your neighbourhood shares with all the other neighbourhoods in your general vicinity. How big is this back-yard? What is it calling forth in you?

Placemaking is a human art, a practice that serves us. It is where we get to practice the integration of all that is important to us. Places are much more than spaces; they are made, by/for the people in/of the place. You’ll be able to tell a place by the conviviality in action at their core – people enjoying the company of other people, working for the wellbeing of all. There will also be smiles aplenty – and more; all will feel like they have ‘come home’.

Sharing Practice Stories of Convivial Backyard Civilization
An ACCBC Practice Story Offering

**Convivial Conversation: Dogs as Catalysts
of Occasions of Neighbourly Conviviality**

Ian Wight,
August 2015

I am noticing the power of dogs to catalyse conviviality among comparative strangers, in the neighbourhood they share. Dogs lead us out of our immediate backyards, and help us appreciate our larger backyard that we also come to care about, and care for – in the interests of a joyful convivial life.

For the past few weeks we have been hosting family from another part of the country; they come most summers for the month of July (I'm in the northern hemisphere). This year they again brought their dog – Fitz, a three year-old terrier 'mix' and a pretty good 'Benji' look-alike. A very social - and sociable - little lady, Fitz has helped take me out of my usual self, and out into my wider environs, during our regular morning and evening walks.



I have probably met more (dog-walking) neighbours in the past few weeks than I have in the whole past year or so. And there is inevitably some conversation, usually about the dogs and their personalities. There are invariably some smiles exchanged, and some other pleasantries, that make one's day a little brighter, and fuller; convivial civilization is enhanced by every encounter.

One almost feels sorry for those who don't have dogs to walk, and who might therefore miss out on such experience. And this will now be my fate, until next summer – because Fitz departed my world today, to return east with his 'peeps'. What might I do instead, to help catalyse some connection and conversation for my other neighbours, that I have still to meet, that may not have dogs to walk on a regular basis?

On our walks I noticed that Fitz was especially pleased to visit a particular stretch of roadside verge, that seemed grassier, and moister, and better shaded than most other roadside verges on our route. I noticed that this attractive spot for Fitz was in the vicinity of our community mailboxes (we live in a rural residential neighbourhood), and I got to wondering if these could be part of some more in-depth neighbouring, where folks picking up their mail might be interested in a brief convivial interlude, with other mail-retrievers.

The boxes serve a relatively small number of residential addresses in fairly close proximity to one another. There is a pull-out space for cars to stop - while mail is picked up, but nothing to really encourage others to linger a little, and experience some chance encounters with other pedestrian mail-retrievers. We can pick up the free, twice-weekly, district newspaper, from its dedicated dispenser... but that's about it in terms of other amenities.



Perhaps there could be – in addition - some simple seating, and a basic shelter – from rain or sun; a rustic table-stand for a bunch of hand-picked flowers contributed by some generous souls; a small free book exchange/mini-library, for our reading surprise and pleasure; perhaps associated with a kiosk for information notices, and requests, and offers – that help us to co-mingle, and commune further. In such ways an impersonal bank of mail-boxes could become a neighbouring centre – a multi-faceted people place, rather than a mere single-function space. It could be a rural ‘third-place’ par excellence.

And dog-walkers would also be welcome, and their dogs of course – exchanging their own messages in the long grass and at the fire hydrant. Fitz would be pleased! A small advance en route to a more convivial civilization...

Convivial Celebrations
Convivial Celebration – The Scottish Experience
An ACCBC Practice Story Offering

Ian Wight
September 2015

“Every one who numbers a real Highlander among his friends knows that he inherits a number of qualities that mark him off from ordinary men. He is quick to take offense and he is a fighter. He is as punctilious in matters of honor as an Italian nobleman. Personal loyalty is a tradition with him. So is whisky. **He loves to arrange, often on the flimsiest pretext, occasions for convivial celebration**, a relic perhaps of old times when men, separated by mountain and flood, would meet together and pledge themselves in strong drink.” H.V. Morton, *In Search of Scotland*

[<http://www.highbrowmagazine.com/3986-search-scotland-s-national-poet>]

I am now back in my native Scotland for an extended visit, after a long absence - experiencing some retirement/refirement in the country that grew me, and formed me. I am celebrating that connection without encumbrance, and am noticing what is drawing me back, as I explore my ‘yearning for a Scottish life again’. And it has a lot to do with the Scottish attraction to matters convivial. So part of my time here will involve an inquiry into conviviality – Scottish-style.

This month’s practice story focus on celebration had me poking around the internet, (from Scotland instead of from Canada) to see what might turn up. Imagine my surprise when the first ‘hit’ on ‘convivial celebration, Scotland, Scottish’ was a reference to an 18th century gentlemen’s club, based in a Fife coastal village (Anstruther). They wrote ‘convivial celebration’ right into their constitution, but with an intriguing focus! https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Beggar%27s_Benison (I should warn folks interested in exploring this further that it should probably be rated as only for ‘adult audiences’, if not XXX).

The club was formed in 1732 and would have been particularly active when Robert Burns (1759-1796) – revered as Scotland’s national ‘bard’ – was walking the land, and becoming a national celebrity. I am expecting that Burns will loom large in my exploration of Scottish conviviality: ‘A farmer’s boy, with a fondness for drink and the ladies, Rabbie Burns is loved for his conviviality, humanity and passion for liberty’ <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/jan/19/poetry.classics> As a young man growing up in Ayrshire – my own early stomping grounds: ‘He joined a dancing class at Tarbolton (to meet girls); formed the Bachelors' Club (to meet with his pals)’, according to the *Guardian* article author, Andrew O’Hagen (I find myself curious as to whether Burns participated in any of the Beggar’s Benison sessions at Anstruther – but that will have to be the subject of a later inquiry).

Meantime, I’m settling for exploring conviviality in a Scottish context. And I’m wondering if it is particularly related to the Highlander in the Scottish character. I myself am a Lowlander by birth – an apparent Sassenach in fact, with a very English-sounding

surname, all of which galls me at times; so I like any stories that bequeath the possibility of some Highland ancestry, and I am pleased to say that my father's birthplace was in upper Aberdeen-shire (and am optimistic that my father's father, or his mother's mother, was even more of a Highlander – but I doubt I'll ever know this).

Connecting with the Highlander in my own character, or personality, may help to explain my own interest in matters convivial, and in the whole notion of conviviality. I find myself cherishing the sentiment expressed at the beginning of this story, attributed to the author H.V. Morton, in his book *In Search of Scotland*. I was particularly attracted to the observation about 'the Highlander': 'He loves to arrange, often on the flimsiest pretext, occasions for convivial celebration'. What a wonderful practice!

Morton wonders 'why' the Highlander's emphasis on convivial celebration, and offers some speculation, which I now interpret as the valuing of collective resilience – but it may simply have been optimizing opportunities for a good drink with your mates, and lots of toasting the fine things in life. Och Aye!

I suspect that there is a good chance that various 'toasts' will figure in your own stories. To which I would add my usual closing rejoinder - Cheerrrrrrs!

Neighbourliness – Foundational Conviviality?

Ian Wight
November 2015

“Neighbours are not necessarily friends but people with whom there is a shared space and physical closeness. Neighbours are usually not chosen by people but are a fact of social life when people are thrown together...”

As some of you may recall - from my September offering - I am now back in my native Scotland for an extended visit. We have been residing in different places, for comparatively significant periods of time, meaning that we have been more like residents than tourists.

We have been, and have had, neighbours on each occasion – albeit short-term, and potentially short-lived. I realize that we have been exposed to, and have contributed to, particular experiences of neighbourliness - that may constitute some ‘practice story’ raw material.

I am having the opportunity here to contemplate neighbourliness in the context of conviviality, and am wondering if we are in the vicinity of something ‘foundational’. Our ‘neighbourhood’ is probably our first order of affiliation beyond the family, where we encounter comparative strangers - who can become friends and/or neighbours - especially in the company of conviviality. I am interpreting the latter as not merely tolerating others, but actually enjoying and valuing their company – and enthusiastically engaging in ‘neighbouring’ – however large or small the gesture. Convivial neighbourliness may therefore be something beyond conventional neighbourliness - where we make the difference, if we work at it.

At our first port of call over here – a duplex cottage in a remote rural setting – our neighbour had been made aware of us being around, by my friend who was letting us have the use of his cottage. We only met very briefly, almost in passing, one day – exchanging no more than an acknowledging smile, but I was very aware of us ‘looking out for one another’. We were on one another’s radar, in an embracing, caring way. My friend had a chance to check in with our neighbour, and reported that she considered us ‘good neighbours’ and was pleased to have us around. We each had our private space, and needs – but we also had some shared space, and a need to know that we were not alone.

At our current port of call – a terrace of inner-city row housing in Edinburgh – we have neighbours ‘through the wall’ from us, on either side. Our backyards are well walled-off from one another – containing the possibility for convivial intercourse, but our front yards are quite open to one another - with easy cross-access. And our living rooms allow

us to see one another coming and going, comparatively unobtrusively, in our peripheral vision.

I have only met one of our current neighbours, again in passing, with only the briefest of interchange – but again it felt like we had already been ‘introduced’ by the friend for whom we are cat/house-sitting (while they are in Australia as it happens). He, good neighbour that he is, had prepared his neighbours for our presence around the place. They are therefore ‘looking out’ for us, especially one of them – entrusted with a spare key – should we encounter any emergency.

But we are also getting to be neighbourly as well – serving as a temporary dropping-off location for the postman, with parcels for either of our neighbours, when he finds them not at home. It saves trekking to a post office to retrieve the parcel, but depends entirely on the goodwill – the neighbourliness – that has been confected. The pick-up allows for the possibility of some catch-up, at the doorstep, to maintain the neighbourly bond.

Neighbouring is a form of communing on a very local – almost site-specific – scale. It is where we first get to practice being civil with one another outside our family circles. It is not all sweetness and light – there can be a lot of truth in ‘good fences make good neighbours’ - but there is a lot of scope for developing neighbourliness appropriate to evolving circumstances. It can be grown and developed as relationships grow and develop, but there will always be limits and conditions – intended to maintain a sense of the desired integrity and civility that we all need, to feel well-placed, well-grounded, well-founded, in our world.

Some of these limits and conditions may well be featured in your own practice stories. I’d be curious about what elements could be mostly associated with what I’ll call ‘conventional’ neighbourliness, compared to what might merit categorization as ‘convivial’ neighbourliness. What’s uniquely in play when conviviality is simmering nicely? What does it make possible?

Verbal Communication and Convivial Blethering

Ian Wight
June 2016

As some of you may recall - from my late 2015 offerings - I enjoyed an extended visit to my native Scotland (from September 2015 to February 2015). Much of the visit happened to coincide with a 'mooc' – a massive open online course – that attracted an unusual degree of interest in <https://www.edx.org/course/transforming-business-society-self-u-lab-mitx-15-671x> Scotland. The course - colloquially referred to as U Lab - featured an incredible array of verbal communication means and forums, in support of an interest in 'co-sensing and co-creating the emerging future'.

Although conviviality did not figure explicitly in the course framing, 'conversation' – that close 'friend' of conviviality - was featured prominently. The course 'text' *Leading from the Emerging* <https://www.amazon.ca/Leading-Emerging-Future-Ego-System-Eco-System/dp/1605099260> shows the Index reference for 'Communication' as 'See Conversation(s)' and an underlying premise was 'Conversations Create the World'.

A quite sophisticated 'multi-level' conversation-system was in play (Level 1: Unilateral, one-way down-loading, and manipulating; Level 2 Bilateral, two-way discussion and exchange of view-points; Level 3 Multilateral stakeholder dialogue – seeing oneself through the eyes of another; and Level 4 Co-creative eco-system innovation – blurring the boundary of ego and eco).

We were helped to appreciate the nuances in this system through various techniques, such as daily 'listening assessments', or periodic participation in 'coaching circles'. However, the richest course experience for many participants was probably in the context of the 'learning hubs' that sprung up to serve particular 'communities of interest' - sharing some affinity, in an immediate shared locality or setting. For myself, these could have been rendered as 'convivialities' - depending on, and nurturing, a very high level of verbal communication.

My 'practice story' offering relates to one of my experiences in one of my U Lab 'learning hubs' (within a Scottish Government work-place). That day the hub featured some 'case clinic' work, around some early 'proto-typing' by one participant, to create 'safe spaces for self-care' (in support of community and organizational development, within the work-place). It focused on reinforcing, while reframing, an organizational interest in fostering regular quality conversation in the work-place. It was very much about verbal communication – aiming for something more helpful than what was then on offer. The initiative was valuing 'self-care' above all else, and was relating this to the provision of 'safe spaces' within the organization, for personal development of the personnel.

All of us participating in the learning hub that day were invited to document our reflections. The case obviously resonated with many present – it was personal and organizational; it was relevant and resonant. The case clinic setting made it a 'safe space' to explore it further, to contemplate some prototyping possibilities, for the presenter's consideration. We naturally responded from our own experience, and in my own case that included some conviviality perspectives, inspired by my engagement with you folks. Here is some of what I offered - with 'convivial verbal communication' in mind.

“Where might caring - for one another and oneself - become more second nature, more front-of-mind, actively engaging heart and soul, and more consciously tapping into the spirit that ultimately sustains us? These would be intentionally safe spaces for some genuine conversation, authentic inter-relating, and perhaps some two-way mentoring - wondering how ‘things’ (one’s work, the system) might become ‘improved’, or ‘better’, and how the folk attached to the things might become more ‘well’ (‘weel’ in Scots), as in more ‘whole’ (rather than simply ‘fine’ or ‘OK’ – the stock responses of many Scots in such situations). In U Lab terms, it seemed that some ‘transforming’ was being contemplated, and some unlocking of sensed potential.

I wondered in particular about the application of some themes that were alive for me, that were being triggered, generatively by our conversation that day. These included possibilities around place-making (how spaces become places) and conviviality (where the company of others is not simply tolerated, but actively enjoyed) – and the place of transformed convivial conversation in all this. Perhaps there was a bigger story to be found in this case – a blast of big mind, big heart ‘blethering’ – blethers that matter, in great blethering places [‘blether’ is a popular Scots word for a good conversation].

The best safe spaces for myself – I felt - would potentially be those that became safe **places** sooner than later. A place is much more than a space; it is made by the people in, and of, the place - filled with the meaning it has for them, and attentive to the intentions that are foremost in their minds and hearts. A safe place emerges out of a process of space-place transformation, where the concern for safety is paramount.

Professional space designers may initially contribute their expertise – by designing good spaces conducive for good dialogue – but the place-makers are those who ‘make’ the place, out of their dialogue, out of their common meaning-making (and out of their ‘agreeing-to-disagree’ where pertinent). The place-making involves action-framing, and action-taking, and reflection on that action; considerable ‘social learning’ takes place naturally. ‘Safe spaces’ involves making places where we can feel safe, to be and become, to grow and develop. They are occasions for co-design, and co-creation.

The quality of the place-making may be enhanced if conviviality can be built in as the desired operative context, the abiding aspiration. Conviviality can be best appreciated in comparison with another common macro-mission these days – sustainability. The latter is more about sustaining what currently exists, from a mainly ‘surviving’ impulse; conviviality is more about ‘thriving’ - flourishing, becoming better, more well (more whole) together. Conviviality is inherently therapeutic.

Think of all the goodness – all the good natural ‘therapy’ – in a good blether, in good company, where caring and concern for one another goes without saying. But what if the implicit context was not simply ‘surviving’, but was actually ‘thriving’? If some ‘blethering’ had such a point to it, in the sense of anticipating a desired future - one requiring some intention - it could become a ‘big’ blether (rather than a ‘wee’ blether) about not just changing things, but aiming for some transformation - starting with oneself.

Around this point in the ‘clinic’ I began to see (imagine?) the case presenter as playing the role of a friendly wizard, who could cast some good spells, and help conjure up a

form of ‘magic’ – all in service of the creation of a safe space, for folks to make a safe place, valuing non-violence, emphasizing nurturing, facilitating some ‘communing’, where caring goes on without saying. And where there was the capacity for some discernment between a ‘wee’ blether, and a ‘big’ blether.

Much of the currency of the ensuing conversation would be in the form of stories. These would be invited, and exchanged - and trust and understanding would be built. We all have stories. We are all story-tellers. We are all story-makers. Stories are the vehicles for our reflections, for ‘outing’ our otherwise suppressed but critically significant tacit knowledge, for making new, grounded, experiential knowledge together.

In more formal staged conversation contexts the opening invitation could be around ‘What’s your (big) story this week, or this month? Ideally it would be ‘big’ in the sense of gob-smacking, mind-blowing, heart-touching, spirit-lifting – out of the ordinary, potentially transformative. And then the curiosity would be around what’s emerging, or what seems to want to emerge, or be emerged? What do you sense is ‘coming’?’

These would be not so much formative ‘creation’ stories as transformative ‘emergence’ stories. And as they are shared, and processed, in ever-widening circles of trust, the possibility of a common ethos arises; a collective ethical space becomes a communal ethical place – a generative safe place to attempt extraordinary co-creation. What are ‘we’ about? What ‘business’ are we in? What do we want to be doing (if we had our druthers)?

This particular case clinic also bequeathed some sensed implications around the essence of the wider U Lab experience - that the case seemed to underline and embody. We are on a steep and deep ‘co-learning’ curve. There is much judicious ‘seeding’ to be undertaken, and ‘massing’ to be accomplished, but with a ‘tipping-point’ in prospect – to keep our spirits up. Safe spaces for self-care have the feel of an excellent starting-point”.

Unwelcome Anonymity and Convivial Well-Becoming

Ian Wight
July 2016

Can one only really be really convivial in real time, in person, face-to-face, flesh-to flesh? Or can it be virtual, digitally? What about us right now ... comparative strangers, communicating digitally, about convivial digital civilization? Is there a story here? It may depend on my anonymity – or otherwise.

A few of you may know me in-person from my time in Adelaide for a few months in 2014, when I first connected with ACCBC. But many of you, perhaps most of you, may only know me from my occasional missives, transmitted digitally, into your inboxes. You are an important link in my interest in conviviality in practice. Digital is far from ideal as a form of communication – I do miss the human contact, and the direct immediate interaction, across the table, or around the room. But here I am again - hoping to escape anonymity - in another hemisphere, many time zones removed, asynchronously seeking a connection, in pursuit of a little more light around the conviviality that I believe is our shared curiosity.

Are we common citizens of a Digital Commons? Are we enjoying one another's company, albeit virtually? It may be easier for me than for you. I have had the first-hand experience of some of the reality of your gatherings; I can 'see' the space where you meet; I know some of the context; it was real for me once... the convivial thread has been maintained. You don't have the same knowledge or experience of my current setting; any conviviality may therefore be essentially 'academic'. Or is it? Could we possibly 'inhabit' a wider common 'field', that is fecund as far as our relating is concerned – a 'field' that is beyond space and time, but where we can all feel at home, if we will it?

I am particularly interested in the potential of a digitally-enabled convivial civilization on a global scale, with an associated global consciousness that makes us all more 'real' to one another; where we feel enriched by the connection with one another, where we can diminish the otherwise tendency to fear one another, where we can be truly civil with and to one another. I am curious about the potential for a digitally-enabled 'neo-civics' where the global and the local meet, in mutual respect, disposed to convivial deliberation. Could this be the context for realization of one of my long-held dreams: for the democratisation of what passes for development, and the development of what passes for democracy?

The themes for each ACCBC gathering are often incredibly generative for myself. Once it is put 'out there' I am immediately curious about what might arise, that I might notice, in my 'field'. On this occasion what I mainly noticed that I was noticing was a *Huffington Post* commentary by an India correspondent, reflecting on the implications of the Brexit vote. Dhruva Jaishankar is a Fellow - for Foreign Policy - at Brookings India in New Delhi. You can find his post at: http://www.huffingtonpost.in/dhruva-jaishankar/brexit-the-first-major-ca_b_10695964.html?utm_hp_ref=world&ir=World

What caught my eye was his observation:

'Arguably, Brexit represents the first major casualty of the ascent of digital democracy over representative democracy'.... 'One big enabler of globalization is the internet, the global network of networks that allows billions of people to cheaply and easily access enormous amounts of digital information'.

I have hopes that this 'information' will become knowledge, and then wisdom, underpinning my hoped-for 'neo-civics'. But Jaishankar also gave me cause to pause, as he observed:

'Many technology optimists have assumed that globalization would lead to the democratization of information and decision-making, and also greater cosmopolitanism. Citizens would be better informed, less likely to be silenced, and able to communicate their views more effectively to their leaders. They would also have greater empathy and understanding of other peoples the more they lived next to them, visited their countries, read their news, communicated, and did business with them. Or so the thinking went'.

Or so my possibly wish-filled thinking went! *'Instead, digital democracy -- the ability to receive information in almost real time through mass media and to make one's voice heard through social media -- has contributed to polarization, gridlock, dissatisfaction and misinformation'.* Hardly the conditions one might hope for, if convivial digital civilization is one's aspiration.

If you read the rest of the piece you'll see more of the rationale, and in particular more of the downsides of digital democracy. One of the biggies has to do with anonymity – one of the biggest counters of conviviality: *'The tone of democratic politics increasingly reflects that of anonymous online discourse: nasty, brutish, and short'.* Perhaps the 'politics' of this can be replaced by a 'democratics' – if we can bend the digital to convivial ends.

A new form of digital democracy may be on the cards, transcending the representative democracy that has been our lot to date. There is some cause for some optimism:

'It may be hard to discern amid the smoke and noise, but there are some benefits to digital democracy. Information is no longer in the hands of the few. It is easier than ever to bring injustices to light'... 'But representative democracy as we have come to know it is under threat, and Brexit represents the first major casualty. Rather than fight the tide, a collective rethink is needed about how to make democracies resilient and productive in the digital age. It won't be easy'.

Nothing it seems is easy, even in this digital world. Might conviviality be a conduit; might digital be the means? And some devaluing of anonymity might not go amiss.

*Convivial Civilization at Home
(An ideas offering)*

Conviviality@Home – At Home with Conviviality: Coming Home to Ourselves

Ian Wight
August 2016

“Home is where the heart is. It stands for the sure centre where individual life is shaped and from where it journeys forth. What it ultimately intends is that each of its individuals would develop the capacity to be at home in themselves. This is something that is usually overlooked, but it is a vital requirement in the creativity and integrity of individual personality. It has to do with the essence of a person, their sense of their own inner ground. When a person is at home in his life, he always has a clear instinct about the shape of outer situations; even in the midst of confusion he can discern the traces of a path forward. When one is at home in oneself, one is integrated and enjoys a sense of balance and poise”.

John O’Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us* (2008), p. 83

I often engage conviviality through – for myself at least - the *joy* that it embraces, especially the inclusive unqualified enjoyment of the company of others. And this is often associated with a larger sense of *home*, larger than our own actual home-plot or back-yard; perhaps even planetary in scale – our planet as *The Home of Man* (the title of a book by Barbara Ward, for the 1976 UN Habitat conference) – the ‘back-yard’ all of us share, out there.

But with this month’s theme I found myself going somewhere else. Going inside; into heart-space. Convivially, I wondered about enjoying not only the company of others, but – more directly, more immediately – enjoying the company of ourselves, ‘our selves’. And here is where I found John O’Donohue’s words to be truly inspiring. How can we be more at home in ourselves, with our selves? It feels like a kind of ‘ground zero’ where conviviality is concerned... *‘the sure centre where individual life is shaped and from where it journeys forth’.*

So let’s consider some more what ‘coming home to ourselves’ might mean... coming back home, coming back-yard home. Such ‘home-coming’ is very much rooted in a ‘back-yarding’. I am eternally grateful for my first-hand experiences, in Adelaide in early 2014, of back-yard culture, back-yard sentiments, and back-yard civilization. Without that experience ‘back-yard’ would have remained an essentially negative moniker for the ‘not-in-my-back-yard’ sloganeering that was all too prevalent, too often, in my professional planning field. Such ‘back-yarders’ were perceived generally as a professional enemy of sorts, to be neutralized, marginalized, delegitimized.

Modern professionals can easily miss the people, and their humanity, that are the heart and soul of such ‘yarding’, where these back-yards are their home – with others, and for themselves. I could see them as special home-places, where stories abound, where dreams are born, and journeys are launched. Being in Australia at the time I readily appreciated the tie between yarding and yarning. How much back-yarding is essentially back-yarning? And then I noticed what an ‘e’ might add... the yarning in yearning, and the yearning in yarning. Can you discern the yearning in your yarning, in your back-yarding? Chances are you’ll be on the way to really coming home to your Self.

Home is about back, and front; outside, and inside – as much about one’s inner experience as outer manifestation... *their sense of their own inner ground... with a clear instinct about the shape of outer situations... better able to discern the traces of a path forward... integrated... and enjoying a sense of balance and poise.* Coming home is – counter-intuitively – a path forward; the destination is yourself, your destiny.

For myself, such multiple personal evolutions compound convivially into a collective awakening that is civilizational in the very best, broadest, deepest sense. Never underestimate the civilization transformation that might emanate from one back-yard – from all the yarning and yearning it nurtures. May all that is still un-lived in you ‘blossom into a future graced with love’; come home, to yourself.

To Come Home To Yourself

May all that is unforgiven in you
Be released.

May your fears yield
Their deepest tranquilities.

May all that is un-lived in you
Blossom into a future
Graced with love.

John O’Donohue, *To Bless This Space Between Us*, p. 97

*Convivial Community Grouping and Organizing
(An ideas offering)*

Conviviality and Communing: Groups@Work – Organizing Civics

Ian Wight
September 2016

Up (over) here in Canada I had a ‘down under’ experience last night – that had me connecting to this month’s theme – the convivial backyard civilization associated with our engagement with community groups and organizations. It was a ‘town hall’ meeting with our local Member of Parliament, who is a member of a committee of (federal) politicians tasked with consulting the Canadian public on electoral reform – a very big issue right now. Our new Liberal Prime Minister – despite his parliamentary majority – has committed to following through on an election campaign promise to eliminate our ‘first-past-the-post’ system, and have some form of proportional representation in place for the next federal election in 2019.

It seems you folks down there have some experience in this regard that might be relevant for us folks up here. The ‘town hall’ meeting heard two well-received contributions from folks with strong Australia and New Zealand connections, mainly about the pros of some form of proportional representation. However what really grabbed my attention – in the context of this month’s theme – was the Australian contributor extolling the virtues of ‘compulsory voting’. This has not previously been on folks’ minds – as a possible piece of our overall electoral reform package – but it definitely seemed to strike a responsive chord among many at our meeting (especially in contrast – for example - with ‘on-line voting’ possibilities, which seemed to be distinctly unwelcome).



It seems that your elections are always held on a Saturday, with the requirement that ostensibly **every** eligible voter turns up at designated polling places – many of which are community ‘anchors’ like a school, church or hall. These seem like occasions for an uncommon convening of potent groups of people in an organized fashion (electorates), for some serious business – and for

some convivial fun, for families and among neighbours. I gather there are often associated community events – sausage sizzles; lamingtons; jumping castles; ‘trash and treasure’ stalls; cakes, drinks, plants – for sale. Sounds like a blast – of honest-to-goodness conviviality! I began to sense that the ‘compulsory voting’ might also facilitate some unusually extensive ‘communing’ – at least at election times – that might otherwise never occur.

Conventional partisan (party) politics must, thankfully I’d surmise, be somewhat muted in such a context. In fact, some unconventional **community** partisanship may get a good boost, in direct proportion to the conviviality generated. I’m thinking there might be a good deal more civility on display, a convivial civilisational impulse at work. And my hunch is that folks would gain a better sense of the bigger ‘back-yard’ that they share, at the electorate level - the ‘back-yard’ shared with actual neighbours, and neighbouring neighbourhoods. This is ‘scaled-up’ community at work, building larger/wider relationships, increasing the level of societal cohesion – a community of communities of communities.

I’m now wondering if this could be part of the case for ‘compulsory voting’ up here. I’m sure you will all have some particular ‘practice stories’ for me, regarding your own first-hand experiences, about something I can only guess at. But it feels significant – for viscerally connecting community and country, neighbourhood and nation, in a very direct way, but still very locally-rooted. Maybe you’d even like to have such convivial electioneering every few weeks, or every few months – instead of every few years! Or maybe you’d settle for a regular ‘town hall’ meeting, with whoever gets elected to represent you – in the context of an expectation of **community** partisanship (rather than one-political-party-favouring partisanship).

For myself then, ‘compulsory voting’ has conjured up a connection between conviviality and communing – both deserving much more play today. The ‘communing’ occurs in particular community groups, at work, for the good of the community – locally and nationally. Societal cohesion is advanced – perhaps one of the most needed public goods these days. The community is a conduit – independent of government, unattached to commercial interests – privileging civil society. It is the place where civics, rather than politics, reigns. You might not welcome ‘politics’, but you might well want to embrace ‘civics’ – especially where everyone votes (and can have some fun at the same time). Friendly, welcoming, merry. How convivial!



*Fostering conviviality and wellbeing
in times of illness, disability and rehabilitation
(An ideas offering)*

Conviviality as Wellbeing by Design

Ian Wight
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Conviviality and wellbeing do seem to go hand-in-hand, heart-in-heart, soul-in-soul. There is a natural impulse to them – basic human nature at work, almost as our default mode, without having to think about it. They are like ‘apps’ in our interior operating system, clicking in/on whenever we are in the presence of relationship, or whenever we sense its comparative absence. Why might this be so?

If we put our etymological hats on we can see that ‘convivial’ began word-life as something pretty basic... ‘con’ together, ‘viv’ live.... a valuing of ‘living together’ - and an implicit rejection of living apart, of living on one’s own, of being alone. What becomes intriguing is that this ‘living together’ developed some particular connotations – reflecting some emerging collective ‘ideals’ perhaps. I notice frequent expansions of ‘convivial’ to incorporate, for example: feasting (festive), carousing, sociable, agreeable, friendly, jovial, merriment.

Nothing sinister. Nothing dark. Nothing negative. Essentially, only ‘good vibrations’ and good relations! It could simply be a signal that ‘all is well’.

Wellbeing almost goes without saying when conviviality is at work. Could conviviality be a form of wellbeing by design? Something we are naturally designed to do and be, to enact and manifest; something we innately ‘will’ as part and parcel of our living together in this world.

The ‘well’ in wellbeing can be linked to this ‘will’ at work in us, but it can also be linked to the notion of ‘well’ as ‘whole’... well-beings as whole-beings - well in body, mind, soul and spirit. Conviviality may be like a natural proactive prescription for what ‘wells’ us - as well as a potential reactive prescription for much of what ‘ails’ us. The ‘wholing’ (as whole-making) is a form of healing, where our health, our ‘whole-th’, is impaired.

Illness, disability and rehabilitation loom large when there is a deficiency of ‘whole-th’. When wellness is absent, when ability is compromised, when normality seems a long ways off. Can conviviality help bridge the gaps? How? Who?

We are the primary and ultimate agents of conviviality. We set our own intentions. We control what gets our attention. If our intention is to leave the world a little more whole than when we first encountered it... to have an enabling disposition in relation to others – especially those less able for whatever reason... or to contribute restoratively to a desired normalcy after an upset or an accident... then our efficacy will be enhanced by the conviviality we can mobilize in ourselves, and in/with others. It’s personal, but it’s

simultaneously inter-personal; sometimes I render this as ‘solitudes in communion’. What solitude do I bring to my communing, and my championing of conviviality?

I seek to embody conviviality through a raft of simple practices. I thankfully acknowledge most communications from others, for the underlying relationship they constitute (when my ‘me’ experiences a ‘we’). I end most of my (email) communications with ‘Cheerrrrrs!’; how convivial is that? (and a convivial Scot at that – with a penchant for rolling their rrrrr’s). I have an extraordinary belief in the value of a smile (my ‘tagline’ is ‘Leadership as Service: For Good, in Love, With a Smile), and my day is made when I bring a smile to a stranger, especially a youngster or toddler.

I also have a little mantra that connects my conviviality to wellbeing:

Doing well by my Self
Being well Together
For the wellbeing of All
In all Our well-becoming

‘Doing well by my Self’ references my higher Self, and the ethical standards it stands for. ‘Being well Together’ is my sense of my conviviality-in-action... living together, well. ‘For the wellbeing of All’ reflects my willing of wellness on a grand – humanity – scale. ‘In all Our well-becoming’ reflects a convivial future outlook, overcoming absences (illness as an absence of wellness; disability as an absence of ability) by a greater presencing of all that is Good and True and Beautiful.

Illness, disability and rehabilitation are facts of our lives that we have to reckon with, at some time or another, to varying degrees and frequencies. They challenge us, and can get the better of us – on occasion. But if we are fortunate we will not be alone; there will always be some conviviality on offer – some healing/wholing balm for what ails us, a willing of wellbeing en route to our well-becoming. As a species we seem to have a hankering for not simply living together, but living well together. With conviviality as our default mode we can take this into the realms of actually enjoying one another’s company on a grand scale – a whole-making communion, in sickness and in health.

Whither Conviviality? What we will; what we will ‘will’

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whith’er : *adv.* to what place; to which
Collins English Gem Dictionary

Year-ends have that inevitable ‘review’ association – a re-viewing - a looking back mainly. But there is also the possibility of some ‘looking forward’, a pre-view-ing, that might capture some wishing and hoping. And, depending on how active (rather than passive) folks feel, there just might be some ‘willing’ at work. What might we want to ‘will’ in the year ahead, especially with conviviality in mind? What might we actually want to enact? We are the ultimate agents of conviviality, individually and collectively.

Ideally, what we ‘will’ will be arrived at through unusual open-mindedness and open-heartedness. Such ‘opening-up’ might be a tall order for many folks; it will probably take courage and require trust, to extraordinary degrees – individual courage and collective trust. Could conviviality be a ‘go-to’ place that gets folks going, that gets them enacting what they will – all their wishing and hoping? A year-end gathering for the ACCBC seems like an excellent opportunity for a simple inquiry: Whither conviviality? ... especially conviviality’s ‘place’ in the larger (civilisational) scheme of things, and the larger end ‘to which’ its exponents aspire?

At its core the ACCBC is already a ‘conviviality’ in my own estimation; it is a congenial – make that convivial – story-telling-place, for practice stories that advance the practice of conviviality. It is well-grounded in a celebration of ‘the local’, counter-balancing the otherwise often-blind worship of ‘the global’; it values ‘real’ rather than ‘virtual’ connections; it is for real persons, with a strong sense of themselves, interested in growing and developing themselves further, in the company of others.

They are what I like to call ‘con-vivants’ (an evolved form of *bon vivant*) – they are as much inter-persons (inter-personal), as persons (personal); as much inter-beings as ‘solo’ beings. They are good at being healthy solitudes, and good at being in uncommon communion – they have an instinct for ‘the good’ in everything, their good-willing is as much ‘good-welling’. They are in ‘the well-being business’ – they enact living well together.

So what might we wish for, and hope for, in the year ahead? Could we possibly ‘scale up’ conviviality - just a little bit, at least? Move it a little beyond ‘the local’ perhaps? It might be a bit much to actually contemplate ‘globalising’ conviviality, but we might want to keep this bit of wishin’ and hopin’ around, on the back-burner – as a ‘to-do’ project for the next generation, or two, or three. Let us at least propose a hearty toast to conviviality – the more the merrier!