

Intentionally Living:
Ethnographic Perspectives of Intentional Communities as
Sites for Cultural Critique

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“...There is always a disparity between the real and the ideal when it comes to culture, and this is no less true in complex societies (that is, nation-states) than in forms of social organization. The job of anthropologists is to note this disparity and how people attempt to reconcile the contradictions that it creates. It is through the analysis of this kind of reconciliation that new knowledge and new theory are produced and older theories substantiated and their power realized.” (Brown 2002, 8)

Prologue

In the winter of 2001 I left Georgetown to visit my mother in Germany for six months and then went on to travel in Costa Rica on a study abroad program. Throughout the course of this year, I repeatedly encountered stories of young and old people alike breaking out of normative lifestyles and creating their own communities. It seemed to me that there was an increasing trend of people attempting a range of social experiments that challenged various aspects of the dominant society, from the nuclear family, to capitalist forms of exchange, environmentally irresponsible building practices, to normative definitions of gendered labor and the specialization of labor.

The United States is notorious for ignoring the fact that their society is culturally situated, and when cultural values are acknowledged, there exist discrepancies over who articulates those values. American city layouts and the basic family unit are two fundamental aspects of American life that exemplify traditionally articulated American values founded on individuality and individual rights. Simultaneously, access to quality affordable housing is not considered a basic right for American citizens as it is in other countries.¹ Furthermore, the moral and legal discourse surrounding the nuclear family normalizes and institutionalizes this particular form in such a way that it becomes a culturally embedded reality, ignoring that the even the nuclear family can be examined within a historical context. Kozeny (1996) explains:

The advent of the isolated nuclear family is, in fact, a fairly recent phenomenon, having evolved primarily with the rise of industrialization, particularly the development of high-speed transportation. As transportation has become cheaper and faster, we've also witnessed an increase in transience, and the demise of the traditional neighborhood.

¹ I am specifically referring to squatters' rights that are protected in many European countries such as Italy, France, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Amsterdam.

As will be further discussed in this paper, with the introduction of new technologies such as automobiles, televisions, and computers, dynamics within the nuclear family have changed, allowing them to become more insular and independent. For example, families can no longer depend on their extended families to care for their children because their jobs move them across the country forcing parents to rely on costly unsubsidized childcare--making the choice to have children a privilege rather than a right. Television and computers have become the focal points of family entertainment. Families communicate less, neighbors communicate less, or remain completely anonymous, children are overweight, depressed and engaged in fewer creative activities. In a society that is increasingly mobile, with people seeking out the most advantageous economic opportunities and carting children off to a variety of after school activities, or keeping them occupied with television and/or video games, the result is a climate of isolation, alienation, and selfishness because people are minimally engaged with what is happening in their families and their neighborhoods. It is this climate that is motivating people to look for alternative living. Intentional communities are emerging once again as an opportunity for people to reclaim their lives and to give themselves choices and change.

Part of the initial appeal of conducting a study of intentional communities was to become swept away in the magic and mystery of a subculture. After spending a year traveling I had come across many different wanderers living out of their backpacks jumping from one hostel, farm, or intentional community to the next: they were dirty and enlightened. There were stories of productive self-sustaining permaculture farms run completely by solar energy and gray water, a system .of storing and redistributing “recycled” non-potable water predominantly for agricultural use. Communities of ambitious young people from all over Latin America and the US joined efforts to develop and educate local people about reclaiming the land and growing their own food and medicine again. People reported ecstatic nights of dancing high and naked under a bright starry sky for the full moon ritual, which entailed the drinking fresh hibiscus teas, eating star fruit off the branch, eating only what was grown on the land. And of course there were the wise dreaded and bearded hippie throw-backs who chanted, “...would never sell out, man. Just

keep on the road. Trust in the universe and she will provide.” Utopian and idealistic.

By the end of my travels in Central America, I began to hear the real story behind Punta Mona, one particularly famous intentional community from which I drew much of the imagery in the beginning of this paper. In reality they struggled to maintain a stable population, it was poorly organized and there was often little work delegated. The charismatic “founder” who first introduced me to the place actually suffered from a bad temper and financial trouble. Also, the white privileged youth outnumbered the Latin American employees for whom Punta Mona was originally established.

While this may reflect some people’s experiences with intentional communal societies, it is also a hyped-up, mythic stereotype--seductive and uncomplex. But the truth is that these images still influenced my expectations of what I was looking for in an intentional community, and moreover they influenced the critiques I would later have surrounding the work with my initial field site, Takoma Village Community. Finally, it is these images that I would come to understand as reflective of commonly held misconceptions of what it means to live in intentional communities.

As stated above, I entered this project with several very specific stipulations. Namely, I hoped to work with a community of people that lived communally—sharing space and resources—and who, through their definition of community, were activists and advocates for social justice broadening their definition of community to include the struggles of others beyond their home. My limitations as an undergraduate student in Washington, DC demanded that I work close to home. But, the nature of intentional communities is that they are not often found in urban locations for a number of reasons. For example, one motivation to join such a community is dissatisfaction with the larger society, technology, and the ills of urban life (see Kamau 2002, 24). The very essence of many intentional communities is to redefine how we build and live in our spaces, and thus many may find it easier to start on their own piece of land in a rural setting instead of attempting to carve out a niche for the community in an urban city. Thus, I found that research sites within DC were very limited.

Although communal group houses can be seen as a building block for intentional communities, I elected not to study a group house because it represented a more insular enclave, and I hoped to see what a network of households with a similar commitment could achieve. When I eventually heard about Takoma Village Community, an urban co-housing community, which was constructed using environmentally-friendly building practices and dedicated to the consensus process, I could not have been more pleased. Several visits and interviews later, I became disillusioned with my work. The consensus process (see Appendix) seemed like it wasn't catching on, interviews with residents revealed some alarmingly racist sentiments, and co-housing, itself, appeared to be an opportunity for the economic elite.

It was not until my final visit, a weekend stay and community work day that I really began seeing TVC as a whole. Up to that point I had been like a blind person trying to describe an elephant by just feeling its tail. Despite my frustrations with the lack of organized outreach and advocacy within the surrounding neighborhood and the several racist comments I had encountered, the value of this community lay in the sum of its parts. Takoma Village, like any group of people within a movement or neighborhood, family or group of friends, is not a monolith. And though these people have chosen to live their lives together, one individual cannot represent the politics of the whole. In fact, the beauty of co-housing emerges from the fact that there does not need to be an overarching political ideology in order to establish community. One resident put it well when she said, "Within co-housing, sometimes the only thing that people have in common is a desire to live in a community." And in many cases within Takoma Village this is exactly true, although commitment to and definition of community itself often varies from resident to resident. This diversity inevitably leads to conflict, and it is the process of dealing with conflict that strengthens and unifies a community.

Due to the attempts made by intentional communities to create alternative narratives of how to establish and participate in community, we as outsiders are often quick to categorize them either as cultish or utopian. But the reality is often much more complex and rich than that dichotomy allows. The story I hope to recount in the pages that follow will hopefully reveal the

struggles and successes, ultimately, of the humanity of individuals attempting to live innovatively, intentionally, and collectively. It is not a smooth process, and at times, it is painful to rebirth ourselves--to redefine the way that we relate to one another and to our space. Ultimately, this is to realize that individual freedoms evaporate when communal rights are ignored, and that communal rights include the rights of the socially marginalized, as well as and the environment. For me, the work of residents is a grand example that there is power in numbers, as well as a reminder that when you don't like something, you "stop bitching and start a revolution."²

²This is a slogan on a T-shirt that I recently saw advertised in a magazine published by Zendig Farms, an intentional art's community outside Asheville, NC.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“What make the larger social entity possible are the smaller communities that continue to offer the face to face existence that is at the heart of human experience and necessity”

-Susan Love Brown, 2002

My attraction to the intentional communities movement and to the topic on communal living arises out of a personal desire to *live* my politics: to give tangible form to the theoretical ideology of living consensually, collaboratively, and consciously. Though it has not yet been documented, I believe that we may look back on this historical period as the beginning of an increasingly well-defined, effective communities movement. While proving this statement is not the goal of this paper, I would like to explore the ways in which intentional communities are forms of activism in action. The incarnation of a communal living project goes beyond the process of envisioning a better future; instead it strives to *enact* a better future. Realistically, though, not every form of intentional community is successful. It thus becomes of great importance to examine what factors lead to enduring communities that live and achieve their goals. The effectiveness of a community’s “success” is predicated on its capacity for diversity and flexibility in the face of loss, change, tragedy, diversity, and conflict. The resiliency of a community is dependent upon its ability to retain a dialectical conversation with the dominant community, to allow for change, and to create cultural meaning and solidarity amongst its members.

Because this work is motivated by the idea of agentive choices, decentralization, and making the marginalized visible, it is imperative to include the voices of individuals who live in these spaces. Consequently, my own ethnographic research will constitute a critical component of this project. I will use original research on two different communities (within a 100 mile radius of Washington, DC). They are: **Takoma Village**, an urban co-housing community located

in Takoma Park at the edge of the District, and **Twin Oaks**, a 35 year old rural income-sharing intentional community in Louisa, Virginia.

The specifics of the methodology employed for each project are outlined in greater detail in their respective chapters. But I would like to take this opportunity to discuss some of the general differences that consequently produced distinct ethnographic results. My work with Takoma Village began in the spring of 2002. I conducted research and fieldwork over an entire semester, visiting the community weekly and participating in interviews, meetings, communal dinners, and community workdays. Because Takoma Village is a relatively young co-housing community, there is not much external documentation. My principle ethnographic resources were my own experiences of the community and the experiences related to me by residents. I interacted with Takoma Village more intimately, witnessing the mundane details of everyday life. My relationship to Twin Oaks varies greatly because my physical contact with the community was limited to one weekend in August 2002. Added to this was the fact that I knew that there had been a great deal of published documentation about the history of Twin Oaks. Both Kat Kinkade and Ingrid Komar's biographical books on Twin Oaks can be regarded as loosely ethnographic. They are included in my methodology as a form of "polished interview".

During this research, I have discovered a diverse world of intentional living projects with incredible variation in structure, history, mission, affiliation, size, location, and longevity. In the pages that follow I hope to explore the ways in which intentional communities redefine how they participate in society and whether their projects can lead us to more effective alternative economic, political, and social models. I reflect on the following questions: 1.) How do intentional communities operate as part of a larger social justice movement and cultural critique of normative US values? 2.) Is the building of community an effective tactic/approach? 3.) How

do individual intentional communities interact with the larger community in general?

I present these two communities as they are in this particular moment in history and contextualize them against the backdrop of their own history as well as within that of the communities movement. Comparatively I juxtapose two very different communities along the following dichotomies: rural vs. urban; established vs. developing, and, income-sharing vs. economically independent. The common rubric of analysis for both communities is that of *diversity* and *flexibility*. While Turner (1969), Kanter (1972), Zablocki (1980) and Kamau (2002) analyze the success of community through the rubric of *communitas*, liminality, and charismatic leadership, I propose that it is a community's capacity for diversity, flexibility, and networking that are essential for community sustainability. Thus not only can we explore diversity and flexibility within a specific community, but we can also see how those qualities also bolster the larger communities movement. The diverse examples of Takoma Village and Twin Oaks outline the broadening scope of intentional communities, making communal living an accessible alternative for a variety of lifestyles.

Constructing a Description: What are “Intentional Communities”?

One day over a telephone conversation my aunt asked me what I was writing my thesis about. When I explained to her that I was writing using original ethnographic work to analyze intentional communities as a social movement she said, “What’s an intentional community? Aren’t *all* communities intentional?” Admittedly I was stumped, and I dismissed her questions as evidence of a generation gap, realizing later that I could not presume that the term “intentional community” was self-evident. For the purposes of this thesis I define “intentional communities” as:

1. A group of people (deliberately) living together in one place, especially one practicing common ownership, a place considered collectively with its inhabitants.
2. The condition of having joint ownership or liability
4. **Ecology**: A group of interdependent plants or

animals growing or living together³.

Derivative terms such as “communal” and “communitarianism” are defined, respectively as,

Shared or done by all members of a community, involving the sharing of work and property; communal living

And,

A system of social organization based on small self-governing communities. 2. An ideology which emphasizes the responsibility of the individual to the community and the social importance of the family unit.

Thus, intentional communities are groups of people that *deliberately* attempt to embody the principles of community: to articulate commonly shared values, to share work and property, to self-govern, to regard individual responsibility in direct relation to the larger group and to the land on which they live, and to view all living things, the individuals comprising the community and the physical environment, as working interpedently in a bounded space. It is also intrinsic to these sorts of communities to outline the specific requirements which determine one as a member, or what one’s obligations and responsibilities are to the community. There is a broad range of living situations that have been labeled (officially and unofficially) under the heading of an intentional community from the dorm room, to the Jewish kibbutz to the co-housing community.

While individuals living in the larger community occasionally participate in forms of community with one or more of the characteristics previously described, the cultural tradition of the US is that of a staunch individualism. Additionally, the post-industrial paradigm of progress is that of expanding the individual’s capacity consumption and range of movement with little or no regard for the impact such actions have on the group, particularly on the disenfranchised and marginalized members of the group. Therefore, intentional communities can be defined by the ways in which they organize themselves to oppose specific dissatisfactory elements of the larger society in which they exist.

³ As defined in the 1999 Oxford Concise English Dictionary.

In Number Our Days, an ethnography on an elderly Jewish community center, Barbara Meyerhoff analyzes the power of language and the use of witchcraft in the form of ‘word magic’ to control and empower. Meyerhoff finds that the use of words, particularly insults and curses, are perceived by the aging members of The Center to have tangible effects on others. In this community both Jewish and English words play a significant role in power relations, and in the construction of history, memory, and meaning. One informant states, “When you have the right word, you have power over something” (168). Participants of the communities movement likewise are sensitive to the power of language. For example, many members upon joining a new community change their name in order to demonstrate the transformative growth process experienced by many in community. The act of naming oneself demonstrates that the individual is reclaiming her life as her own, that she is truly her own person. Furthermore, many communitarians recognize that language can be both liberating and enslaving. Thus part of the work of the communities movement is not only to develop alternative lifestyles, but also to generate an alternative discourse. The practice of which is most clearly manifested in the use of the consensus process to make group decisions. Not only does this provide an alternative egalitarian model of communication, but also a non-violent alternative to conflict resolution.

During one interview with Tessa from Takoma Village Community, she said to me “There aren’t even words for what we are doing here.” So, community members are busy engaging in a discourse to make it possible to communicate about the transformations they are enacting. Communitarians use language to craft and create new realities by arming themselves with the knowledge that radical acts gain power when they are named. The term “intentional community” was first used in 1949 at a gathering of The Fellowship, a network of collectivistic communities, that today is known as The Fellowship of Intentional Communities. The communities movement, itself, is still constructing their definition of “intentional community”. In the 1995 Communities Directory, Dan Questenberry writes that at the 1989 Fellowship of Intentional Communities Board meeting an attempt to create a common definition resulted in the decision to engage in a process of comparative description of “intentional community,” rather

than a definition because definitions were seen as limiting and judgmental (1995, 35).

The term “utopian⁴” and “commune” have been used as pejorative descriptions by the media and academics rendering communes and utopian projects politically ineffectual and negligible (See Harvey, Zablocki, and Schehr). Though today’s intentional communities have their origin in the communes and utopian living experiments of the 60s and 70s, out of support for alternative discourses, I choose not to use these words to describe the communities mentioned here. Not only do the common understandings of “utopia” and “commune” not apply to the communities in this study, but I also reject the argument that intentional communities do not comprise an influential social movement.

Historically Situating Intentional Communities

Communal/ collectivistic communities can be traced as far back to the period of 100 B.C. to 100 A.D. in the early Roman Empire. Since its origin, history of communitarianism has been discontinuous. Although communitarian movements have spanned the globe, it appears that intentional communities are largely a product of affluent, urbanized, industrial nations. The United States has a long tradition of communitarianism. Since the birth of this nation, people have been organizing themselves to live simply and communally.

Benjamin Zablocki’s research on intentional communities documents five periods of “community building” in the United States. Zablocki links each of the five phases of intentional communal living to periods of significant historical and cultural upheaval. The first phase, the Colonial Period, took place from 1620-1776. The second phase, The Shaker Influx, lasted from 1790-1805. The Shakers were a strict religious community that attracted a lot of attention in its time. Anne Leigh founded the Shakers in 1774, and they were committed to social, economic, and spiritual freedom. This included egalitarian gender relationships as well. Today, two Shaker communities still remain in New Hampshire and Maine. The third phase from 1824-1848, was

⁴ “Utopia” as defined by the 1999 Oxford Concise English Dictionary is “an imagined perfect place or state of things.” It defines “utopian” as “idealistic, an idealistic reformer.”

called the Utopian Socialist Age. The Utopian Socialist Age was characterized by a rise in secular communities, though a fair number of religious communities established in previous era still remained. The fourth phase, The Turn of the Century from 1890-1915 arose out of rebellion against technological advances. This period marks the first truly nationwide movement, as well as the first documented urban communal experiments. There were brief revivals of communal projects after WWII, but it was not until the 60s that America witnessed the fifth phase from 1965-1975. During this phase tens of thousands of communal living projects were created. The high incidence of intentional community building directly corresponds to periods of great transformation or social upheaval in the US at those particular moments in history. For example, the popularity of intentional communities during the late sixties and early seventies corresponds to social resistance against the Vietnam War and the social alienation that arose with the advent of television. During this time in history Americans experienced a sense of disenfranchisement and disillusionment due to the fact that during the Vietnam War, the US government proceeded despite the public's opposition.

Interestingly, the history of Twin Oaks Community fits Zablocki's rubric of analysis for the communitarian groups of this era. The founding of Twin Oaks took place in 1967, right in the midst of the most recently documented phase from 1965-1975 (1980, 41). There are several explanations for the high incidence of communes, which also coincide with reasons why the movement was driven by so many young people. First, the general increase in population resulted in a higher number of emerging communities. Also, unlike other historically significant phases of communitarianism, communes of the 60s and 70s had open admission policies, not the selective and lengthy initiations that were characteristic of the religious and spiritual communities of the past. Finally, Zablocki writes:

In a certain sense, communes served as tribal reservations for those whose adulthood was put on hold by the events of the decade. During more demographically normal times the cohorts of young people between the ages of 15 and 25 would be absorbed into the society largely through participation in the labor force and through marriage and family formation. The communitarianism of 1965-1975 may be partially explained by the failure

of the job market and the marriage market to cope with the generation's youth glut (1980, 60).

As the children of the baby boom generation were coming of age and women were entering the job market in greater numbers, there was more available labor than available jobs. Furthermore, young people were faced with a bewildering array of potentially fateful choices. Disillusionment at their prospects for traditional success may have been yet another motivation for young people to join community in search of purpose and direction.

As intentional communities have evolved over the years, so have the public attitudes towards them. The term "commune" developed such a negative connotation that today many intentional communities reject the label. During the 60's and 70's communes gained a lot of media attention because the movement was perceived as threatening the equilibrium of established social institutions. For many Americans, media stereotypes of communes as havens of drug abuse and sexual perversity molded public opinion. Because intentional communities today rarely make the news, disapproving public opinion has diminished. Zablocki suggests that intentional communities are perceived as less newsworthy now because they comprise more of an alternative lifestyle choice, rather than a radical social movement (1980, 61). Although the communities movement is not polarized around one specific political agenda, it is unfair to assume that the movement is any less politically inspired. Is this neutralized public opinion the reason why the communities movement of today is increasingly more intergenerational? Has the de-politicized image of the communities movement attracted a wider audience of members? Or has American culture simply become more receptive to alternative values and discourse because of the political movements of the 60s and 70s?

For the anthropological project, the study of intentional communities in the US presents the opportunity to critically analyze US society. Love Brown explains further:

The intentional community is a phenomenon of the nation-state and an important object of study because it allows us to observe how human beings living in large, heterogeneous societies use community to cope with the exigencies of life. Although the nation-states

often consist of millions of people, they do not operate only on that mass level. What makes the larger entity possible are the smaller communities that continue to offer the face-to-face existence that is at the heart of human experience and necessity (2002, 6).

Intentional communities can be seen as constructive forms of resistance and protest emerging from dissatisfaction with the larger culture. The study of these sites of resistance informs us about the ways in which Americans negotiate and challenge US cultural values from the inside. Beyond pop-cultural media icons and governmental policy, the resistance enacted through the creation of intentional communities reveals the values at the heart of individual American people, deconstructing the monolithic idea of “American values”. The potential decentralization and agentive actions generated by intentional communities challenges the sense of impending doom commonly expressed by alienated and hopeless Americans, who are only increasing in number.

Theoretical Framework

The focal theoretical paradigm for my analysis is Susan Love Brown’s concept of intentional communities as cultural critique. Love Brown interprets intentional communities as sites of conscious and intentional, non-elitist challenge to the psychological distress caused by dissatisfaction with the status quo of the larger society. Her rubric of analysis unites the concept of cultural critique with Anthony Wallace’s theory of revitalization movements. While her approach is the locus of my argument, I also draw upon several social theorists and anthropologist to theoretically analyze Takoma Village and Twin Oaks as part of a larger social movement, as well as to deconstruct some problematic theory regarding intentional communities.

Liminality, Communitas, and Charismatic Leaders

The general social theory used to explain the phenomenon of social movements like intentionally communal living has developed as an incorporation of decades of theoretical

analysis about culture and human organization. Here I will explore the theoretical contributions of Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Victor Turner, and Anthony Wallace as they pertain to the goals of this project.

Writing and organizing in the late 19th century, Marx's analysis of the class struggle and his call for revolution provided social theory with an insightful perspective on the causes of alienation in the industrializing world. Marx argued that the specialization and division of labor generates alienation. In the factory, the proletariat worker is forced to repeat one task working on only a small part of the eventual product. Marx is also influential because of his use of the dialectical process to analyze human behavior in society. The Marxist application of world history assumes the following: 1.) Thesis: The Societal Stage (Stability) 2.) Antithesis: Destruction of the Societal Stage (Revolution) 3.) Synthesis: A New Societal Stage (Revitalization). Marxist theory has become an integral ethos anthropological theory. Marx became extremely influential in the 1970's as culture came under attack. Under Marxist influence culture was viewed as a means of propagating power and wealth. American culture was perceived, by some, as an ideological opiate that masked social inequalities. However, Marx's rubric of analysis leaves little room for individual agency.

Social anthropologist Emile Durkheim writing in the late 19th century and early 20th century, was particularly interested in "collectivistic" or "non-Western" societies. His work focused primarily on analyzing "primitive religion." He is influential to the study of communities for two reasons. First, he was committed to the notion that the individual could not exist beyond the context of society. For Durkheim, the group was more fundamental than the individual. He believed that true community must have direct contact among its members. However, while Marx's theory allowed for anarchistic movements, Durkheim's belief in ultimate surrender to the

community necessitated a need for governmental control.

Secondly, while solidarity for Marx was ephemeral, for Durkheim solidarity was a powerful observable fact. He called this *communitas*. Religious ceremonies were common opportunities for creating this sense of *communitas*. *Communitas* can be described as communal “effervescence” or collective “exuberance” that allowed an individual to transcend himself/herself and motivate him/her to collective action.

While both Marx and Durkheim assume the individual is subject to the external forces acting upon her/him, Weber’s ideational approach views individuals as agents of social construction. Weber’s work stresses the importance of the individual to make meaning. Like Marx, Weber uses the dialectical process to delineate how individuals in society collectively seek salvation and meaning through the charismatic leader. Weber sees charisma as the antithesis of bureaucracy. The charismatic authority has the ability to influence others via spiritual power. It is the charisma of the individual that gives the her/him power to be a leader of change. Charismatic leaders transport themselves beyond the everyday experience to suspend the old spiritual order and synthesize a new one. Similar to Durkheim, he links the transcendence of alienation to the solidarity and shared spiritual experience of religious ritual.

Turner builds off of Durkheim’s notion of *communitas* and social solidarity in his work studying Ndembu ritual. Turner analyzes community as a series of rites of passage through which an individual passes in order to gain full membership in a community. These include disassociation, liminality, and reincorporation. Some examples of liminal phases in life in our life today are hazing in fraternities, college, in general, or getting a driver’s license. For Turner liminality is a blend of “lowliness and sacredness,” and is ultimately only a temporary phase. Many social scientists have used Turner’s model of liminal phases, the process of disassociation,

liminality, and reincorporation to explain the phenomenon of intentional communities. However, most intentional communities reject the notion that their existence is inevitably temporary, and prefer to embrace a transcendent, separate existence as their goal. But this view is not entirely incompatible with Turner's model. Turner considers *communitas*, one of the defining characteristics of the liminal period, one of two "juxtaposed and alternating" models "for human interrelatedness":

The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of "more" or "less." The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders (1969, 96).

It would be false to assume that intentional communities are unstructured. Therefore, I propose that one can the phases of disassociation, liminality, and reincorporation occur within individual intentional communities as they do in the larger society, but contradict that intentional communities themselves are liminal communities whose members are merely waiting to reincorporate themselves into the larger society.

Many academics that have written about intentional communities or "communes" employ Durkheim's theory of *communitas*, Max Weber's theory of the *charismatic leader* as well as Victor Turner's notion of *liminality* to understand communal behavior. They perceive that intentional communities are forms of voluntary liminality, an opportunity to experience *communitas* and eventual reintegration into society after their alienated phase. Furthermore, the presence of a charismatic leader is seen as essential to the success of an intentional community. While I do not propose to refute that there is no truth to these prescriptions and paradigms of human behavior in community, it should not be assumed that charismatic leadership, liminality, and *communitas*, as traditionally understood, are the motivating principles in community life.

Much less can we assume their presence in every intentional community, particularly in regards to charismatic leadership. In the context of an egalitarian model and the consensus process found at both Twin Oaks and Takoma Village, the notion of charismatic leadership as articulated by Durkheim appears highly hierarchical and patriarchal. However, charisma and dynamism are surely vital elements for attracting new members and keeping group solidarity unified. I propose to redefine the rubric of “charismatic leadership” as “collective charisma.”

The interpretations of human behavior previously mentioned assume that society seeks equilibrium and that chaos or revolution are simply means of arriving at a new state of equilibrium. This premise is an underlying assumption for Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Turner, Wallace, and Zablocki. But post-modern theorists influenced by chaos theory like Love Brown, Jonathon Andelson, and David Harvey deconstruct the notion of stability as the dominant paradigm by proposing that perceived chaos is also a form of organization, as well as a goal sought by individual agents of change.

David Harvey’s work as a cultural geographer is extremely innovative and inspiring. For one, Harvey proposes to resurrect Marxists theory from its position of symbolic influence to a position of urgent and direct relevance. He argues vehemently against capitalism and industrialization for their destruction of the environment, international culture and economy, and human relationships. He insightfully explores the way the physical layout of city space promotes conspicuous consumption, capitalism, and globalism. However, Harvey’s only mention of intentional communities is in the context of ineffective utopian experiments. He critiques communes because he also espouses that intentional communities fall prey to inefficiency in changing the system. He is wary of “utopian communities” because he perceives their rising popularity as part of an over-romanticized discourse on the ‘local/global nexus.’ In regards to the

work of community movements Harvey cynically writes:

The second is to pursue the utopian vision of some kind of communitarianism (including movements of national redemption as an answer to the alienations and abstractions of a globalizing political economy and culture). Many political movements now trend in this direction, sometimes appealing to some sort of political mythology laced with nostalgia for a lost golden age of organic community (2000, 85).

While it appears that Harvey does not allow for the possibility that intentional communities provide for a sustainable alternative to the capitalist industrial society, he does base his dismissal on the premise that collectivistic movements are utopian and highly nostalgic.

Based on the long tradition of social theory, Anthony Wallace developed a theory of collective action as a form of revitalization movement. He suggests that social movements are established in response to a decrease in a society's "efficiency in satisfying needs" and the inability of individuals to relieve the stress created in such environments (1956, 267). Wallace writes:

Whenever an individual who is under chronic, physiologically measurable stress, receives repeated information which indicates that his mazeway does not lead to action which reduces the level of stress, he must choose between maintaining his present mazeway and tolerating the stress, or changing the mazeway in an attempt to reduce the stress (1956, 267).

Anthropologist Susan Love Brown applies Wallace's theory on revitalization movements to her theory of intentional communities as cultural critiques. Love Brown writes:

Intentional communities represent a kind of 'voting with the feet'--a call to action that is personal and communal, bringing together the needs of the individual with those of other individuals, reestablishing the bonds that connect human beings but in particular fashion. The members of these communities often see themselves at odds with or needing to withdraw from the larger society; however, that withdrawal occurs within the context of a larger society (2002, 161).

Brown's analysis defines an important distinction between *utopian* communities and effective intentional communities. Despite the unique characteristics that separate an intentional

community from the larger society, the success of an intentional community in articulating a critique of the larger whole is dependent upon a dialogue between the two. While in utopian societies, members often attempt to escape permanently because they have given up on larger society, members of successful intentional communities use the space to reconstruct a better society in the hopes that the larger society may follow in their footsteps (Tipton 1982, 35). The eventual goal is to remain committed to the uniting principle of the community and inspire the larger society to move closer to that principle rather than the other way around. One possible result of the “communities movement” is the potential crafting of new relationships between the individual and the community. I propose the emerging result is a delicate balance of reciprocity between the agentive role of the individual and the ultimate value of preserving the harmony of the group.

As has been previously established, anthropologists have frequently used Turner’s interpretation of liminality and *communitas*—the social relationship established in community—to understand the transitional periods, rites of passage, and cultural life cycles of small communities (See Meyerhoff, Brown, etc.). For Turner intentional communities are nearly always “...Liminal and their members in a state of outsiderhood” (Turner 1975, 232-33). However, Jonathon Anderson inverts Turner’s liminality in his research by saying:

I take a community-centered rather than a society-centered approach, in which the formation of an intentional community is seen more as an act of coming together than an act of separation, and in which the dissolution of an intentional community is seen more as a breaking apart than a reincorporation (back into the larger society) (2002, 134).

Applying Anderson’s paradigm, alternative forms of behavior, organization, and culture do not have to be interpreted as means of creating differentiation, but rather as a means of creating a space in which the distinction between the normative and the marginalized is blurred. Similarly, while Turner describes *communitas* as the binary opposite of structure, Anderson’s community-

centered approach allows us to accept the great amount of structural organization, boundaries, and regulations necessary to create and sustain an egalitarian yet diverse group. However, as we will see, structure must be tempered by flexibility in order to achieve the long-term goal of lasting community.

Chapter 2: Takoma Village Community*

The central focus of this chapter is to explore the Takoma Village Community as a multi-layered organism that appeals to people on various levels from cyber communities to the interface between the internal community with the external whole of both the surrounding neighborhood and the larger society. I use Love Brown's model of intentional community as a cultural critique to explore why people choose co-housing, especially in an urban environment, how community is understood and negotiated by residents, and the mechanisms used to maintain the sense of community. Also, Ingrid Komar's Living the Dream, a documentary study of Twin Oaks Community, has also been helpful in contextualizing TVC within the larger landscape of other types of intentional communities. Komar's work presents a contrast to the idyllic imagery conjured up by mainstream discourses by uncovering the struggles and triumphs of everyday life. Meyerhoff's ethnographic work on an elderly Jewish community center, reflects my own struggle to overcome unmet expectations of a community, by recognizing one's myopic tendency to over romanticize or interpret a few individuals' behavior as a monolithic representation of the whole. I conclude this chapter by relating Takoma Village's capacity for diversity and flexibility in the face of change, loss, tragedy, difference, and conflict as well as the mechanisms they employ to thrive.

What is Co-housing? "Closing my door is a good thing!"-TVC resident

The concept of co-housing emerged thirty years ago in Denmark. It later arrived on the American scene in 1988 through a text authored by Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett. In North America, to date, there are over 50 co-housing communities that have been completed since 1991 and over 150 in various states of development.⁵ The theory behind co-housing is to combine the autonomy of private living quarters with the benefits of shared resources and community living. Unless an individual is renting from a homeowner, most residents own their

* The names of informants have been changed to protect their privacy, except in cases where the informant already uses a pseudonym. The names of the intentional communities, however, have not been disguised.

⁵ This information is drawn from an informational pamphlet distributed by the co-housing Network.

units that are then clustered around a “common house,” the focal point of any co-housing community. The common house is a space for residents to gather for both work and play. Most common houses feature shared kitchen spaces, play rooms, guest rooms, laundry facilities and workshops.

One of the principle differences between co-housing and other forms of intentional communities is that residents own their units and thus control the extent of their interaction with other members of the community. The appeal is that in contrast to communes or group houses finding quiet alone-time is simply a matter of shutting the door. Additionally, co-housing itself does not espouse any ideologies aside from the desire for “ a more practical and social home environment.”⁶ As one TVC resident put it, “We are individual homeowners that bring our values to the community.” The humor and quirkiness inherent in many co-housing communities arises from the interaction of multiple worldviews and lifestyle choices in a small, contained space. Co-housing ’s lack of association with one particular political ideology promotes it as a model that can be applied in a variety of situations amongst a range of individuals.

Methodology

Because intentional communities and co-housing were very new topics for me, I spent time reading information on the Internet, in pamphlets, magazines and books. But mostly I gabbed about it with anyone who would listen. My first entree into TVC was by coincidence. I wandered into the normally alarmed and fortified common house just before a community spaghetti dinner. I was quickly directed to the man in charge of guests and outreach who showed me around and introduced me to the woman who would become my central informant. The majority of my future visits to TVC were centered around community meals, membership meetings, informal gatherings, and conversations with Tessa. I also elected to get involved in one of the three “work-share” teams that residents are required to participate in order to be members. After witnessing a struggle during the consensus process, I chose Team and Development, a

⁶ *ibid.*

subgroup of the Community team that was specifically in place to deal with implementing the consensus process, facilitating meetings, dealing with community conflict and training residents to be facilitators and peer counselors. It seemed that participation in this group would give me the most comprehensive look at the working mechanism of how this community was run and maintained. The crowning conclusion to my field work was a weekend stay in the guest house and participation in the monthly community work day which resulted in hours of sifting through compost bins and wheeling rocks and dirt from one hole to another! My exposure to TVC via community meetings and both formal and informal interviews was supplemented by email correspondence. Specifically I observed the infinite amounts of communication and group work that was conducted over a cyber listserv.

Challenges and Limitations: Situating the Ethnographer

Working with Takoma Village was challenging in a way that none of my other ethnographic endeavors have been. Living in co-housing is a constantly evolving process, and TVC had barely begun their journey. Throughout the course of my interaction with this community, the biggest topic of discussion at consensus meetings was the membership policy-- that is, who is defined as a member, who is responsible for guests, and what is expected of guests. Because this community exists in an urban setting in DC, members are particularly concerned with safety issues. For this reason there are many locks and coded keypads on every entrance to the communal space. Currently, there is also a very ritualized and cautious procedure for hosting guests. The future membership policy will outline the responsibilities of members and outline how to deal with non-members and guests, such as myself. This topic will be decided via consensus in order to address everyone's concerns. The high levels of security and some people's reticence to speak with strangers made the initial work of getting to know people a great challenge.

A significant point of contention was use of the common space. Many residents like, Mirina, expressed, "If there was something interesting going on every night of the week, I couldn't be happier. Isn't that the point of the common house?" Others suffered from what

members jokingly referred to as, “the-common-house-as-extension-of-my-living-room syndrome,” an extreme of spending all of one’s time in the common house. Still, other TVC members, despite the mantra of commitment to community, are very protective of who they allow into their world. And for this reason, I felt, at times, that my presence was viewed by some as suspicious and meddlesome.

Another important element that emerged was the negotiation of power between myself, as the ethnographer, and the TVC residents who became as my informants. These issues are typical for ethnographers researching from the position of the “insider.” Although there were clear demarcations that I was in fact an outsider in the context of TVC, I shared a common ethnic, economic, and educational background with most informants. In many cases, these informants were even more privileged and educated than I am at present. A Georgetown guest lecturer Rebecca Bryant stated about her experience working in Cyprus that many of her informants were very well educated and viewed her first as a student, rather than as a researcher, which made the attainment of legitimacy a challenge. I found this to be true in my experiences as well; I was often viewed as a student in the midst of her academic development. Added to this was the fact that I was significantly younger than most of my informants, so I believe that many people associated me with their children or their grandchildren.

During the course of one meeting I attended, a woman was in the midst of recalling a personal story. Suddenly she turned to me and said, “I suddenly became aware of you sitting there scribbling in your journal. May I ask what you are going to do with those notes?” Because of her high level of education and a degree of privilege as an older white woman in our society, Rose was not afraid to speak back nor was she impressed by my role as an ethnographer. Like her, many TVC residents understand the power of the written word and are equally well trained in negotiating and manipulating language. They are aware of issues of misrepresentation and are also aware of the damaging effects of gossip in a small community. As a consequence, Rose wanted to ensure that my presence would not disrupt the harmony established between residents of TVC by publishing private conversations. While all of these factors served as limitations

influenced by who I was as the ethnographer, the confrontation with these issues and the eventual resolution that I came to allowed me a glimpse into the subtleties of this community's social values.

Birth of TVC: A Brief History

Takoma Village is a very young community. Residents have been living in their units for a little over one year. The establishment of TVC was a historical one for the co-housing movement because the project was “developer-driven.” Traditionally the residents themselves generate the idea and impetus for co-housing villages. But in this case, environmental consultant, developer and architect, Don Tucker conceived of the idea as a constructive solution for the eyesore of an empty lot that sat at the intersection of Blair Road, Butternut, Aspen and 4th St. in Takoma, Washington, DC, two blocks from the Takoma metro stop. Potential residents heard about TVC through ads in the CityPaper, Pathways Magazine, and by word of mouth. Mona, one TVC resident explained that the group allowed for a process of “self-selection.” The self-selection process was one that minimized elitism and discrimination and demanded that potential members include themselves based on what was good for both themselves and the community. Mona cited one example about a self-identified religious cult called “ADIDAM,” that sought to purchase 6 units in TVC. Their stipulation was that the units have internal access to one another with a communal living space at the center. Non-ADIDAM residents were concerned that having the cult might cause problems during the consensus process, that ADIDAM members might represent too great of a concentration of power, and the needs of their group might eclipse the needs of TVC as a whole. The developer was worried that it would be hard to sell such a unique unit space. Mona recounts that after several weeks of meetings and community discussion ADIDAM withdrew themselves from the process, realizing that “TVC was not a match for their needs.”

The entire process from inception to realization took a total of 3.5 years, while many co-housing attempts take 10-20 years. At the ground-breaking ceremony on October 22, 1999, Melina Tamaro delivered this speech to describe the process:

Until this day, the community of Takoma Village was made up of the intentions, dreams, plans, and designs that flowed from the hearts and minds of 40 people (give or take a few) who have a somewhat rosy idea of what a community good be, and architects and a developer who thought this was the right time and the right place to build a neighborhood, rather than just another set of buildings. It was made up of relationships, mostly among people who didn't know each other at first, and who have since come to trust and care about each other.

From this day on, Takoma Village co-housing will be a place of dirt and brick and mortar and wood and cementitious hardy plank siding and geothermal pumps and pipes, located on a very specific piece of land... When it is finished, the end product will be greater than the sum of its physical structures and its human relationships. It will be a caring neighborhood and community.

As is expressed above the community was very involved in every aspect of the planning and building process and individual members stepped forward to offer their expertise as was needed. But because in most cases residents did not know each other previously (uncommon in co-housing projects) there was a strong effort to “grow community on a timeline.” In addition to participating in countless grueling meetings, always employing the consensus process, potential TVC residents also took a ropes course together. The ropes course was an opportunity to work on trust and team building.

Because there was so much to be completed during this initial phase and members were working very closely to make decisions by the deadlines set by the developer, TVC residents note the difference between those members who worked together during that time and those who were bought into Takoma later. Members who entered Takoma later are often those who today feel less comfortable navigating the consensus process.

TVC is legally classified as a condominium. Owners pay condo fees that are used to pay for communal utilities such as gas and some maintenance fees, though currently residents do all the landscaping work themselves. The “board of members” is elected by the community and acts as the face of centralized governance when dealing with the developer and legal matters. Beyond this, TVC operates as a “sociocracy,” a Dutch term to describe social systems based on consensus. Other decision-making bodies include the three work teams: *Facilities*,

Administration and Community. All members are required to participate on one of the three teams as a fulfillment of the work share requirement. Leaders of these three teams rotate monthly and report to the community at monthly Community Membership meetings, and by posting subcommittee meeting minutes to the listserv. Individuals often volunteer themselves to serve as “point people” or references for a variety of TVC activity including the care of the composting pile to the management of the guest rooms. As stated in the Co-housing Network pamphlet, “A co-housing development seems limited only by the imagination, desire and resources of the people who are actively creating their own neighborhood.”

Why Choose (Urban) Co-housing?

Over spaghetti in the common house one resident explained, “Its like a cul de sac without the cul de sac.” Ironically TVC is designed much like a cul de sac or a horseshoe. The common house takes up most of the east lot. It houses an industrial sized kitchen complete with enough table and chairs to seat all the members of the community. There are also laundry facilities, a living room, children’s playroom, a workshop, mailboxes, and office space. Recently TVC installed a hot tub behind the common house. Using the common house as the axis point, the housing units extend along either side of the common house three stories up forming the arms of the horseshoe. The pedestrian entrance to the property is along the west lot. There are 43 units with 17 different internal designs, though the exterior of all the houses are the same combinations of muted gray and white. This is to ensure uniformity and to prevent the condos from standing out too much from the rest of the neighborhood. The cement pathway leading to the common house is garnished with a modern art sculpture fountain and flanked by the green spaces that are cared for by families living in ground floor units. Children’s toys and lawn chairs create an informal and welcoming landscape. Because the complex is so compact, from the pathway you can glance into people’s kitchen windows as they prepare meals or chat with neighbors who are lounging on the lawn.

For most Takoma Village residents this is their first experience of living in an intentional

community, aside from the occasional group house experience in college. So why would these homeowners take the risk of purchasing a home in alternative housing, never having experienced it before? Bennett, an environmental lawyer and father of two put it succinctly, “Safety, comfort and cleanliness!” Other residents like Mona, a single woman who works at Galludet University was looking forward to images that she remembered from her experiences living in a group house. “When the weather was warm someone used to sit on the lawn and play their guitar, someone else brought a flute or a drum and soon there was a concert in our front yard.” She also mentioned that she enjoys watching activity unfold in the courtyard as well as sitting on the front porch and talking to neighbors as they pass. Other people say that living in co-housing is a way to pass on their childhood experience to their children. Some people I spoke with mentioned that it was a way to return to memories from youth when everyone’s yards were connected, and children scampered freely from one house to the next. It is often difficult to recreate those idyllic settings in an urban environment, but TVC allows easy access to stores and jobs while creating the ambience of suburban neighborhoods.

There are also countless environmental reasons why living in co-housing makes sense. One resident pointed out that the compact design of the houses limits the size of people’s lawns. In fact no one on the second and third floor has a lawn at all. This reduces the amount of water spent maintaining lawns. Additionally, as a group of paying clients, co-housers were able to ensure that environmentally friendly building materials were used during construction. The most impressive feature is the geothermal pumps used to heat and cool all of TVC. Geothermal heating/cooling systems exchange energy with the ground to change the temperature within a unit. This means that absolutely no gas is used for heating and cooling, and electricity is the only thing required to run the pumps. Although the system is initially expensive to install, as gas prices rise residents are pleased with their choice. Mirina informed me that her total monthly electricity bill hovers around \$20 to heat/cool and light her apartment.

But as Bennett reminds me, “Co-housing is not for everyone.” People choose co-housing because it meets specific needs. Participating in a co-housing community is a lot of work, both

physically and psychologically. The commitment implicit in purchasing a unit is not only an economic one, but an emotional investment as well, even though really it is an investment with high yields. Tessa adds, “When you share things, you have more to share.” For many of these families and individuals with special needs the close-knit community provided in co-housing is an extended family, and thus a survival strategy. The implementation of “work share” requirements serves as a mechanism to ensure constant investment in the community, as a means of bonding within the community, and also an economic tool to reduce the cost of property maintenance. But several residents admitted that it is not a perfect system. “Some people are involved, and other people, you might never see,” explained Mona. Currently the terms of work share are lax and there is no means to demand the participation of all members. Once again this is one of the inherent structural characteristics of co-housing. Ultimately participation in the community is self-determined, as is the degree of privacy and anonymity.

The Culture of “hello” and “good-bye”

One of the most impressive characteristics of TVC is the importance that people place on greeting one another. In many ways, co-housing is reminiscent of the freshman dorm experience. There is an unspoken open door policy in co-housing and people are constantly stopping by to ask a quick question, but often end up staying for tea. It is obvious that the small size of the community facilitates a greater degree of familiarity and intimacy, but people truly go out of their way to recognize one another. At times I found it challenging to hold a conversation with individuals in group settings because of the constant influx and interruption from hellos and good-byes. I also began to notice the intentionality behind these greetings. Members believe that they foster a sense of community, but I found the purposefulness of these greetings somewhat superficial and overly sweet.

Appreciation and praise are also important aspects of social interaction. People are fond of saying, “Give credit where credit is due.” This too seems at times to detract from the value of praise as a special recognition of your unique contribution. I witnessed one such scenario when Tessa thanked Elka, an older single woman notorious for being highly out-spoken, for

purchasing pizza every week for the ritual Friday night dinner. “I just wanted to let you know that I really appreciate that you buy pizza every week for the community, especially yesterday because I was exhausted and there was absolutely NOTHING in my refrigerator. I just wanted to thank you for keeping me from going hungry.” Initially as Tessa was giving this praise it was sounding forced. It seemed as though Tessa, “the matriarch” of TVC was trying to keep Elka from feeling alienated and unappreciated given that there is so much group animosity towards her. Tessa began by giving a thank you on behalf of the community, but quickly gave her compliment a personal touch that in turn made it easier for Elka to accept and made the compliment seem more sincere.

The use of greetings and verbal appreciation serves as both an expression of sincere respect and compassion, but also as a constructive tool to maintain harmony and deal with conflict in the community. These interactions used as strategies to create “community” are part of a larger discourse about community that is generated in the literature on these communities, and reinforced by interaction within and among intentional communities. The historically intentional communities were founded under humanistic utopian and religious ideals. Thus intentional communities in the United States remain vulnerable to the cliché imagery of liberal humanism, as well as associations with the discourse of religious traditions and Utopian societies.

This raises the question of whether the strategies employed by intentional communities truly foster a genuine sense of community, or whether they simply reproduce the appearance of community. One suggestion is that every community is founded under different principles and goals. These principles and goals may reflect alternatives to specific aspects of American culture while retaining many others. It is for this reason that one must not misconstrue intentional communities as utopian in the sense they are the panacea for social problems. During a weekend gathering at Twin Oaks, an intentional community in Virginia, a commonly expressed sentiment was that the inter-personal and intra-personal problems that individuals faced before “living in community” are the same ones that they face within the community. Living in community can be

seen as similar to being in an intimate relationship. In order to make that relationship work there must be a commitment to flexibility, growth, compassion, and self-improvement. A balance must be struck between individual needs and the needs of the group. The act of living communally with others does not automatically cure one's social biases and awkwardness. Ideally, living in community in a climate of decentralized power and increased accountability may clarify some of those problems, and may provide the space and opportunity to fully engage in correcting problematic behaviors and preconceptions.

The Role of Technology: Building cyber communities

Most TVC residents have either full or part time jobs. Residents claim that the number of meetings has significantly reduced since their move-in, yet I was constantly impressed by peoples' dedicating of their free time to community business matters. Meetings often occur during meal times, and thus the meetings are converted into informal potlucks. TVC residents are not afraid to mix business with pleasure; in fact, most wouldn't have it any other way. During one of our interviews Tessa recounted a story in which Rose saw Tessa and Mirina having dinner on the porch. Rose called up to Tessa asking if they were having a meeting because she wanted to eat her dinner with them otherwise. Mirina did not quite hear the comment and Tessa retold the story joking that Rose only wanted to come up if they were in fact having a meeting. Tessa turned to me saying, "It's true. If you get lonely, just call a meeting!"

Because time is so precious and there is consistently more work to be done, much business is conducted via email. Joining the listserv for only one subcommittee I received between 5 and 10 emails a day. Multiply this by two or three (the number of other TVC listserves one resident might subscribe to) and add that to the amount of email you receive daily. Members who are lax about checking email or those who take retreats from computers are often teased. In many instances a literal sigh of relief was exhaled when these reticent writers promised to become engaged once more with their cyber community.

Internet interactions function well in this setting for it maintains the balance between

interaction and distance that attracts homeowners to co-housing in the first place. Internet users can still be involved in community discussions without having to leave the privacy of their homes. Despite the lack of physical human interaction, community and human relationships at TVC are continuously negotiated over the web. Additionally, the Internet is used as a non-violent conflict mediator. People can more freely articulate their dissatisfactions, critiques and suggestions without the fear of face-to-face confrontation. In fact every conflict that I heard about originated from web discussion. Unfortunately, emails lend themselves to great amounts of interpretation. Often conflicts that did arise over email were a result of miscommunication or misunderstanding.

Diversity and Flexibility

The metro ride to Takoma Village is similar to that of many rides heading out of the confines of Georgetown and Dupont Circle. I watch as the faces around me get darker and darker as I near the Takoma Village. Walking the two blocks from the Metro stop to TVC, I come upon a new shiny enclave of white liberal upper middle class comfort in an otherwise middle class black neighborhood.

These were my initial impressions of Takoma Village community and I include them here because I still believe that the question of racial and economic diversity is relevant when discussing TVC. The responses that I got when I raised these issues with informants were at times quite alarming. After doing much research on gentrification for Professor Denise Brennan's Transnational Migration class, I assumed that if there wasn't a dialogue between TVC and its neighbors, there probably needed to be. I was also preoccupied with the apparent lack of outreach and involvement with the surrounding neighborhood.

When I inquired about neighborhood reactions to TVC, most people said that the neighbors were glad to have them. Tessa pointed out that Don Tucker, the developer had done a very thorough job of contacting neighbors and presenting the project to them and that they had in fact voted on their approval of the TVC proposal. Tessa added, "After years of seeing the lot sit empty neighbors welcomed the development." Although Takoma Village was not jointly organizing outreach projects, individuals were volunteering their time in different ways to ensure that residents of TVC were not viewed as intruders and elites.

Lena, one of the few African American members of TVC and a long time resident of Takoma Park before the co-housing project, recounted one resident's attempt at outreach that really made her feel as though TVC was the right choice for her. "Mona and a gentlemen from the neighborhood went around to all the (black) churches in the neighborhood introducing (themselves) and introducing TVC to the community. I felt relief after that." Other individuals are involved in the Orange Hats, a neighborhood watch group, and still others are involved with the plans to develop a vacant theater and help pick up neighborhood trash. While all of these actions seem positive, they seem like the other side of gentrification, the gentrifier's justification.

Susan Love Brown claims that intentional communities can be a form of non-elitist cultural critique, and as I have stated throughout this paper, TVC does not discriminate against potential members, and in fact it employs an active policy of self-selection. Despite these factual details, the racial and economic homogeneity raises the question of "why?" Tessa make this suggestion, "We (the co-housing movement) only have 65 communities built, we need one thousand before we can start branching out and applying co-housing to environmental and low-income housing. Right now we need to focus on ourselves and only the middle to upper middle class can afford that." This explanation is fraught with problems, especially when co-housing models could be applied to section 8 housing projects with no injury to the movement or already established communities. But what really underlies this statement is the desperation and competition for resources and attention that marginalized communities often dissolve into when they are pitted against each other. Although many of the members of TVC are in fact quite privileged, Tessa expresses the fact that the future of co-housing and intentional communities is still quite vulnerable requires careful attention and nurturing.

Lives Intertwined: The Faces of TVC

TVC is a 43 unit complex whose population currently hovers around 70 people. While the community is predominately white and wealthy enough to purchase their units (mostly middle to upper middle class), there exists a great deal of diversity in family structure, religion and political ideology. "Yes, we are mostly white, but there are five black adults, one Colombian

woman, and an Italian au pair. We are single parents, families, and single individuals. Including families with children was always a priority, but attracting them to DC was difficult because of the state of DC public schools,” Mirina informed me as her gray tabby cat curled up in her lap. One of the most active women in the community is disabled, suffering from Multiple Sclerosis. Several women are pregnant and two families have adopted non-white children into white families. One man, a single parent of three adopted black children is openly gay. There is a span of different religious affiliations, two very active groups of Jewish and Christian residents.

Despite this array of diverse identities and lifestyles and a general sense of tolerance, as previously mentioned, emails were often the sites for conflict, with this particular conflict reflecting some of the religious tension at TVC. At the close of one Community subcommittee meeting Mona brought up “a painful issue,” for discussion. By bringing it to the group, she sought support, advice and resolution. Every Friday, Elka purchases pizza for the community and hosts an informal “pizza night” in the Common House. One recent Friday night, a group of Jewish residents along with a neighborhood Jewish organization decided to have a Shabbat as well. Mirina later explained to me that this Shabbat was highly informal and that they only wished to light candles and say a blessing before the meal. “We weren’t even going to have a service,” Mirina explained. An invitation was sent out over email to invite the community to join. Upon delivery of the email a defensive comment was made by a resident (Elka), “I like pizza better than Shabbat ceremonies.” A misunderstanding arose because Elka believed that the Shabbat would be permanently eclipsing the traditional Friday night dinners.

Bennett comments, “How actively spiritual and religious people in the community are depends on how we as a community make decisions about religious symbols.” Mona soon took the floor again, articulating her argument. “When a minority group wants to do something other groups wonder, ‘Is this discrimination against my group?’ Who gets to make decisions about who gets to use the common house and common space? There is a mentality that, ‘the common house is an extension of my living room.’” Mona went on wondering how to negotiate the situation, whether or not to present this as a painful incident to the entire community. “Its

important for people to say they've been hurt in the community. I don't think we can ignore the hurts, but we must also talk about what we can create together."

Her suggestions seemed feasible. She proposed having a non-Jewish member organize an interfaith/diversity meeting so that people in the community could connect on the differences that they bring to the group. She also mentioned a past Liberation Sadder that was organized by another Jewish woman, Merit, who was deeply affected by the email/Shabbat incident. In regards to Merit, Mona said she "...kept putting herself out there even after she was hurt about the Shabbat. Mona claimed, "During the Liberation Sadder the community really owned that event. People didn't really own the Shabbat." Mona also made the suggestion that rather than attempting a whole community mediation around the issue of the Shabbat that she and Merit take Elka out to dinner. Her feeling was that it was more beneficial "to start small." "Most changes happen on a conversational level. It is easier this way to hear and be heard," she concluded.

This example illustrates that the individual differences between community members are not healed instantly through the engagement between people of different backgrounds. But Mona's presentation of the matter to a group displays her faith in the flexibility of the group to process and accommodate for difference through on-going and open dialogue.

In The Face of Change, Loss, and Struggle

"People organize around crisis and recreation. That is how community is built." -Mona

Struggle: After Mona's problem we went on to discuss another member who was agonizing over a personal conflict with her recently adopted son Magid. Magid was having learning (a learning disability) problems. After visiting a specialist who gave Magid an exam with inconclusive results, she was left feeling a lack a resolution. Sending him to a special school, which looked like the only option, was not economically feasible for her at the moment. She was also feeling a lot of stress. As a single mom trying to make ends meet, she had no time for herself and little quality time with Magid. Bennett was acting as her support system, but hoped to gather the support of the community. He asked, "How can we be the 'partner' (in reference to her being a

single mom) with resources to help out? She needs time with Magid and time for herself.” He suggested that the community offer financial support, though other members of the group wondered if she was “open to receiving help from the community.” Other suggestions were made to baby sit to give Mom time off.

Change: Tessa’s MS is getting increasingly more advanced. Everyday is more of a struggle for mobility. Eventually it is possible that she will completely lose her eyesight. Because she is often in so much pain, she spends a good portion of her day on the couch. Coupled with her lack of mobility, Tessa often cannot find the time to complete simple chores like grocery shopping. Although she is not yet asking the community for assistance in completing these everyday tasks, she is making an effort to thank people like Elka for arranging community dinners so that she can eat. I did overhear one resident telling Tessa that she should stop hanging around during the community workday and get some rest. If this attentiveness continues, hopefully the burden of asking for help will be alleviated by the offer.

Loss: After a year of living at TVC, major life changes are occurring in Mona’s life. She is in love and spending a lot of time away from the community. She is contemplating renting out her unit and helping her lover purchase the house next door to his current group house residency. They have plans to start their own co-housing project. “I expected more from this project. It just hasn’t turned out they way I expected. I think I am looking for a deeper sense of community,” she explained. Mona will be the first resident to leave the community indefinitely. “I am not going to sell. Who knows how things will work out with Gary. It will be nice to still have a home if things fall through.” Despite her disenchantment with TVC, she has invested enough in the community that she is comfortable and confident that she will still be accepted upon her return.

These three brief examples illustrate the flexibility of TVC to accommodate the rhythms of life. Although the transitions may not always be smooth, in many ways TVC has succeeded in creating something more than “the sum of its physical structures and human relationships.” They have planted the seed for an organic community organism, and “a caring neighborhood and community.”

Conclusion

“Everyone seems interested. We are getting a lot of attention,” says Tessa as she lists off the various ways in which TVC is being recognized and celebrated. In the upcoming months, TVC is to receive the 100 Visions Award from a watch group in DC for outstanding community building. They will be featured in the Co-housing Network Journal and will get three different TV spots “SmartWoman”, “Homes and Gardens, and the local news station. When I asked Tessa why she opts for co-housing she explained, “Because we are going to transform the world.” This is a similar sentiment expressed in the co-housing Network’s pamphlet:

co-housing offers hope in our society. Through co-housing we can build a better place to live, a place where we know our neighbors, a place where we can enjoy a rich sense of community and contribute to a more sustainable world.

While Takoma Village Community works out its kinks, and while it struggles to establish itself as a strong and centered “neighborhood,” the very attempt is a successful hopeful act. The residents of TVC are trying to lead by example, working on their community in the hopes that more people might be willing to try it as well. The efforts put forth by the members of TVC reveal that co-housing can be a source of resistance and transformation.

Chapter 4: Twin Oaks Community

While Takoma Village is a young community of only one and half years, Twin Oaks benefits from three decades of building community. Much can be learned from their example. The following ethnographic work on Twin Oaks serves contrasts and contextualizes to the co-housing living project at Takoma Village to portray the range of possibilities within the communities movement. The goal of the following discussion of Twin Oaks is not to write a comprehensive analysis of the community, but rather to explore the future sustainability of intentional communities, using Twin Oaks's model of income sharing, sustainability, and organization as an example. I use the rubrics of diversity and flexibility, Zablocki's historical contextualization of Twin Oaks in the larger communities movement, Andelson's community-centered approach, and Love Brown's theory of community as cultural critique to answer the question: How is conflict and diversity negotiated amongst community members and prospective members? Here I explore how one community reevaluates its growth, its relationship to its members, prospective members, and to the larger community in which it exists.

Methodology

During conversations with Tessa at Takoma Village Community, she lent me her personal copy of Ingrid Komar's semi-ethnographic work, Living the Dream, encouraging me to explore this community further. It seems that Twin Oaks has become a household name amongst intentional communities in the US. In the last weekend of August 2002 I decided to visit Twin Oaks Community to participate in their 19th Annual Women's Gathering. While my work and contact with Takoma Village was spread over an entire semester, my personal contact with Twin Oaks was limited to only one weekend.

Gatherings and conferences are held on an adjoining piece of land, but one away from the actual residences, and for the purposes of the conference was restricted as "women-only space." Despite the limited direct contact with the general community, attendees were given a tour of the community grounds, residences, workshops, common spaces, and farms. Many female Twin

Oak's residents organized the conference, held workshops, and participated in conference activities. Much information was gathered from informal conversations with these female residents. Additionally, women and children from many other intentional communities also attended the event, along with women who were considering joining communities. During the conference, I was able to participate in a substantive discussion in a seminar entitled "Women in the Life." This forum provided an opportunity for both women living in community and women interested in joining community to raise questions and concerns about their experience with community life. Among the topics of discussion were raising children in community, the challenges of exploring and joining community, as well as, gender roles and relationships in community.

Collectively Katherine Kinkade and Ingrid Komar's works comprehensively account for every phase of Twin Oaks' growth. Thus, a significant portion of the methodology for this section consisted of gathering literature written about the community, including Kinkade's⁷ Walden Two Experiment and Is It Utopia Yet?, as well as Komar's Living the Dream. Additionally, the Twin Oaks Community website⁸ and online discussions, "Leaves of Twin Oaks" newsletter, and the Communities Directory have also provided supplementary information.

The egalitarian and communal participation encouraged throughout the weekend event fostered a sense of agency amongst the participants, encouraging the women attendees to be responsible for the event's success. For the researcher, the gathering's organization promoted anthropological models of participant-observation and direct action research.

The Women's Gathering

I was able to find a woman living in Ballston to take me and two other DC women to the gathering in Louisa Virginia (approx. 100 mi. southwest of DC). In return for the ride we each contributed to the price of gas. The three of us met at the Ballston metro-stop and we waited for a

⁷ Katherine Kinkade is one of the original founding members of Twin Oaks.

⁸ www.twinoaks.org

quirky woman in her 50s or 60s to arrive in a large cluttered van, the back of which she had converted into a sleeping compartment for herself. Sally had been going to the gathering for years. She explained her routine: we would leave late on Sunday, giving her enough time to soak in the mud pit and take a swim in the river. For Sally, the mud pit was the crowning jewel of the weekend's activities. She was thoroughly excited to introduce the three fledglings to the joys of this weekend in August that she spent her entire year anticipating.

In order to participate in the gathering the attendees were requested to pay on a sliding scale of \$40-140. This money not only covers the cost of the weekend, but also serves as a source of revenue for the community. Additionally, each participant was asked to bring several food items: one dish, a breakfast item, fruit, and a snack, each enough to feed "10 hungry women". All meals were potluck, and Twin Oaks supplemented all the "basics". Organizers requested that homemade food items be labeled indicating the ingredients out of consideration for women with food restrictions. Attendees were also required to volunteer 2-3 one-hour work shifts. Work shifts included washing dishes, food preparation, childcare, and latrine cleanup. During their shifts women were able to meet one another as they worked, and prevented any one group of women from doing all the food preparation or clean up for the entire gathering, allowing all participants, even organizers, to enjoy non-work related activities as well.

The "rustic retreat center"⁹ in the woods consists of a pavilion and covered outdoor kitchen area, picnic tables and hammocks, a smoker's circle, a large fire pit, outdoor showers, and latrines at the border. The wooded area provided ample campsites. Sleeping arrangements were such that many women brought their own tents, tarps, and sleeping bags. I myself had only a sleeping bag. For others like myself, we slept in a large yurt on the conference site land¹⁰.

Event activities included everything from religious ceremonies to yoga and belly dancing workshops, to lectures on safer sex. The organization was such that any participant was allowed

⁹ As described on the Twin Oaks website: www.twinoaks.org

¹⁰ Yurts are a type of dome-like traditional Mongolian home created to facilitate efficient heating and portability to accommodate the nomadic lifestyles of Mongolians. Yurts have become increasingly popular in the West because yurts are portable, low cost, and intimate.

to offer workshops based on their personal interests and skills. In the evenings there were musical performances, a talent show, and a dance. The most poignant moment occurred when all the women were gathered under the pavilion during the performances. Singer Maya Dorn was commenting on the severe drought that was affecting Virginia that summer, encouraging us all to remember the preciousness of water. As she was playing her final set it began to pour. Laughing and shouting, many women rushed out into the rain. I couldn't help but think that the force and power of so many unique women gathered together had caused the skies to open and allow the life-giving force to flow.

Challenges and Limitations: Situating the Ethnographer

I had wanted to visit Twin Oaks for a long time, but their strict guidelines for visitors frequently dissuaded me from making the effort. Arriving at the Women's Gathering was a transformative experience. I was nervous. I was not arriving at the gathering as merely an anthropology student doing a project on intentional communities. In fact there were very few people I told that I was doing a project on intentional communities. For the most part, I participated in the gathering as a woman with expanding ideals and curiosity, hoping to make connections and gain legitimacy in an alternative community. During the weekend I did not wear my "anthropologist hat," but rather I came as a potential member. Mostly I was worried that I would not be liked, that people would see through my façade, see that I was not as radical, not as brave, not as experienced and wise, nor as idealistic as they.

We unpacked the car and headed to camp. I saw old women and young women lounging in the hammocks and working the registration table. We were soon greeted by an enthusiastic topless woman wondering if we wanted to sign up for a work shift. The optional nudity policy exacerbated my fears of validation. Would I be accepted if I did not want to bear my breasts? Could I even have conversations with naked people I did not know? After the opening ceremony and the first meal, the camp was transformed for me into a safe and magical haven. It did not take long to become accustomed to the nude and partially nude participants. A bond of trust and intimacy had been established. I realized that the nude participants were a dynamic presence. The

act of publicly disrobing was a gesture of deliberate vulnerability, openness, and intimacy. It was a statement to all the women present not only that they were free from the fear of sexual assault and objectification, but free to experiment and to create new boundaries and meanings by redefining the cultural meaning of nudity. The gathering itself and the activities that took place during the weekend are reflective not only of Twin Oaks, but also of the essence of the larger communities movement that critiques normative cultural values by crafting alternatives.

There are many factors that contributed to my situatedness and subjectivities of this fieldsite. The obvious one being that I would not have been able to participate in the Gathering as a man. Because it was a women's only space, my only frame of reference for Twin Oaks is from the perspective of women. Interestingly, the three most commonly referenced biographic works on Twin Oaks are also written by women. While I do not believe this to be a handicap, this fact can be said to bias my experience. I must also admit my own tendency to romanticize the rural. Finally, the nature of the gathering was such that it was able to showcase the most exciting and appealing aspects of intentional communities. It is easy to idealize a community during times of celebration and festivity. I was able to see Takoma Village in the midst of their mundane, daily ritual activities, while my impression of Twin Oaks, though supplemented by other texts, is influenced by the magic and communitias that arises during a once-a-year event.

Twin Oaks: Historical and Structural Background

This year marks the 36th anniversary of Twin Oaks, making it one of the oldest intentional communities in the country. Founded in 1967 on 465 acres of land in Louisa, VA, it was donated to the group by one "community enthusiast" who also participated as a member of the original founding group. The idea for Twin Oaks crystallized around the fictional utopian community described by B.F. Skinner in his book Walden Two. Reading Walden Two became the common bond that united the previously unknown members of Twin Oaks. While Skinner's novel is deeply rooted in an experiment in behaviorism, the members of Twin Oaks did not employ behavioral science to develop communal relationships, and instead espoused the values of cooperation, equality, sharing, nonviolence, and sustainability.

Decisions at Twin Oaks are made by consensus and community members are allowed to raise issues and engage in discussions using the comment board in the community Common House. Passing by the comment board one can see surveys, jokes, requests, and lengthy dissertations about members opinions on the benefits of a new composting technique, the evils of Vacation Earnings, or any number of community gripes, pleas, and responses. The comment board at Twin Oaks is used somewhat similarly to email at Takoma Village. Like the email exchange at Takoma Village, the board serves as a non-violent way of blowing off steam in a public forum.

Twin Oaks also participates in an economic model that actively challenges normative standards of exchange. Unlike Takoma Village where each resident is economically independent, Twin Oaks identifies itself as an “income-sharing community.” Kinkade describes the structure as a “communal economic system” because the majority of income is generated by “on-premise activities” which include a tofu business, a hammock business, and money raised by conferences and seminars held on the grounds (1994, 42). This serves as quite a contrast to Takoma Village where residents are employed outside the community; and while some resources may be pooled, such as communal monies, Takoma Village does not provide for the livelihood of its residents.

Each member of Twin Oaks is expected to work 40.5 hours per week, in exchange he/she receives a monthly allowance of \$50 for personal spending. The community covers all necessities. These necessities include all medical and dental care, and food, most of which is grown or made on the community (but does not include sweets, cigarettes, sugared candy, etc.). There are several communal vehicles, and gas is paid for out of the member’s allowance. If a member is sick he/she will receive his/her monthly allowance despite the sick time lost. As a member ages their required work hours reduce one credit per year after the age of 60. Although most of the original members were college students or college dropouts, today the population has significantly changed. Of the 100 current members, ages range from 9 months to 78 years. Because of the balance that must be achieved in order to get community work accomplished, the age of potential members becomes of a serious consideration and a point of tension, as will be

discussed later.

To explain further, when a new member joins the community any prior assets or bank accounts are frozen and any income earned by outside jobs while living in the community is funneled back into the community to be shared by all. Kinkade explains that more recently allowances have been made for personal gifts such as birthday money or plane tickets gifted by parents. Additionally, a policy called V.E. (Vacation Earnings) allows members to earn independent extra cash during earned vacations to cover the costs of expenses not covered by the community such as lessons, clothing not deemed “necessary” by the Clothing Manager¹¹, or travel expenses (1994, 45).

While internal dynamics have played the key role in defining Twin Oaks’ historical and structural background, Twin Oaks, like all intentional communities is also situated in the larger community of Louisa, VA, and hence the United States. Louisa is a relatively small, rural tobacco farming community. Like many small towns everyone pays close attention to one another’s business, and anonymity is not really an option. Kinkade writes that in the beginning residents were both curious and suspicious, but generally friendly and non-threatening. Curious neighbors arrived from day one bringing over pies, tomato plants, baskets of fruit, and stories about the Depression. Twin Oaks has developed reciprocal gift exchange relationships by assisting other farms in their harvests, putting out fires, and taking care of unwanted bees; and have in return benefited from the advice of experienced farmers. Twin Oaks’ members also make efforts to participate in the community by supporting the local Louisa economy, maintaining good credit with the bank, and singing in the choir at the Methodist Church. Though I have critiqued Takoma Village for not participating more closely in their surrounding neighborhood, it must be understood that like any relationship, establishing a connection with the neighbors takes time and earned trust. Twin Oaks has had three decades to do this, while Takoma Village has only had two.

¹¹ The Clothing Manager is the person in charge of allotting money for new clothing purchases. For a more information on the Twin Oaks’ communal economy, see Kinkade, 1994.

Kinkade writes about an anecdotal experience at Twin Oaks that illustrates the dialectical relationship between intentional communities and the larger American society that encompass them. A family visiting Twin Oaks in 1967 brought along their son, a drug user, and a long haired drug user at that. The community had not yet established a policy about drugs, and the discussion that ensued became tangled in a stereotype about long hair. Because Twin Oaks' men were aware of the stereotype associated with longhaired hippies, the male members had voluntarily kept short hair to protect their reputation amongst the locals. They did not want to be known as the hippie farm. Eventually the community came to the agreement that, "The length of one's hair is so obviously one's own business that it would be a moral defeat if we made any policy about it" (1973, 206). Kinkade explains further:

It was the latter point of view that we opted for. Dope, no; hair, yes. Within a year, almost all of our men had grown long hair or beards or both. We are indeed known as the hippie farm, and it is indeed difficult to persuade our neighbors that we really do not have drugs on the property (1973, 206).

Twin Oaks members still remain vulnerable to the opinions, policies, and influences of the larger society. Their final decision displays the way this community both reflects and challenges normative values. Like the majority of Americans, Twin Oaks members share a common wariness towards drug users and believed the acceptance of that lifestyle would hinder community productivity and damage its reputation amongst the locals. However, Twin Oaks members decided to challenge the superficial association between physical appearance and drug use. This is one example of how as a community, Twin Oaks, was able to critique and deconstruct an internalized societal norm.

Joining A Community

Unlike at Takoma Village, visitors play an essential role in community life at Twin Oaks. As previously mentioned organized events, like the Women's Gathering, often draw some amount of revenue for the community. But more so, visitors may be coming as potential members. Entry into co-housing communities, like Takoma Village, is more difficult because

most residents own their units. Much of the selection process for co-housing communities occurs as the community is forming¹². It thus becomes of importance to examine the visitor's policy of Twin Oaks, as well as the challenges inherent in attempting to join an intentional community to explore the way the community presents itself, as well as how it relates to non-members. It is crucial for communities like Twin oaks to establish a policy regarding both visitors and potential members as a means of security and protection for the community; but also in order to create a non-prejudicial systematized form of dealing with non-members. Both Rosabeth Kanter (1972) and Zablocki (1980) have shown that stringency of admission is directly correlated with commune stability. However, Twin Oaks and Takoma Village expressed a desire to make decisions about potential member based on a mutual decision (on the part of both the community and the joiner). Neither community wanted to make unilateral and possibly elitist decisions about who could and couldn't join. It became incumbent upon the potential member to also responsibly assess whether the community would be a good fit for him/her.

Because it is one of the oldest existing communities in the US today, its residents have become quite experienced with hosting guests and visitors. In Walden Two Experiment, the first work written about Twin Oaks, Kat Kinkade provides an honest critique of the community's experience with visitors. She divulges the frustrations and acknowledges the necessity of visitors in order to attract future residents. She also admits that there were visitors on the land from the very first day, and that these visitors were mostly ignored while the community attempted to settle in.

Originally Twin Oaks had very loose/non-existent policies concerning visitors, nor did visitors understand what consisted of a respectful and productive stay. At times community needs were at odds with the prevailing hippie commune culture, or what Zablocki describes as "unrestricted admission," characteristic of communes in 1965-1975 (1980, 46). As described by

¹²Once a co-housing resident owns her home, the next buyer or renter is often selected by the resident, but not by the community as a whole. The co-housing community can assert their influence by being particularly welcoming to preferred potential replacements, but ultimately it is the individual owner who will decide.

Kinkade, Twin Oaks did not have the capacity for unrestricted admission. There were simply not enough housing spaces, facilities, nor the organization to accept every person that arrived on the land. People interested in joining the community would be subject to the rules established by the community and were also required to participate in a 40-hour workweek. Many visitors during the late 60s and 70s (and some today, I imagine) felt that these obligations did not agree with their politics and vision of community.

Due to community expectations and experience with visitors, Twin Oaks systematized their policy. Today interested visitors have several options. One may either call ahead to make arrangements for a Saturday tour, write to the community in advance to arrange a three week or three month internship (geared toward college students/youth), or attend a conference held at Twin Oaks. In any case, all visitors must make arrangements with the community by contacting the community member designated as Visitor Coordinator. Additionally, Twin Oaks suggests that visitors not purchase more than \$60 worth of goods visit or join the community. They claim that the average value of items brought with members to the community does not exceed \$60. This policy both reflects their egalitarian values and also prepares joining members for the economic standard of living at Twin Oaks.

Twin Oaks requires perspective members to participate in the three-week stay before being considered to join. Once the three-week period is over the perspective member is asked to leave for a period of ten days allowing both the individual and the community to reflect on the visit. The Community then will notify the individual about their decision. Twin Oaks is not the only community to establish an admission and visitor policy. In fact having such a policy is, today, more often the rule than the exception. The Communities Directory, an annually published listing of both international and US based intentional communities, includes articles with helpful hints and protocol for successful visits. While these regulations are at times cumbersome, and for the uninitiated, rather discouraging, I discovered during my weekend stay at Twin Oaks that the policy was much more flexible than it appeared on the website. Ultra Violet, one of the acting Visitor Coordinators, was extending invitations for visits on days

besides Saturday and for stays shorter than three weeks, giving out her email address and phone number to interested parties, and especially encouraging young women to visit explaining that there was a deficient amount of both female members and members under thirty. It became apparent that the hard-line policy on the website was a strategic defense mechanism to protect Twin Oaks from individuals not truly dedicated to living in community. The individuals behind the policy seemed excited by and welcoming of potential members.

To investigate community requires emotional and economic divestment in the normative valuables of time and money. Joy from Abundant Dawn Community expressed, “You need to step out of money being the bottom line in order to find out what is the bottom line.” However, while a community may provide food and lodging, good conversation and valuable experiences, they cannot compensate you for travel or for the money that you could have earned by staying at home. As a student, it was not feasible to sacrifice a summer of work in order to live at Twin Oaks. Such a reality may make it difficult for low-income people and single parent families to visit many communities without the assurance that one day they will find one to make the search worthwhile.

Potential members must also take an emotional risk when they attempt to visit and join a community. One communitarian at the gathering admitted, “It is a vulnerable thing to apply to a community. You feel they may reject you because they simply do not like you. But, whatever your issues are in life, you are going to experience them full force in a community.” These statements help deconstruct the fantasy of utopian living and dispels the fallacy that one can change spaces and have all his/her troubles disappear.

Diversity and Flexibility

Since affirmative action, the civil, women’s and indigenous rights movements of the 60s, 70s, 80s, the quest for “diversity” has become a common practice for both alternative and mainstream institutions. Because many intentional communities are founded under the principles of egalitarianism, non-violence, cooperation, and sustainability, it is significant to explore how a community like Twin Oaks defines and accommodates diversity. In their pamphlet Twin Oaks

speaks of diversity:

Diversity is more than a buzzword to us. We come from a wide range of national, ethnic, and class backgrounds, and range from 9 months to 78 years. Our membership includes gay, straight, bisexual, and transgender people; singles, couples, and families, people who are celibate, monogamous, and polyamorous. The opportunity to live in such close proximity with people from so many different walks of life is one of the most stimulating aspects of our community.

To achieve sustainability a community must remain flexible to accommodate diversity, difference, and conflict as a means of deepening the collective relationship. Yet, after spending a weekend at Twin Oaks, it seemed that their success as a community was predicated on striking a balance between homogeneity and differentiation. Acceptance into a community is a reciprocal relationship that requires that a new person bring something unique to the group, but that person must also fit in. I will focus on five types of diversity: race, economic, sexual orientation, family, and age. These particular issues are the concerns voiced by the women who participated in the group discussion: *Women in the Life*. The following ethnographic vignettes describe Twin Oaks efforts to confront the challenges of diversity while maintaining their commitment to an egalitarian model and meeting community needs.

Race: Faces of color are one of the most glaring absences in many American intentional communities. Though Twin Oaks is by no means racially homogenous, the racial diversity within the community does not reflect the US population. Twin Oaks, itself, is not satisfied with the racial makeup of their community, either. The underrepresentation of non-whites in community is not necessarily a result of racial prejudice within the community itself. In fact Twin Oaks has deliberately tried to recruit non-white members. Ultra Violet explained that racial diversity is a goal and frequently a topic of conversation. Members have proposed increasing the number of non-white visitors, but this does not address the issue of attracting non-whites in the first place. One black resident theorized that most African-Americans, even if they did visit, would be discouraged because Twin Oaks might seem too unkempt and unruly.

Zablocki's study, for example, documents that non-whites are rarely found in the

communities movement. He suggests, “The utility of communes lies largely in their ability to crystallize preference orderings and narrow fields of choice for members, this might explain their lack of felt relevance to most blacks.” Often non-whites are engaged in the work to gain visibility and access so readily available to most whites. For the many non-whites, communitarianism may not be perceived as an effective form of cultural critique.

Non-whites are already perceived as marginalized members of society. Close-knit ethnic enclaves are a common phenomenon in the US. It is possible that the community created in ethnic neighborhoods fosters an essential identity, such that while there may exist alienation from the white America, within the ethnic community there exists a sense of belonging and purpose much like the type created in intentional communities. Nevertheless, while I do not doubt the sincerity of Twin Oaks to achieve racial diversity, no amount of wishful thinking is going to bring non-whites to Twin Oaks. It seems as though getting involved in non-white community events or volunteering at non-white organization would be a more effective approach.

Debtors: As previously discussed, income sharing is not for everyone, especially those with large debts hanging over their heads. As a student with ever accumulating debt, I was particularly curious about how those with loans were able to pay them back while surrendering all income to the community. During our discussion one participant confessed, “Community is more challenging for those with debt, people may start to feel as though they are trapped in a community because they can literally not afford to leave.” When I inquired of the Twin Oaks members how debt was accounted for in their income-sharing system, I received a vague response that special arrangements can be made. Once again, while Twin Oaks aspires to attract individuals from a variety of economic backgrounds, youth and low-income families may be unable to afford living in community.

Sexual Orientation: Twin Oaks appears to do a good job of making their community friendly to people with a range of gender identities and sexual orientations. For example, the work-credit system ensures that all labor is equally valued, you get one dollar per labor hour regardless of

whether you are washing dishes or farming. Anyone can learn any trade, craft, or task at Twin Oaks. Rotation of labor and responsibility encourages members to take learn to do each kind of work that sustains Twin Oaks.

Interestingly, one of the weekend's participants was a male-to-female (m/to/f) transgendered person. I was impressed to see her there because the presence of m/to/f's at women's only events in the US has been highly controversial. One of the oldest and most famous women's gatherings in the US, The Michigan Womyn's Festival, has established a policy that only biological women are allowed on the land. Trannie groups have annually demonstrated at the Festival by setting up Camp Trans across from the land.

The stereotype of communes, of course, is that of rampant sexual deviance. While there is no denying that sexuality, nudity, and polyamorous relationships are looked upon with much more lenience than in mainstream society, "sexually deviant" behavior most likely does not occur with any more frequency in community than outside of it. In fact one participant named Feather, a young woman living at East Wind Community in Missouri, explained that living in a communal environment has helped her re-evaluate her sexual identity.

My identification with lesbian and queer community became less important while living in community because I found that my energy freed up. I established a new relationship to money, non-traditional work. I had no fear to walk around at night. Today I am a professional carpenter and I have a unique relationship with male members. I live in a more balanced culture because in general I feel like I have women's energy around me more.

While Feather still has relationships with women, she has let go of some of the anger, fear, and mistrust that were so central to her previous identification with lesbian and queer community.

The recognition and acceptance of diverse sexual orientations can be embraced as an idiosyncratic personal characteristic rather than a marginal lifestyle. Because the community openly accepted her sexual orientation, the label of differentiation became less relevant. By de-politicizing the label of queerness, Feather's identity is allowed to become a more complex and

dynamic whole.

Families: Raising children and attracting families to a community is a common theme for both the communities that I worked with. Children in community not only add to the richness of diversity, but also can be seen as a test of a community's sustainability. If, for example, children do not thrive in a community, then how can the model of communal living hope to be applied to the larger society? But, as was expressed by both current and potential communitarians, communal living can be very challenging and rewarding for families, especially those with children.

First is the issue of researching and visiting community. As has been previously mentioned, researching community can be a very consuming, rigorous process. It may be the case that one parent may have to be the principal visitor so that the other parent can continue to work and take care of the children. For single parents, this process becomes much more complicated. Secondly, when a family does discover a desirable community, there are many considerations to be made, for both the parents and the community. One discussant pointed out that the community must first consider the welfare of the children already living there. Will the new children be compatible with their children or will the new children be ostracized or create conflicts? Families are concerned with the ratio of children to adults. Will the children have sufficient playmates? Where will the children be educated? Susan, a mother actively researching various communities was very drawn to Twin Oaks because the ratio of adults to children is two to one. Additionally, childcare is a shared experience and many children are home-schooled.

Thea, a pregnant mother living at Twin Oaks explained her reasons for choosing Twin Oaks:

To raise children and for tribal living. That means removing oneself from isolation and a false sense of security. You need a village to raise a family. It is a waste of energy and life energy making your individual loaf of bread.

While the reciprocal benefits of having families and children in community can be positive on both sides, one discussant admitted, “The communities movement is not as open to families and children as we should be.” It takes many years for a community to achieve the type of stability necessary to support families and children. Additionally, while the presence of families may enrich this stability, a community’s obligation is to its own survival, not only to one specific family. If a family’s needs are not being met, a family may be encouraged or choose to leave. Today Twin Oaks has placed a cap on accepting families with children. Members believe that the diversity of their community may be threatened if it becomes what one member termed, “a breeder community.”

Aging in Community: Conversely, there is the issue of elderly community members, and the struggle for the aging to gain access to intentional communities. A poignant discussion about age and ageism ensued when Firefly, an older woman from Georgia, raised the issue of Twin Oaks’ other admission cap on individuals over 54. Firefly had previously applied to live at Twin Oaks, but was not accepted. She stated, “To me it is embarrassing that alternative culture have a cap on age.” As mentioned earlier, Twin Oaks has accounted for aging members in their structural organization adjusting the work requirement as members age. One of Twin Oaks most recently completed building projects is wheel-chair accessible housing, designed specifically for the needs of aging members. The community also pays for all the medical costs of their aging members.

Ultra Violet reminded the group, “All communities have their boundaries.” Despite her own critiques of admission caps, Ultra Violet defended Twin Oaks’ decision citing all the reasons mentioned above, explaining that the cap was an issue of resource allocation and the reality of rising health care costs. Joy, a 53 yr. old member of Abundant Dawn Community

responded with this question, “How do you keep a full spectrum of ages? How does an aging community continue to appeal to youth to keep the young population vibrant?” Attracting young people is seen as crucial to survival. Still obviously hurt, Firefly concluded by saying, “Would you want to live in a community that’s ageist?” Several Twin Oaks members apologized, but remained loyal to their community’s policy and decision.

There are many possible reasons why Firefly was not accepted at Twin Oaks. I do not believe that Twin Oaks as a community is ageist, nor that the cap on age is either. However, it is possible that the individuals that dealt with Firefly may have exhibited ageist attitudes and behaviors. This example reinforces, once more, that communities cannot be regarded as monoliths or utopias, nor can their membership be expected not to reflect the biases and prejudices found in American society. Community policies can place members in uncomfortable positions when they are faced with how their policies may affect both members and non-members. The struggle to negotiate conflict and diversity will remain a complex and evolving process. Likewise, Twin Oaks must remain vigilant by dealing with diversity in a diplomatic manner in order to preserve their reputation as an alternative space. Thankfully policies can be changed, and Twin Oaks has proven its capacity for evolution and flexibility in the face of diversity and difference.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Looking Out

Networking

Zablocki prescribes that the establishment of community networks is essential to the perpetuation of the movement as a whole. Today several forms of associations and networking structures are available for emerging intentional communities, established groups, and for prospective members. These systems of networks link disparate communities and comprise the public face of a unified movement. The Fellowship—established in 1960 and reincorporated in its present form in 1986 as the Fellowship of Intentional Communities (FIC)—produces the Communities Directory that includes articles about the communitarian movement, as well as descriptions and contact information for hundreds of international and domestic intentional communities. Twin Oaks Press publishes the book, along with *Communities Magazine*, another document compiled by the Fellowship of Intentional Communities. The Federation of Egalitarian Communities (FEC), of which Twin Oaks is also a member, consists of six communities. FEC members tax themselves \$200 per year plus one percent of net revenues to fund recruitment and fundraising campaigns and to cover travel expenses to meetings and between communities. They have also created a voluntary joint security fund for protection against the economic strain of large medical bills. This fund is more than \$100,000, and functions as part of a revolving loan fund to provide low-interest loans to projects and community businesses compatible with FEC values (Communities Directory 1995, 23).

The communities movement does not completely eschew technology. In fact the Internet plays a vital role in getting the word out. By subscribing to the FIC on-line (www.ic.org), one can gain access to on-line discussions about living in community. Many residents pose questions and share advice about the daily struggles involved in running community. The Communities

Directory can also be ordered on-line, along with a variety of literature about intentional communities. Both Twin Oaks (www.twinoaks.org) and Takoma Village (www.takomavillage.org) have websites that provide detailed information about the community organization and bios on members. For those seeking to visit a community, these websites can be extremely helpful. *Communities Magazine* (www.communitiesmagazine.com) also had a website allowing web-surfers to access archival issues on the computer.

Closing Remarks

By reflecting on Anthony Wallace's discussion on revitalization and Donald Janzen's concept of "intentional community interface" Susan Love Brown demonstrates how revitalization and critique actually proceed and, sometimes, succeed within the larger community." The residents of Takoma Village are engaged in a "conscious and indigenous critique" of certain aspects of urban living, such as a lack a safety for children, isolation and lack of communication between neighbors, a reduced sense of involvement and participation beyond the nuclear family unit. Using Wallace's model of revitalization movements, Takoma Village residents can be viewed as extracting themselves from "normal" community voluntarily placing themselves in a liminal position in order to make a critique of urban life as well as to employ an agentive decision to make the desired changes for themselves. The community was developer driven, that is it originated as an architectural and ideological abstract before the community of individuals actually existed. If Takoma continues to be a stable, long-lasting community, this success can be used as a model for future builders and future communities in urban settings. Their success as a stable, enduring community may set a precedent for low-income housing projects as well as for market-rate housing projects in the city.

The example of Twin Oaks Community depicts the evolving potential of the communities

movement to provide a dynamic cultural critique of normative American values, as well as to develop a sustained alternative solution. To juxtapose Twin Oaks and Takoma Village provides a framework that portrays different communities in two unique processual moments with two different configurations. While both provide feasible and creative alternatives, the cultivation of alternatives need not stop here. It is for this reason that diversity and flexibility become integral resources for sustainable intentional communities. If the organizational structure remains flexible to change and open to diverse possibilities, then community members can be involved in a constant reevaluation of meanings, order, and values. That is to say the community will be allowed to grow and change as the members and external forces do.

The complex structure of Twin Oaks dispels the myth of simplistic utopian stereotypes, proving that a well-articulated organizational system is crucial to community survival. I have also tried to establish the ways in which Twin Oaks participates in a dialogic relationship with American cultural and social values and how the community as a whole plays a role in the neighboring community of Louisa, VA.

Despite Zablocki and Harvey's implications that intentional communities are ineffective means of revolutionary change and in and of themselves are ineffective and unstable with few exceptions, Zablocki's own research on these communities also reveals that with time intentional communities are growing and changing and learning from their own mistakes. The devaluation of the effectiveness of intentional communities to achieve lasting societal change and to resist the allure of incorporating the negative normative aspects of the larger society disregards the power of changes in individual lifestyle choices. Because of the nature of our capitalistic society the consumer has a great deal of agentive power to sway the market. If intentional communities strive to "vote with their feet" as Susan Love Brown writes, then they can collectively actualize

the world they want to live in.

Appendix

Consensus Decision-Making Process: as required in the by-laws:

Underlying Values: Trust, respect/nonjudgementalness/ patience/ compassion, Curiosity/ openness to conflict as an opportunity for creativity and understanding, active participation/ personal responsibility, cooperation/ commitment to the common good over the desires of the individual

Steps in the Trial Consensus Decision-making Process

Option A: Start with an Issue

1. Introduction to the Issue

Presenter introduces the topic of concern to the community and provides:

- * History and background information
- * The team's subteam's thinking to date

2. Exploratory Discussion

Goals:

- * Mutual understanding
- * Exploration

Members:

- * Share thoughts opinions, feelings, and ideas about the topic
- * Listen to and respond to each other's contributions
- * May discuss these questions:
 - * What information do we focus on (and what do we ignore)?
 - * What assumptions do we make about the information?
 - * What meaning do we ascribe to the information and what conclusions do draw as a result?
 - * What personal or TVC values relate to this issue?
- * What excites us about this issue and what opportunities does it present?
- * What worries us or concerns us about this issue?

Option B: Start with a Proposal

3. Introduction to the Proposal

Presenter presents the proposal and

- * Provides history and background information
- * States clearly the benefits and reasons for adoption
- * Addresses any known concerns

Presenter answers questions

4. Listing of Concerns

- * Members articulate concerns
- * The scribe records them on the flipchart

No attempt is made to discuss or resolve concerns or determine their validity.

5. Discussion of Concerns

- * To enable members to understand each other's concerns they:
 - * Share interests, needs, and desires behind their concerns

* Share concerns they have regarding what they think will or won't happen if the proposal is adopted

* Listen

6. Listing of Options

* Members offer creative ideas to address identified concerns

* The scribe records them on the flipchart

7. Resolution of Concerns

Members:

* Identify the most promising ideas for addressing the concerns

* Suggest improvements to the ideas

* Offer modifications to the proposal

The scribe notes the modifications to the proposal language on the flipchart.

8. Check-in and Call for Consensus

Members raise their hand if they can say “yes” to the following questions:

Check-In

1. I have had an opportunity to voice my concerns.

2. I believe the group had heard me.

3. I believe we have made a good faith effort to generate creative improvements to the proposal.

Call for Consensus

Members raise their hand if they can say “yes” to the following question:

* I can support the proposal as the best possible at this time, even if it is not my first choice.

Closing Options

You can:

1. Consent to the proposal

2. Stand aside when you have an unresolved concern but do not wish to stand in the way of the proposal's adoption. Your concern will be recorded in the minutes and can be raised again later. If the proposal is about an event, you need not participate.

* Members standing aside explain their concerns

3. Withhold consent when you are convinced that adoption of the proposal is not in TVC's best interest and is inconsistent with the TVC's principles, vision, mission or values. You are responsible for persuading the group of the validity of your concerns.

* Members who withhold consent explain their reasons, which must be based on the TVC's principles, vision, mission or values.

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