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**The Typology of Community:
A Case Study Analysis of Three Intentional Communities**

by

Caleb J. Kalinowski

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science
In
Applied Anthropology

Minnesota State University, Mankato
Mankato, Minnesota
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Caleb J. Kalinowski

2017

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A Case Study Analysis of Three Intentional Communities

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This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to Andrew Brown for years of inspiration, guidance, and friendship.

Acknowledgements

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I also express my sincere thanks to each of the communities and to every informant for their contributions to this work, and certainly for their wonderful hospitality and friendships offered over the course of research.

Lastly I thank my wonderful friends, classmates, and all others who have had a hand in my development as the lifelong student I hope to be, and whose impact inspires me to investigate the world through the eyes of many.

The Typology of Community:

A Case Study Analysis of Three Intentional Communities

Abstract

Typological schemes like those produced by Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies have been used to classify human groups in an evolutionary spectrum ranging from the simple to the complex. Though the typological approach was foundational to further development of the western social sciences it is seldom used to examine what might be termed “simple” societies in the modern day. This study aims to apply the contributions of the two theorists listed above to the concept of the modern intentional community. Although these communities comprise an eclectic and diverse social phenomenon, their characteristic small populations and other features make them intriguing subjects for the application of theoretical concepts previously reserved for earlier cultural groups existing peripheral to the developed state.

Caleb Kalinowski, M.S.

Minnesota State University, Mankato, 2016

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Context and Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the research conducted for this study was to collect and compile information about the social-structural makeup of intentional communities. The three communities on which this study is based illustrate some of the great diversity within the intentional community movement. These case studies, along with a body of academic research—much of which is rooted (like the origins of the modern movement) in the mid-to-late 1960s and 1970s—suggest that intentional communities represent a unique type of social phenomenon in the context of a modern state-level society. The question guiding the analysis of the data is theoretical in nature: If intentional communities constitute a new type of society, where would they fall with reference to classical theoretical schemes about social complexity and group solidarity? In order to answer this question, I will reference two famous typological schemes: Emile Durkheim's models of mechanical and organic solidarity (1893), and Ferdinand Tönnies' concepts of *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society) (1887).

Community movements are not new to the United States. Various Anabaptist groups have maintained healthy agrarian collectives away from much direct influence of mainstream society for centuries, and various utopian experiments have been undertaken in America for hundreds of years, some of which predate the establishment of the United States itself (Smith 2002:111). Much of the early era of European settlement in general may be described in terms of processes of community-creation, in which new networks of social relationships were being forged out of diverse collections of human identity, experience and values—but also out of shared goals about prospects for a stable future in a newly common space. Writer R.M. Williams comments:

[A] metaphysical drive to work permeated the older agrarian culture of this country and exists today in practically the original quasi-religious form in some rural areas and among other subgroups that have not fully assimilated [into] the more recent cult of success and conspicuous consumption. (Williams in Christensen 1984)

Although there are a range of factors which motivate groups to seek separation from mainstream society, efforts of the modern intentional community movement (beginning 1960s-1970s) have been broadly characterized in terms of the creation of new collective cultural realities (Conover 1975; Brown 2002; Sargisson 2007) situated to encourage new forms of personal experience, growth, and expression (Iannaccone 1992). With respect to the most recently established communities (post-1990), communitarians embrace an eclecticism and attention toward group as well as personal needs in cultural environments not typically so distantly removed from the social mainstream as were communal movements rooted in decades prior (Smith 2002:111).

Established intentional communities today find themselves situated within a hyper-connected world in which members of even the most isolated collectives are able to maintain Facebook accounts or community websites, which might serve as the first point of contact for new prospective members. Publications like the well-known *Communities* magazine and major online databases like Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) and Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) provide effective platforms for communities to extend their reach within the movement and beyond. The existence of expanded community networks such as the Camphill Association, the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, or Twelve Tribes communities further encourage new levels of inter-community communication and exchange, and can serve as valuable benchmarks for the expansion of community consciousness. But importantly, from the standpoint of this study, such examples of tech-savvy and networking capacity illustrate broader

cultural patterns associated with the prevailing state of social complexity that is the backdrop of the modern movement. This study will present a discussion and analysis of the three case study communities in this modern context.

Methods

Data was collected in the tradition of anthropological participant observation. At the onset of the project I sought out fieldwork sites at intentional communities that were well-situated enough to accommodate an extended stay of an outsider like myself. While this condition did limit the field of potential research sites to an extent, I deemed it necessary to guard against placing potentially uncomfortable burdens on these communities over my research stints, which initially were planned to extend to one to two months each. During these periods at the prospective sites I aimed to contribute to these communities in more or less the capacity of a regular member, and in the process build rapport with full-time residents or those perhaps otherwise associated with the community.

Site Selection

Though there is a great variety of intentional communities in the United States¹ my research goals did narrow the field of viable candidate sites to an extent. The definition of what may constitute an intentional community includes a wide variety of types of projects and in a number of different kinds of settings. For example, there are community entities that are co-operatives, i.e. based on the sharing of certain resources like land or food, but not requiring much other integration of invested members into an enclosed social system. There are also co-housing

¹ One database, from the Fellowship for Intentional Community, puts the number at 1,766 as of April 2016. Databases like this one provided me the means to learn about many intentional communities and groups and rendered it very easy to make contact with prospective communities.

communities based on shared housing and facilities but similarly not requiring a large degree of regularized contact between members. Throughout the United States there is also a great variety of spiritual communities, each based in the fellowship of a religious group, its philosophical structure, or particular ritualized practice—but perhaps lacking full-time investment beyond a small handful of core members. Many of these communities also tend to flourish in comparatively urban settings, accessible to devotees or potential converts, but unlikely to host any large number of invested residents.

To explore potential fieldwork sites I employed the use of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) online directory. This valuable resource made it possible to research hundreds of communities in the United States, allowing me to specify details of my search within a range of fields, including community location, size, type, stage of development, or ideological or spiritual affiliation—and on to other particular traits, such as dietary preferences, political style, amount of on-site food production, and frequency of community-shared meals. Out of convenience the search for sites was conducted on a U.S. state-by-state basis. When a potential site was discovered the community was contacted via their own webpage or via contact information available in the FIC listing. Initial contact was usually established through email, although I also filled out applications, wrote letters of introduction, and had conversations with community contacts on the phone or via Skype.

Rural communities were sought out for a few reasons. Foremost, rural communities generally have a more stable and more easily definable membership than their urban counterparts. This is significant because for the general purpose of this research I make the distinction between consolidated membership within a social system versus instances of members' merely having periodic contact with some variety of community-related project,

although as we will see, especially in the case of the Nomad Creek community, this line can be subject to blurring even in rural settings. Typically though, rural communities in which all of the membership resides in a generally shared place comprise social networks that are maintained on a consistent basis in terms of members' routine interactions with one another. Rural intentional communities can evoke a deeper sense of investment in their members. In a paper on the topic of the communal family Berger et al. discuss their use of the urban-rural distinction and its significance:

Because they are easier to start, urban communes tend to have a more fluid membership; it is sometimes difficult to tell who is a member, who is a visitor, and who is a crasher. [...] This suggests that urban communes represent a less thorough commitment [because they do] not necessarily involve isolation from and inaccessibility to one's former milieu, a radical change in the structure of one's daily life, and engagement in unfamiliar forms of work...(Berger et al. 1972).

Because a goal of this research is to illustrate the functional and organizational differences existing within and between different types of societies, it was important to find communities for the study that do provide for their members a distinctive way of social life—not merely punctuated exposure to alternative culture. The communities in this study were sought out because they provide alternative institutionalized functions on behalf of their member populations to serve needs that would also be analogously attended to in some capacity out in mainstream society. Rural communities are more likely to need creatively-derived social mechanisms (to varying degrees of institutionalization) of their own to compensate for lack of access to those available to mainstream populations, paving the way for these communities to gradually develop into micro-societies in their own right. Also with respect to this notion, another requirement imposed on prospective fieldwork sites was a population of at least twelve generally consistently-invested individuals as indicated by an FIC listing.

The last reason for preference for rural communities was specific to my own goals to contribute within these communities during my time with them. Heavy participation within routine community life is the most important way to build rapport, and naturally this participation will often take the form of some kind of labor. It was necessary to find communities in which there would be enough to do—enough opportunities to plug into group activity and to observe social life in a variety of settings within. It was my guess that rural communities would be likelier to supply a more diverse variety of these opportunities as well as host a broader population from which to draw informants. The site selection process was ongoing, from the onset of project clearance in spring 2014 to confirmation of the final site—Nomad Creek—and the subsequent fieldwork (for four weeks) in summer 2015. Fieldwork at Honey Locust was conducted in the preceding spring 2015 (four weeks) and at Bhakti Farm in summer 2014 (seven weeks).

Data Collection

The data used in the analyses of these intentional communities were compiled from a combination of my own observations of community life with information gathered from interviews with members. Interviews were conducted informally, taking place under casual circumstances in members' living spaces, in public community spaces, and in work environments. On some occasions members and I would establish a later meeting date and at other times I might ask permission to take notes from conversations already underway. For example, casual interactions between myself and my roommate and longtime member Nick at Honey Locust yielded many unintended yet valuable insights about community life. With regard to pre-arranged interviews I did not pose the same questions at all three research sites. Instead I based inquiries in the context of members' particular experiences and in terms of each

community's unique cultural and historical background. An open-ended conversational format was conducive to highlighting intimate features of community social life while also exposing common themes within and between communities which could later be integrated for analysis. With regard to reaching out to potential interview participants I adopted a primarily opportunistic approach. As it will become evident over the course of this paper, proponents and members of intentional communities (whom I refer to as "communitarians") may often hold a degree of disdain for elements of mainstream culture, rendering on-site informant participation in an academic study uncertain at the onset. Thus, rather than devising any systematized (top-down) approach to establishing informant bases I allowed my relationships to community members to progress naturally—over the course of work, recreation, or otherwise routine interaction—eventually yielding friendships and the confidants to whom I would propose my interviews when the time was appropriate. At each community, ten to fifteen individuals were approached for interviews².

Interpretive Approach

An important goal of this research is to reflect on the significance of the concept of community for the lives of individuals, and to describe the social elements of community that appeal to human values. However, the contribution this project is intended to make more accurately concerns questions about the structure and arrangement of human groups. The analysis of field data will proceed in the spirit of the efforts to classify human groups within an evolutionary scheme that characterized much of the social sciences—particularly schools of sociological thought in Europe—in earlier days of the development of western social theory. This study means to revive a theoretical dialogue regarding the notions of so-called "simple"

² MSU IRBNet ID# 728391

societies and of the continuum of socio-structural complexity which has traditionally placed these systems of a comparatively primitive social order—bands, tribes, etc.—opposite structurally sophisticated and complex societies like the modern state.

The works of Durkheim and Tönnies were chosen to supply the orienting theoretical perspectives for this work primarily because of the approachable simplicity to their claims about opposing, dichotomous types of societies and the ease with which theoretical contributions of both men can be used to address contemporary—but similar—questions as they did in their own time. Both theorists' typological schemes are built out of fundamentally binary systems for the reckoning of human groups, built out of opposing “ideal types” of societies—Durkheim's mechanical and organic modes of solidarity corresponding to Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*³ respectively. Both theorists' works touch on a large number of topics, out of which many opportunities arise for applying these theoretical perspectives to research data yielded from intentional communities. The focal points of community culture and structure examined in terms of these classical approaches include population size, family structure, gender roles, extended networks of relationships, and the element of labor.

Composition

Data collected from each fieldwork site is presented in a series of ethnographic chapters. Although the composition of each of these three chapters are similar, subtle differences in sequence and in emphasis reflect variations observed between the communities in terms of structural makeup, values systems, and in the order of daily life. The significance of these differences will be explored further in the final chapters, as they are discussed with references to

³ Certainly, other dichotomous schemes exist, notably those involving the rural-urban continuum (Redfield 1947), and typological schemes related to the evolution of technology, agriculture, political structure, economic systems, etc.

features of Durkheim's and Tönnies' typological schemes. Before moving to data analysis and discussion however, the ethnographic chapters will be followed by a brief overview and application of a collection of selected literature on the topic of liminality⁴. Considering that the goals of this study are anchored in the use of classical theory and general typology with limited direction from more contemporary writings on intentional communities, the particular concept of liminality was here selected for the precedent for its applications to examples of pre-modern societies within anthropology as well as its recent uses with respect to modern intentional communities. Because this literature review does focus on this particular concept, and is not purported to be any comprehensive overview of intentional community-focused research, it is situated after the presentation of ethnographic data rather than before to prevent any misleading interpretation of the data as it is first encountered. This arrangement serves to provide an introduction to the application of established anthropological theory to the modern community concept while highlighting an underlying existential component of the intentional community ethos as well. Proceeding from the literature review will follow the analysis of the research data, concluding remarks on the utility of the use of the typological schemes to understand intentional communities, and a brief consideration of prospective future research. Note: To protect the anonymity of informants in the study, the names of the communities and community members have been changed, and efforts are made to obscure details of community locations and affiliations.

⁴ See Turner 1969

Nomad Creek Community

Population

Nomad Creek has a modest average population of only around six substantially invested individuals whose roles in the community are woven in with responsibilities of temporary visitors, who may stay anywhere from days to years. The (avg. 5) individuals of the latter group, who during their stay are regarded as members, have obligations to the community that are improvised on a day-to-day or week-by-week basis. Out of this core aggregate (10-12 individuals), around eight people live and work at the community on a regular basis, while a few, including community founder, primary organizer, and de-facto leader Victor, as well as his partner and co-organizer Serena, divide their time and responsibility between Nomad Creek and other community-related projects, primarily in the Washington D.C. area, about three hours away. For intentional communities this somewhat scattered living situation is rather unconventional, but in the context of this community, it alludes to overarching patterns of individual mobility and the freedom to integrate on one's own accord—traits that characterize the philosophy of Nomad Creek, as well as the New Philosophy community movement they represent within the intentional community tradition.

Agency and Experimentation

A defining characteristic of Nomad Creek membership is an emphasis on cultural self-determination. Intentional communities in general can be characterized as institutions of opposition, populated by the alternatively-minded: those who decry the shortcomings of mainstream society and actively pursue alternatives. Nomad Creek is a certain example of the viability of alternative philosophy to attract potential members, despite somewhat meager growth

and development thus far. Nomad Creek can attribute some of its appeal to community-seekers to its non-committal doctrine, out of which emerges a cultural atmosphere of freedom, experimentation, and self-exploration that allows members to choose their own degree of investment in the community. While not all community members allude to having intentionally sought out a loosely-articulated community such as Nomad Creek, there is acknowledgment that the relaxed and human-centric values structure of Nomad Creek has nonetheless enhanced their interests and involvement with the intentional community movement, whether they plan to stay or to move on. The community also serves as a valuable access point to further reaches of the movement, as will be discussed in the following section.

Negative attitudes about the effects of mainstream culture is a strong push toward intentional communities for many members. The seductive array of the advancements and accomplishments of modern society do not sufficiently justify what many who seek out alternative communities perceive as a yoke of self-indetermination lying at the foundation of western culture. They also reject the notion that the value of economic growth is to be placed above the collective well-being of society. Here a community member discusses the “three-legged model of sustainability” as it relates to a conception of the dominant American cultural paradigm:

In our culture, in the western world, we have a stool with one leg that is monstrously long, and that represents a focus on economics. It's a market-driven system. We're concerned with how big our businesses can get, how much money we can make, and so on. What pays the price are the other two—the social leg and the ecological leg. As the economic and technological leg grows, social problems run amok—loneliness, homelessness—every sort of social relationship is strained. And though we might not have to deal with it ourselves, we're aware of the damage that our lifestyles and material expectations inflict upon ecological zones all over the world. (Jill)

Others account for the personal toll taken by participation within the system:

Isaac:

I came from a very capitalist, corporate world, corporate banks. I became aware of the things that go on in the background of this system that create myriad problems and destroy pieces of the human being. A year and a half ago I started to plan my lifestyle shift. I sold both my condos, gave away all of my things and started to travel, mostly to intentional communities.

Jakob:

You could argue that throughout all of human history, there has never been a time when a human has had such unfettered access to the world. Ideas and potentially life-changing innovations. So many options about how we want to live our own lives. I think that a lot of this possibility has been freed up with the retreat of religion as the primary point of reference for our existence. But now this void is jam-packed with corporate bullshit, to the point where you feel as though you have less freedom of thought than before. It's an onslaught on the senses.

Communitarians realize an imperative to reclaim aspects of the human being that have been dulled in the modern world. What results is a retreat from convention and a drive to experiment with alternative styles of personal, as well as group existence. For most intentional communities even well into the established phase, it becomes clear to members that community building is an experimental undertaking, ruled by trial-and-error in an effort to find solutions that are sustainable—as well as attractive—for the mainstream societal drop-out.

There are not perfect blueprints out there for us regarding 'building' human integration. The closest thing that we have are indigenous cultures, traditional village culture, and so on. So what happens with this heterogeneous group of people? I would say we start off as fairly clueless in every possible way. From where we were to where we want to be, we have to develop every possible skill along the way. (Jill)

This is necessarily a process that has a significant personal dimension; community members are faced with the reality that alternative structures of community life require dramatic alterations to

the construction of personal identity. At Nomad Creek, transformation of the self accompanies the transition into community life. Members progress in the establishment of a more community-oriented identity, whether or not they will be present for the long term.

I'm in this process of seeking as much personal growth as possible. I want it to be an ongoing thing. I'm laboring to expand my emotional awareness of myself. By knowing myself better I am empowered, and can lead others to self-empowerment. You can't give to others anything you do not have for yourself.
(Isaac)

Gaining insights into one's goals of personal development also offer a sense of direction with respect to community goals and aspirations, as Isaac continues:

I've been traveling, looking for a community with anarchistic components, as well as compassionate ones. Also environmental consciousness, social intimacy, and some sort of local economy. In the meantime my goal truly is to take in all that I can.

With respect to sharing the learning process:

I feel like my role is to bring people together to share what I've learned. To make others experience new things. I want others to be able to live vicariously through me. When you live in the city you're more or less surrounded by others who are living in the cage, so to speak, inside that reality. So it's very hard to experience new things living in that environment. (Isaac)

The transmission of values is facilitated by the community's adoption of a system of noncommittal member participation that serves to cultivate an environment of spontaneity and individual expression. The community's relaxed philosophy in terms of fluid membership and high turnover rate is supported by the lengths taken to support an enduring familial atmosphere that is conducive to the expansion of personal consciousness:

Our development has been inspired by the negative elements of society, or maybe the ones that leave others wanting. But we're not an activist group. We're here to

offer a place of learning to those who are looking for it, but for the most part, this is a place where you can figure things out for yourself. (Victor)

To a large extent, Nomad Creek's philosophical orientation is anchored in the values system of a social movement derived from southern California which will be referred to as "New Philosophy". Victor and Serena are popular within the New Philosophy movement, particularly within its regional following in the northeastern United States. The Nomad Creek community owes a fair amount of its exposure and its appeal with communitarians to its strong ties with the extended New Philosophy community.

New Philosophy and Nomad Creek

Several times a year the Nomad Creek site functions as a retreat and event center for series of lectures, fora, and workshops which are attended by followers of New Philosophy. New Philosophy is an alternative culture movement based on the principles of personal growth, acceptance of all types of individuals, compassion, equality, and sexual liberation. New Philosophy now has pockets of devotees around the country, including a dedicated population throughout urban centers along the East Coast and surrounding area. These individuals comprise the bulk of Nomad Creek's regional clientele base as well, through their attendance of events hosted at the community. The event being held during the time of my stay was oriented around polyamory and poly-relationships⁵.

There has seemingly been little effort paid to mobilizing the whole New Philosophy community for the sake of any particular comprehensive end but the movement thrives, able to subsist on its own network of heavily travelled speakers and educators, who make valuable use

⁵ Victor and Serena are popular in polyamory circles of the region and participate in workshops and speaking events throughout the U.S. A number of community members maintain polyamorous or open relationships.

of well-known retreat destinations like Nomad Creek, where followers are repeatedly drawn to visit to attend events like the one coinciding with the fieldwork conducted for this study in summer 2015. These events typically run from one to three weeks at a time and are meant to provide immersion into the New Philosophy experience, reinforcing current members' identification with the values of the movement as well as attracting newcomers.

Although events are organized around particular topics, common themes include work on community cohesion, communication skills, self-expression, and sexual identity. New Philosophy's significant emphasis on a hands-on approach to learning produces heavily participatory event schedules designed to quickly and comprehensively break down attendees' perceptions of normative social boundaries, as well as bring awareness to the impersonal habits and conventions that have been acquired within mainstream society. Many newcomers travel from urban locales, and fast-paced sequences of presentations and exercises taking place in the naturally beautiful and relatively secluded environment—70 acres of wooded camping area encompassed by a gentle creek of boulders and swimming holes—impart an expedited sense of connection to the complete experience. As Victor puts it:

It doesn't take much to blow people away. It's quick and effective, the process of shedding our old culture skin with what we're doing here. Within a couple of days, folks literally have their jaws on the ground, with that "what!?" sort of look on their face. They simply didn't realize such possibilities were as accessible as we invite them to be here—with what we are trying to accomplish here. Culture shock has a huge effect.

In addition to providing the core Nomad Creek members with opportunities to interact with people from outside the community—a typically welcome change of pace for the small, cloistered population—the influx of event attendees also functions as an important mechanism of population reconfiguration: intrigued visitors have been known to linger for a time at the

community as temporary members. New Philosophy events are also opportunities for extended networking, as a significant proportion of the attendee population has had experience with or are currently involved with other established intentional communities around the region. Event attendees have access to many community-related discussions and fora, including information about other communities that may be offering membership or visiting periods to newer waves of communitarians. Community members on the lookout for opportunities outside the confines of the community have been known to “ride the wave” out with the exodus of event attendees, catching rides or following newfound acquaintances to alluring prospects elsewhere. As member Isaac puts it: “People see people come and go and then that’s what they do. They come for an event, maybe stick around for a short while, and then take off.” However this sort of membership fluidity can have negative effects upon the community’s state of unity. Isaac continues:

Knowing that you [or others] don’t have a strong investment [in the place] makes it hard sometimes, when it can allow for resentment toward others who are supposed to be contributing more. You get the feeling that others are just hanging around temporarily. How do you build a team, a community, when there is only that level of investment?

As a hub for the ideology of personal exploration and commitment to the self, the notion that the environment at Nomad Creek can be fulfilling in the long term struggles to be a tenable possibility to community members who, like Isaac, understand the place to be a mere stopping point in a succession of new places and experiences.

It kind of relates to poly-[amory], you know? To recognize that we or I can reach a new level if we introduce a third who might spark new things in us that we’re not sparking for each other. New dynamics, variables. (Isaac)

Given its ongoing relationship with New Philosophy, Nomad Creek has a unique character among intentional communities. From a local standpoint, core members maintain a

tight-knit social group living and working together, cultivating the human experience by way of experimentation and serendipity. From a broader standpoint, the community has a well-established overlapping relationship with the New Philosophy following, even though the followers of this movement may have only sporadic contact with the community. However, the Nomad Creek community is inextricably linked with the expansion of New Philosophy; the two organizations maintain what can most appropriately be called a symbiotic relationship, in which New Philosophy inspires the philosophical bearings in place at Nomad as well as supplies potential new members. In turn Nomad Creek supplies a valuable and reliable venue for the expression of New Philosophy's practices, values, and personalities that is credible as well as marketable to the regional followers of the movement, providing income to the community (tickets run upwards of \$300). Figure 1 illustrates the interrelationships of the Nomad Creek community, the New Philosophy cultural movement, and its regional following.

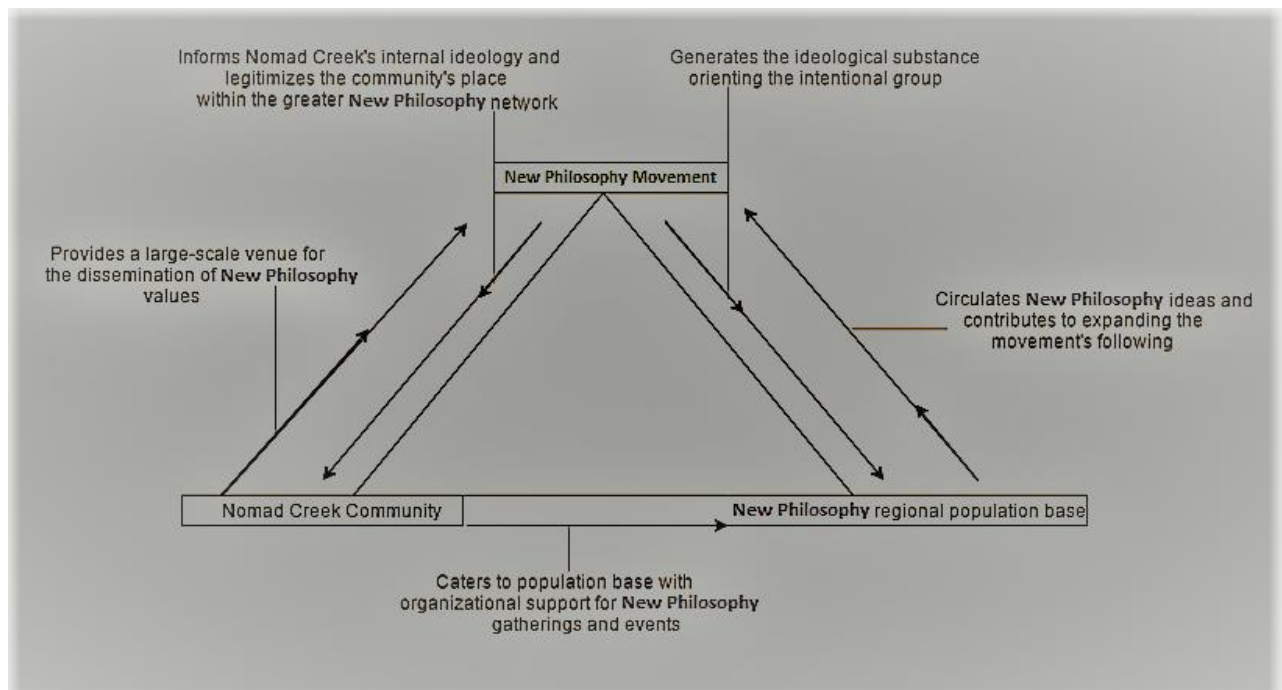


Figure 1

Because of Nomad Creek's complex relationship with New Philosophy's extended following, and because of the geographic scattering characterizing the New Philosophy network, Nomad Creek might be considered to be a gathering place for this broader diaspora community, or as other writers have styled, an "intentional group" (Erasmus 1981). Intentional groups are less formalized, less integrated communities than they are extended networks of individuals and possibly organizations who collectively identify with a social group or movement. One important aspect of these particular groups, as a type of intentional community, is an organized system of repeated gatherings, especially if these gatherings can attract the loyal attendance of high densities of followers. Consistent, loyal attendance and participation at gatherings ensures that the extended community can retain a strong sense of camaraderie and internal cohesion. One may attribute to the New Philosophy movement a distinction similar to that of the Rainbow Family, whose members are drawn from around the United States, and who gather once a year at a pre-selected National Forest for the Rainbow Gathering, to live out for a month the ideals of a communal utopia characterized by friendship, peace, and fellowship (Niman 1997). New Philosophy, like the Rainbow Family, has no established headquarters or formal organizational structure overseeing the movement. It is amorphous, spontaneous, and its expression can be subject to the creative whims of any of its followers.

Social Environment at Nomad Creek

People come and go; they do not necessarily feel the pressure to stick around. In a sense this is more similar to the reality of a modern family [arrangement] than you might see at other intentional communities. Your being a part of your family does not depend on always being [geographically] close to them. You're free to roam about the world, to seek the things you desire for yourself and expand as a person. If you reach a point when you're ready to return and share new aspects of yourself with your family here, you can do that whenever you'd like. Whether you were here for ten days or ten years. (Victor)

Normal daily life at Nomad Creek cultivates a sense of unity between members that does resemble some elements of a modern family. Members of the small population living in the close-quarters environment acquire a high degree of familiarity with the other people there. Although individuals maintain a broader sense of direction with regard to their own goals at the community, typical daily life is loosely ordered around work assignments and shifts, morning meetings and check-ins, impromptu gatherings, and routine activities like cooking, eating, or resting. For some, responsibilities include regular work outside of the community as well. Victor has purchased two small businesses—a general store and motel—located about ten minutes away in a small town of approximately 100 locally dispersed persons and families whose bloodlines derive from the earliest days of European settlement in the area. These business acquisitions have been made in an effort to build what Victor envisions to be an “intentional village” in which Nomad Creek will continue to integrate more of the locally-surrounding people and milieu into the accommodating purview of the community. Victor recounts that when these establishments had come up for sale, the town was facing economic uncertainty in the midst of steady loss of younger generations of job-seekers. To take over the operation of old local businesses was seen as a chance to breathe new life into what he views as community-essential commercial outposts:

Any place of commerce in a tiny mountain community in a rural place like this is huge. If you lose this sort of economic hub—however meager—in a location like this, it’s not a matter of trying to save the surrounding community—it’s a matter of picking out the pallbearers. (Victor)

Both local residents and Nomad Creek members are employed at these businesses, and while there doesn’t seem to have been much substantial development of this relationship, there has at least been some regular interaction and occasionally even visits to the community by locals. The

open-door policy embraced by Victor is one that is intended to endure as the community evolves. “[Nomad Creek] is not an island. We have tendrils into the surrounding community. It’s intentional. We’re here for the whole community as we are here for our family.” In addition to shifts taken at these “village” establishments in town, community members supply labor with respect to maintaining Nomad Creek’s property and facilities. Responsibilities include cleaning, landscaping or other yard chores, splitting wood, cooking, or assisting in the organization and preparation for upcoming events or those in progress. Work undertaken on site is often a collaborative or cooperative effort (though shifts in town generally are not) and locally these opportunities for team building are appreciated. Any community’s system of labor, however informal, is a strong indicator of the overall level of social cohesion as well as its degree of internal differentiation (Katz 1966:207-8; Wallwork 1984:55). Sharing chores and other responsibilities provide ample opportunity to establish close community ties and maintain friendships. They also may spell where differences in opinion or personality may have to be addressed down the road, as one member, Jakob accounts:

You’re forced to keep interacting and cooperating with one another [potentially] in the midst of personality differences or small conflicts. It definitely brings about awareness of the possible negative effects of overly authoritative individuals and the tensions that can arise between them and others. And in terms of the small group, you’re hyper aware of certain factions that can arise out of petty issues. This is difficult to tolerate if you’re of the personality type that tends to remain neutral...and when you’re interacting with the same few people nearly constantly.

Living Situation

Nomad Creek members generally enjoy a low stress environment in which to live and work. While the nature of shifts taken in town seem to be typical for those types of jobs in general, i.e. low-wage commercial labor, work at home is largely done at the member’s leisure,

not in the least as a result of Victor's consistent absence. The community also owns and operates a campground on site open to the general public except during events. These grounds occupy the bulk of the space on the property and given the community's distance from any major road, only a fraction of sites are in use at a given time, a situation members take general advantage of—exploring and lazing about the community grounds, swimming in the creek, and setting up tents and hammocks for outdoor slumber when the climate permits. When cold or wet weather requires it, individuals take rooms at a large house-turned-dormitory building on-site, which includes nine bedrooms and communal bunkroom, as well as shared kitchen and dining, bathrooms, laundry, and common areas for watching movies, reading, playing music and other recreational activities.

At the house and in the yard surrounding it one will often find another with whom to pass the leisurely hours. When a little solitude is desired, there is plenty at hand: the sloping woodlands as well as the creek, which can be followed for miles, make for a tranquil setting. In the woods along the creek a network of ten small cabins mix with the more traditional campsites and two large teepees. Of these, most are typically vacant. At least one couple from the community has adopted a cabin as temporary living quarters. But it is always back at the house where the desire for community can be satisfied once more.

The cultural environment at Nomad Creek seems to attract a particular sort of communitarian—those who are wading into a transitory phase of their lives. The community serves as a type of buffer, or perhaps a temporary refuge from the life an individual had been part of before taking steps toward whichever next phase would be to follow. For some, the experience at Nomad Creek might be the first exposure to intentional community life. Because of the relatively low level of real investment required to join—only a willingness to contribute some

labor and to be able to get along with the others—and low expectations regarding the length of a stay, a stint at Nomad Creek provides an opportunity for an experiment in community: “I don’t know where I’ll end up, as long as I keep learning and staying happy. I like being settled [here] for the time being. I needed an escape” (Jakob).

The intimate community structure can be an alluring environment, especially for those who are escaping the smothering anonymity of the city. The high degree of informal and routinized intra-member contact at Nomad Creek sets it apart from many other smaller (pop.15>) intentional communities, which are often of the “co-operative” type, i.e. communities with shared land but with distinct personal dwellings and with generally individuated careers and incomes; this structure is also common to urban intentional communities (Berger 1972:419-20). The arrangement at Nomad Creek also contrasts with communities of more complex and possibly imposing social networks. Larger communities with more stable membership invariably develop a greater sense of collective identity out of years or decades of community interaction, familiarity and the collective occupation of a marginalized social and cultural status (Sargisson 2007:394-5; Van Wormer 2006:38). During visits to intentional communities, I learned firsthand that this reality can be intimidating for newcomers, and can make it difficult to integrate into the social fold. During my first days at Nomad however, integration was immediate. I had been acquainted with every member then on-site within an hour of arrival. In my first evening I was invited to socialize and play games with the group of around seven people. It felt a natural and welcome experience to enter into what resembled a comfortable, established family collective, and this warm first impression was conducive to establishing closer relationships shortly down the road. It was evident how this tight-knit community would seem inviting and accommodating to new potential members.

I enjoy the small group thing. It has its pitfalls sometimes, sure—little things come up—but at least you know where people are at when you see them every day. That big question mark of anonymity, that stranger-on-the-street complex is not really present here. And on the positive side of things, when you do connect with someone, a close bond can develop very quickly. The atmosphere is very conducive to it. (Jakob)

Mechanisms of Integration

When it comes to cultivating an enduring and importantly—fertile—sense of community integration, Nomad Creek is at something of a disadvantage compared to other intentional communities. Although its small size does ensure a heightened degree of familiarity and intimacy between members, these bonds are derived ultimately from a shared ideology about the value of *individual* empowerment and agency. In an interactive setting, these types of beliefs are allowed to crystalize, their power enhanced from the articulations of other like-minded individuals, providing members a more conscious platform from which to spring toward new ways of living and understanding themselves in the social world. Many of the culture-building communication strategies practiced within the Nomad Creek community have clear referents in New Philosophy practices, as will be discussed later. In terms of this ideological scheme, a general question must be addressed: How can a heavy emphasis upon individual empowerment, agency, and mobility fit in the context of *community* goals or those of this broader alternative-cultural phenomenon?

What brings us together? What brings any [traditional] community together? The thing about [an] indigenous culture is that it is a very homogenous population. We don't want to over-romanticize the situation, but if we looked at each other, we'd all look alike. We'd know each other's families going back for generations. What is the glue there? The ties that bind? Is it simply momentum? An intact natural environment, a reliable relationship with our food sources? Maybe it's this cultural and spiritual mythos, some cosmological understanding. Does the indigenous culture have a cosmology that situates them, that makes the world "right"? That makes everything fit? Maybe we're missing cosmology. We're

between cosmologies, longing for it. Maybe that's the very amorphous answer.
(Event attendee Melissa)

Compared with the other communities of this study, members of Nomad Creek placed the most emphasis on forging a sort of “tribal” social order optimistically modeled on egalitarianism and the construction of more intimate networks of social relationships. Although the community (as well as New Philosophy) draw inspiration from the notion of traditional tribal cultures, community members recognize this undertaking as a novel and dramatic one, for it involves a fundamental rejection of the normative structures of mainstream society. New Philosophy as Victor discusses, is “not a mere re-organization of elements of our current society, but a totally new cultural undertaking, one that provides the people who take part a real sense of change that they can enjoy now—not just change for future generations.” Melissa discusses the formidable task of constructing this new yet “traditional” cultural scheme:

We're pioneering this stuff—who has the answers? At least we're asking the question. How do you rebuild [cultural integration] once it's been destroyed? We're transcending what we call primitive. We can't go back to an indigenous cosmology, but how can we take the best of that and bring it forward with a heterogeneous group of people? How do we find cosmology? These are fabulous questions.

In the absence of an orienting, encompassing cosmology as described by Melissa, communities like Nomad Creek must devise unifying ideological structures as well as tangible applications of these which mimic the desired results of “traditional” strategies, namely political egalitarianism, gender equality, and the maintenance of adaptable social support systems, which in turn are intended to produce a sort of ideal local community characterized by human compassion and social transparency, individual freedom (including sexual freedom), and human diversity.

It becomes evident that even in the context of a localized intentional community, Nomad Creek at its current stage of development would be an unlikely setting for any novel cultural system to take root and come to formally characterize the community in the long term, with its high turnover rate and blurry reckoning of its true membership. However, the cultivation of new ideological structures, as Victor and other members have expressed, is not intended to remain exclusive to Nomad Creek alone, but diffuse outward, locally—albeit indirectly—via the community’s relationship with the immediate surrounding community, and beyond, aided by the extended New Philosophy population. These individuals utilize Nomad Creek-based events to maintain ties with other parts of the movement before dispersing back to the mainstream, carrying with them new ideas and new tools to spread New Philosophy ideology further. In this way, access to events at Nomad impact participants’ lives on a personal level, and simultaneously aid in the transmission of New Philosophy values. As a regional hub for New Philosophy activity, Nomad Creek benefits from its ability to network within this extended community, and does so with the use of ideological system of practices inherited directly from New Philosophy. This system can be distilled to its three main pillars: *Radical Acceptance*, *Compassionate Anarchy*, and *Radical Transparency*.

Radical Acceptance

The notion of “Radical Acceptance” implies both the community’s encouraged acceptance of a wide range of human diversity within its ranks as well as its acceptance of various types or degrees of membership, i.e. from fully integrated community members to sporadic visitors.

Outsiders can blend in seamlessly here. It works because of our strong enculturation process, and Radical Acceptance. There’s a huge emphasis on tolerating a huge range of diversity: we’ve got blind folks, people with

Asperger's, obviously people of various ethnicities. There have been people with troubled backgrounds—even those who've come forward with some form of pedophilia in their past—we've hard-pressed to draw lines between what we can or can't—or shouldn't—do. If we're truly starting from scratch, we will avoid carrying on with old biases, however tightly they were embraced. It's radical. This is how we say we can help everybody. (Victor)

One reason Radical Acceptance has an important place within the New Philosophy community is the movement's approval and advocacy for polyamorous relationships—romantic relationships between more than two people. During polyamory-oriented events (like the one I was in attendance for), discussion revolved around improving the mechanics of polyamorous relationships themselves—communication strategies dominantly—as well as lectures about New Philosophy's brand of poly-acceptance as another example of breaking a mainstream cultural norm that can be seen in this case, to suppress natural or original forms of sexual freedom. The cultural stigma placed upon this dominant characteristic of New Philosophy has in turn seemingly had a strengthening effect upon the internal unity of the movement, and is perhaps an important reason that New Philosophy followers remain connected to the Nomad Creek, merely for there being a very limited number of other venues available within mainstream society for the expression of polyamorous or related alternative views.

Radical Acceptance also suggests an emphasis on individual empowerment. Individuals are encouraged to feel free to evolve into the human beings they envision themselves to be, and free to take the steps necessary to get there—even if the process involves time away from the community. Members are able to trust that if and when it is time to return to the community fold, they are welcome to do so. A fondly remembered example of this was illustrated for me while I was making preparations to leave the community, which were coming about more prematurely than I had anticipated, and earlier than I had told members would be the case. I approached one

of my closer acquaintances, apprehensive about how he would react to my early flight. When I told him I was feeling “antsy” (mostly as a result of most of my informants leaving as well) along with a hug was his simple reply “then it’s time to go.”

Compassionate Anarchy

This area of ideological work also implies a heightened sense of individual empowerment but primarily in the context of community-mindedness. Compassionate Anarchy refers to individual freedom to act according to one’s own goals and desires, so long as a more enduring sense of compassion and respect for the needs and concerns of others is in place to guide enlightened decision-making. This area pertains mostly to established communities, and is thus a more idealistic goal than the other value areas with respect to Nomad Creek-local, for it implies application within groups who are collectively more invested in some long-term community-based project. Nomad Creek is far from being an anarchic or politically-egalitarian community, given the position of leadership held by Victor and his overall economic and organizational control. Perhaps in the future his authoritative role may be relaxed as the community evolves, but as Nomad Creek remains in a developmental stage, most effort seems to be directed toward the cultivation of a philosophical precedent to guide the community toward the day when Compassionate Anarchy can be more of a practicable possibility.

Radical Transparency

Of these core areas of ideological practice, Radical Transparency is perhaps the most important area of community philosophy, both in terms of the Nomad Creek group as well as the whole New Philosophy community. Radical Transparency refers to an elevated state of openness

and honesty intended to permeate throughout all types of social interactions that take place within the group. As one event attendee expressed:

Radical honesty—transparency—was a sort of an unexpected thing to pick up. [...] This isn't some kind of enormous change to my thought process or anything, but it's a subtle shift in how I approach talking to people. It's being able to cut through unconscious detached social conventions, and to adopt "real" language, real communication, expressing literal thoughts, feelings...it's not as though I'm getting rid of every filter, but it's more like taking control of communication, cutting through the fog. (Mary)

Regarding daily life at Nomad Creek, the expression of thoughts and emotions, as Victor notes, becomes immensely important when working through polyamorous relationships, as particularly relevant to the New Philosophy community: "Poly-people know a hell of a lot about relationships." Regarding the community's situation within New Philosophy much of the information presented at the event was practical—helpful perspectives, strategies, and exercises that can be employed in day-to-day life that can enhance the ways an individual navigates their social world, from their intimate relationships to the forging of new ones out in society. However, some of the exercises were purely group-oriented, and none as paramount as ZEGG Forum, a true demonstration of Radical Transparency in action.

ZEGG Forum

ZEGG Forum, adopted from ZEGG Community (*Zentrum für experimentelle Gesellschaftsgestaltung* translated as "Center of Experimental Cultural Design") of Germany is a type of group exercise that has gained some popularity within the intentional community movement as a strategy for alleviating the internal political dissonances which occasionally arise within intentional communities as consequences of other systems of decision-making. Two types of these dissonances have been referred to as: (1) *The Tyranny of the Majority*, which refers to

instances of political control established by the majority of a voting population, usually as a result of voting systems that overrule the opinions of the losing side of the vote, and (2) *The Tyranny of the Minority*, which results from consensus-based political systems in which for a given motion to be passed, it requires unanimous support and thus can be subject to derailment as a result of only a small number of dissenting voters. The forum instead is designed to cultivate an in-depth community dialogue—often but not always in the midst of imminent change or alteration—that its proponents claim helps engender a greater degree of harmony, communication, and informed decision-making.

ZEGG Forum is structured as follows. A group, or whole community if possible, comes together and forms a circle. The circle is respected as an entirely protected space, and those placed around it understand that whoever takes their place in its center is only to be shown love, respect, and emotional support while confronting the issues they introduce to the group. The one who address the community at the center of the circle is known as the “protagonist”. Those gathered around the circle are known as “mirrors”. A pre-established facilitator is seated from a vantage point on the outer circle. Their responsibility is to moderate the forum process, and most importantly to assist those who take the stage and speak. The role of the facilitator has been likened to that of a midwife, their role being not so much to induce results directly but to prod the process along at a natural pace in order to maximize the extent to which the speaker feels comfortable to reach for and to express (perhaps to themselves) the true inner workings of their world. However, facilitators do effectively control the process, and can interrupt at any moment, mostly to ask questions, but can be quite creative at times, inviting physical actions on the part of protagonists, or to invite mirror-participants into the circle to act, in a manner, as a prop, that might assist in eliciting a more profound overall exchange. The facilitator may encourage the

demonstration of an exaggerated form of the protagonist's thoughts and feelings, and to coax them, they instruct the individual to amplify their voice, and to move and act with great expression, enthusiasm, and emotion.

While the forum is in session, any person who is compelled to reach out to the group may assume the role of the protagonist, and it need not be to address a particular problem, though the forum provides an appropriate venue to do so. The purpose of speaking is to express to the gathered group how and why—in the most genuine sense possible—they feel some way about something in their lives, and to be as completely honest and transparent about it as possible. The protagonist is encouraged to keep moving while occupying the circle, and often walk in a large circle themselves, a few feet from the mirrors.

When the protagonist has finished, he or she is seated at a place on the circle with the rest of the group. Then, mirrors one by one volunteer to enter the center of the circle themselves, also remaining in physical motion, and make—mostly brief—comments about how what was just expressed by the protagonist has made them feel—what their visceral and emotional reactions to it were. This phase represents the “reflection” of what has been said with respect to the whole community; the exercise is an example of group reflection upon itself through provoking actions and attitudes of its constituent parts, the particular identities of which being not altogether significant. During this mirroring phase, those who come up avoid addressing or acknowledging the preceding protagonist directly, and for the moment remain effectively a protagonist themselves. There is a distinctive absence of back-and-forth discussion over what has been brought up, with the purpose being to minimize certain overt elements of individual personality dominating the dialogue.

The impersonality of the ZEGG process may seem to contradict some of what New Philosophy and its constituents value about the movement, namely the respect for individual viewpoints and the intimate context out of which true sincerity and expression emerge. But the forum does not overlook the element of the individual—it represents the shifting of the focus outward, in order to view the individual as a valuable microcosmic insight into the whole group. ZEGG’s somewhat de-personalized approach is intended to diminish the propensity of certain human elements to assert themselves in the midst of a community-level conversations. It is acknowledged that community dialogue in a loosely-controlled setting may tend to produce distortions generated from personal biases and egos, obstructing real progress if they are not accounted for in some systematic way. ZEGG forum is designed to operate above some of the influences of individuality so that it can produce outcomes that benefit the entire group—but still retain its ability to weigh deeply personal factors during the process.

At the conclusion of the forum, after a few or several protagonists have expressed themselves to the group, it is dissolved. No two forum experiences are alike; there is a general structure to guide the process, but the specific topics of conversation and the individuals who participate sketch the contour of each discussion, and determine what may result from a session. At the conclusion of the exercise, after the group has departed from the forum space, participants are not to raise the subject of any of the forum’s events or developments in public space. This barrier is meant to ensure the sanctity of the circle as a protected space for sincere emotional expression and to guarantee individual privacy and confidence.

The extent to which the forum directly impacts community political decisions is unclear. It likely serves primarily to define particular social parameters to be established when addressing prospective group decisions. Like the principle of Compassionate Anarchy, ZEGG Forum as a

mechanism of transparency has its greatest potential as a tool for well-established intentional communities. However, witnessed in the context of the liminality and rapid cultivation of New Philosophy community cohesion, the forum clearly demonstrated the participants' confidence in it, and implicitly in the gathered group to uphold the exercise's integrity, purpose, and value. During my visit, a forum was held every day throughout the two week-long event, and its clear importance as a New Philosophy staple was undeniable. The forum experience brings to culmination the sort of synthesized, rapid forging of close bonds being established within the enclosed setting of the event, and the liminal state of the exercise assists in the transcendence once more over individuated vectors of culture shock, i.e. the subjective experiences of each person, to establish a powerful environment of confidence in which participants shed a final layer of their mainstream cultural skin. This process contributes to the fast rate of social group evolution that the event camp is structured to foster.

Local Community Application of Ideological Exercises

The core group at Nomad Creek is well-versed in the practice of the forum and does employ it on a small scale, although some of its formal characteristics as a large-group exercise are set aside. In the small group context, spontaneous and comparatively direct exchanges are more likely the norm than the sentimental and structured products of the proper ZEGG method. The comments of some Nomad Creek members indicate that the forum is employed sparingly, generally to settle the occasional conflict. For more general and consistent means of maintaining relations and keeping itself up to date, the Nomad Creek group coordinates weekly meetings.

A routinized pattern of intragroup communication is essential for the development of a heightened sense of group cohesion, particularly in the individualistic atmosphere of Nomad Creek. Meetings, referred to as "check-ins", allow members to keep abreast of one another: how

people are feeling, what they want to accomplish on a given day, and so on. Check-ins are also times to establish the local labor responsibilities of members. During events, meetings might be coordinated every day to ensure things run smoothly and that labor responsibilities are seen to. Another exercise I was able to witness, one I deem a recreational version of the check-in, was the use of a game called “hot-seat”. In this simple group game, one person is chosen to respond to a series of personal questions asked by the others of the group. When a question has been answered, the one who has asked it closes with a “thank you” and the next person in the sequence asks. There is no particular end goal—only to become increasingly open to answering questions that under normal circumstances might seem too personal or unorthodox. Hot seat is another example of a method employed at the community as well as within New Philosophy to encourage members to systematically remove barriers to honesty and transparency, especially in a group setting. There was a hot seat variant played during the New Philosophy event as well.

Examples of Radical Transparency are instrumental in bringing about the heightened sense of group intimacy and inter-connection that one might encounter in communities with longer histories of shared collective experiences (Ruz 2012), or in communities with some unifying ideological orientation, such as a dominant religious tradition or shared community goals about environmental protection, self-sustainability, political egalitarianism, or any of the myriad banners under which communities are established. The fast pace of the community-building process assisted by the use of the three pillars of the New Philosophy ideological scheme produces a cultural environment that binds community members together at the local level, as well as unifies and occasionally mobilizes the extended New Philosophy community, even in the context of a philosophical message that emphasizes the agency and mobility of individuals. The strategic use of Radical Transparency is aimed at revealing to all taken into the

fold that which New Philosophy holds as a fundamental belief: beneath our acculturated outer layer, there lies a human identity rooted in a pure version of the origins of our species as liberated social beings, and that the realization of this fact can sufficiently engender the camaraderie of an attuned and inter-connected social group.

Honey Locust Egalitarian Community

Honey Locust Egalitarian Community is one of the six intentional communities which together comprise the Inter-Community Alliance for Equality (ICAE)⁶. These communities are dispersed within the southern Midwest and eastern United States. Honey Locust was initiated in the early 1970s as an offshoot of another intentional community founded in the previous decade, from which a portion of the founding membership sought to spread their particular brand of the intentional community movement outward. The ICAE was officially established at its first conference held at Honey Locust in mid-1970s. Honey Locust Egalitarian Community is a highly integrated and relatively enclosed community in the rural Midwest. Many of the features of the community warrant its classification as a type of commune, for as a member of the ICAE, its egalitarian political and economic structures favor to a high degree the communal sharing of resources, including income as well as labor responsibilities.

Population and Demographics

Honey Locust is a relatively large established community, home to approximately 75-80 members at a time. The population is comprised of full members (at least a year of residence), provisional members (5-6 months to a year of residence), and visitors. A visitor period runs for three weeks every month, and functions as a type of trial period after which, if passed successfully, visitors can elect to remain at the community as workers while waiting for membership slots to become available. The community currently has a membership limit of 80

⁶ The name of this community alliance has been changed to protect anonymity.

individuals and an ongoing waiting list for those hoping to secure a spot, pending the departure of an existing member⁷.

As one of the older established intentional communities in the country, Honey Locust has a relatively balanced age distribution to reflect its several decades of activity. The bulk of the population, approximately 60 members, are between the ages of twenty-six and forty, while the youngest and oldest age groups together account for only about 25% of the adult population: ages (18-25 pop. <10) and (46+ pop. <15), respectively. At the time of my visit there were also four children under ten years old. Honey Locust, like most rural intentional communities is proportionately quite young, without any elders over seventy years old as regular members although a small handful of the founding generation (primarily early baby boomers) do make occasional visits. It seems as though it is far less common for elders to join rural communities later in life than for them to have aged in situ, which the situation at Honey Locust supports. Therefore, based on a conservative estimation, even the relatively low number of community elders still make up nearly half of total years lived at the community: twenty of the oldest members with an average age of 50 and an average membership of 20 years equals 400 years of combined membership; the middle cohort of approximately 30 individuals of an average age of 30 and an average of ten years of membership has produced 300 years, and the youngest group also of around 30 members at an average age of 25 and five years of membership produces 150 years. These figures show the present elder generation (comprising maximally 20% of the community population) claiming about 47% of the community's total time of personal membership.

⁷ To give an idea of the waiting period, I was added to the list upon my departure in early May 2015 and notified of an opening in December of that year.

One dimension of the community population is its somewhat unbalanced sex ratio. While this detail does not seem to have any significant impact upon the general establishment of cliques or other internal social relationships, some expressed that the overall shortage of females available for romantic relationships can put a strain on long term morale for males, particularly those who have been in the community for some years. Around 40% of the population is female, and of this group, just under one-fifth were observed to be invested in monogamous lesbian relationships in the community. Out of the approximately fifty males of the community, only eleven were in observable, steady relationships compared to sixteen of thirty total females.

Isolation is a big aspect of this place. If you get bored of the social scene—which can happen after years of the same people—you notice a void in terms of companionship. You realize that there are limited prospects at hand and not nearly enough new ones coming through on a regular basis—it takes a bit of a toll.
(Dane, seven years of membership)

Problematic demographic realities facing rural intentional communities may be one variety of the many types of challenges these communities may face as a result of their isolation from mainstream society. While a marked separation from meddlesome influences of the social mainstream allows rural communities the liberty to pursue new ways of living, a dramatic degree of separation or “estrangement” from society can have negative consequences as well. This passage, from Lucy Sargisson’s *Strange Places: Estrangement, Utopianism, and Intentional Communities* illustrates the double-sided coin of estrangement:

Members recall a sense of freedom, awe, and spiritual awakening as an important part of their early [community] experiences. Many established close relationships with the land and cherished their experience of physical isolation. The positive, liberating, and enabling effects of estrangement in a utopian project can be clearly observed in such accounts. However this form of estrangement has a high price. Members found a place in which they were free to live as they wished with like-

mindful people far away from the gaze of the world 'outside'. They also found themselves isolated, lonely, and conflict-ridden. Life was physically tough as well as financially-challenging, and social relationships (always intense in intentional communities) were placed under additional strain. (Sargisson 2007:402)

These days, Honey Locust's stable economic base allows the community to avoid major problems associated with scarcity of resources or other financial troubles. The community is not immune to instances of social dissonance or conflict however, which might be expected out of a large, enclosed community characterized by a large degree of sharing and continuous interpersonal contact:

Conflicts tend to heat up around August and February, the former being the time when the heat begins to put strains on labor responsibilities and the latter when 'cabin-fever' begins to really set in during winter (Brenda, 36 years of membership)

While the ability to adapt to challenges associated with social isolation is essential for intentional communities to remain healthy, some dimensions of a separation from the cultural mainstream has benefits for stimulating and maintaining social cohesion within communities, as will be discussed later on.

Element of Space

The Honey Locust community is situated upon around 1200 acres of land, which is comprised primarily of woodland and meadow, as well as peripheral wetlands which are found alongside a major regional river forging the community's wide southern flank. A combination of federally-preserved and neighbor-leased land comprise a further few hundred acres accessible to the community. Of the community-owned land, which has been added to on a few occasions

over the past few decades, approximately 15% has been developed for vehicle access, building construction, or agriculture.

The northern end of the community is home to some industrial facilities, an office and recreation building, and a few personal dwellings (1-2 people living in each). The central portion of the developed area, what I call the “general community” is the location of the community’s kitchens and dining area, a half-dozen other special-use facilities, two recreational buildings, and five dormitory buildings which together house around 55 members. The rest of the developed land occupies the community’s southern reaches and consists primarily of livestock grazing and fallow areas, a large series of vegetable garden plots, storage and livestock-use barns, and a few modest hayfields.

Spatial relationships define life at Honey Locust in a series of important ways. The community is the most isolated of the three communities in the study, neighbored by mostly unincorporated areas and a few small towns (pop. <1000) within a forty mile radius. A local (within 50 miles) supply run is made with community vehicles (personal vehicles are not allowed for full members) every week and another is made to a major city (pop. >150,000) one hundred miles away, every three weeks. Apart from these outings, there are very few regular opportunities for members to travel any significant distance from the community, with one exception being much anticipated “float trips” consisting of groups of canoes filled with members, camping supplies, and beer, setting off upstream from one of the community’s distant river access points for outings lasting up to several days.

Although there are many rural intentional communities throughout the United States, few of Honey Locust’s size are able to “enforce” the element of isolation as it can. The measure of limitation upon individuals’ abilities to leave the community at will is not an effort to keep

communitarians shackled to the place (it is possible to catch rides from the community when they are available), but to place a limit upon the unequal expression of status of members, in this case the private status and mobility that comes with owning a car. To some members, the simplicity that comes with distant rurality might be a welcome change:

I couldn't stand to be a cog, a part of an evil machine. Couldn't stand struggling to find my own place in a society that exploits your hard work for the obvious benefit of others higher up the food chain. I've been a part of it—labored to keep my place in that society, worked, driven—God it's infuriating. Slow, roads full of assholes; I don't care if I never drive again now. (Jesse, new member)

Overall dissatisfaction with the realities of mainstream society—often referred to as “Babylon”, a term borrowed from Rastafaris and the Rainbow Family and widely used in the alternative culture world—is a prime mover of future communitarians to alternative social forms. For long-term members, the city becomes an alarming, alienating place.

There is definitely something to be said about how isolated this place is. When I've visited cities throughout the last decade, it's been too much. Too much diverting your attention this way and that. You lose track of your person, you're absorbed into this giant expanse of impersonality—you are alarmingly reminded of your insignificance in a place like that. That doesn't happen in nature—there you can feel as though you belong. (Levi, 25 years of membership)

Another member highlights his relationship with nature:

What keeps me here is the land. We've got access to some of the best land and waterways in the country around here [...] access to this land is the real legacy of this place—you don't discover a place like this by accident, at least not any more. (Jermaine, 20 years of membership)

An indicator of the community's success over its four decades of existence is the degree to which it has been able to invest in its own land and property, clearing plots for pasture and agricultural gardens, building and maintaining dormitories, personal shelters, and community

spaces, as well as constructing and outfitting automotive and metal workshops, a coffee processing factory and industrial refrigeration facility, all in addition to an accumulation of past structures and spaces. Years of new membership, community projects, business-related endeavors, and so forth have projected onto the land generations' worth of community ingenuity and spirit. Only the newest buildings still appear as they did upon completion. Others show evidence of years of hippie creativity in action: artwork of all of media permeate the place. Older buildings and dwellings could represent community history all on their own, as it emerges from the strata of years of artistic as well as practical repurposing of old materials and resources, inside and out.

The community as a social entity leaves imprints in the natural and material realms as well. The surrounding environment forming the backdrop of community life provides common points of reference for any and all who come by them, whether they are passed by out of routine or stumbled upon miles away in the forest. One informant hinted also, that there exist in the farthest reaches of the community natural as well as human-made features of the environment that are kept secret to all but full members. One indication of the significance of the community's relationship with its own land becomes evident with the realization that nearly every manmade structure of the community had a customized moniker of some underlying significance or attachment to a point of community history. Even while the community evolves and undergoes changes, the place is allowed to become imbued with the imprint of hundreds of experiences at the same places of the same names; continuity provides the basis for the transformation of materials into cultural relics. Some quirks that result from this propensity for naming occasionally surface in members' anecdotes:

After I had been living here for a while and had become familiar with most of the land close by, I kept hearing references to "shanty town". After a while, after it

had come up enough I knew it was near a thicket I was used to cutting through on my way up [to the main campus of buildings]. Only when I was once accompanied by someone in the know did I learn that “shanty town” is literally an old over grown fire pit and few cinder blocks. (Felix)

To challenge the place of cultural relics can have significant consequences for offending parties. A flare of controversy sprang up during my research window as a petition circulated with a proposal to demote a full member to provisional status, meaning that he could then be asked to leave upon further infraction. Although earlier factors were involved, his offense was removing without permission a collection of animal bones and skulls from a public space known as the music room. As I understand it, these had been accumulating there for decades, and his impression had been that they were too excessively morbid to accompany a common place of casual recreation. As the music room is one of the few most constantly and comprehensively visited spaces for beer drinking, smoking and all manner of other socializing—ironically music is not played there frequently any more, another example of the cherishing of old monikers and sentiments—the reaction to these actions cut to the core of the legacy of that place, which had emerged out of years of the happy banter within, evident to anyone witnessing this accumulation of pictures, maps, curiosities, and artifacts strewn about shelves and walls.

Integration: A Working Community

The community derives much of its de facto social structure from its labor system, which arranges community members within a great variety of types of labor (labor spheres) on a daily basis. Members are free to devote themselves to particular types of work and to explore new possibilities available throughout all of the community. The system enforces a high degree of participation and contribution from all active members while facilitating a healthy degree of intermixing within the population. It is also built upon a foundation of flexibility to encourage

members to involve themselves with a wide array of labor types and, tacitly, with the various fluid, always transforming social environments associated with each of these.

The network of connections between people run deep here. The structure of the community allows people to experience a lot of different things yet the culture here doesn't allow tensions to move along with them...we work a lot but it doesn't overshadow the focus on the community. You interact with the same, or different groups for different reasons. There is no "you yelled at me at work yesterday, what the f***?" It's more so once you crack a beer it's like "hey what's up man, what's going on?" (Nick)

This philosophy is well-appreciated by members with certain interests not typically valued within the labor system of mainstream society. As one artisan reflects:

I came here in the early 1990s. [Here] I had a valued skill set, which is art. Art thrives in this place—you see it everywhere. The openness to expression in this place was and still is very attractive. The space here is art in itself. The land is a blank canvas on which to paint life...there is a lot of freedom at hand in a place like this. (Leo)

The overall sense of liberation underlying an accessible division of labor comes as a welcome change for those exhausted with strictures and stresses that may come with navigating one's life in mainstream society:

I was out on a controlled burn one afternoon [at the community], and I was moving along with the others, tending the fire. And I had this sudden realization...that the job I was doing—my responsibilities that were literally right in front of me—were all I needed to worry about. Dinner was cooking...dishes were being washed, laundry's getting done...all of the things I used to stress out about while I did everything else...poof...I couldn't believe how much sense this [labor system] made. Everybody takes care of one another and everybody does their job...the difference here is that anything a person could do to contribute was just as valuable as somebody else's job. (Jesse)

Labor Organization

“Most people here don’t have a real problem with work. They have a problem with bosses...they don’t care for overhead authority.” (Diana)

It is not possible to typify the goals of alternative culture or of the intentional community movement without reference to structural elements of mainstream society that aspiring communitarians aim to leave behind. In Shimon Gottschalk’s *Communities and Alternatives*, he postulates that most organized social groups fall primarily into one of two archetypal social systems. “Formal organizations” are generally hierarchical: top-down or externally-controlled, strongly goal-oriented systems based on the supremacy of the *social contract*, which limits the degree of internal cooperation to specifically mandated sets of tasks. In contrast, “communal” types of organizations are those that are not rigidly hierarchical, and are founded upon principles that highlight the value of ongoing cooperation, allowing for a process which Gottschalk calls *structural freewheeling*, which refers to this type of organization’s high degree of internal flexibility and potential to move about or innovate upon its own pre-existing structural arrangements (Gottschalk 1975). At Honey Locust, internal flexibility extends largely to the micro- or individual level. As an egalitarian community, the distinct absence of centralized power defines the community’s capacity to reorganize itself according to the wants and needs of the individuals who comprise it. “Normative” culture at the community is an emergent process, meaning that as opposed to a formal system of organization in which the interworking of parts are defined from the top, the Honey Locust cultural system continuously re-articulates its internal makeup as community members circulate between personalized subsets of labor or other types of routine spheres of activity. This sort of capacity for internal elements and subsystems to generate

and to define the whole character of the organization themselves, qualifies Honey Locust and other “freewheeling” types of communities as examples of communal organizations.

Although Honey Locust community members enjoy a high degree of internal mobility—particularly between labor spheres—the community does sustain a fair degree of institutionalization with regard to the establishment of labor spheres themselves. As Gottschalk points out though, a fairly high degree of institutionalization regarding (1) consensus about shared values (like valuing work), (2) patterned role expectations (most importantly labor responsibilities), and (3) established internal structures—are characteristic of *both* formal and communal organizations (Gottschalk 10). In contrast with formal organizations, however, Honey Locust does not precisely formulate the exact nature of the relationships between labor spheres, including their corresponding social environments. The unconstrained movement of individuals between multiple spheres of social interaction—via shared labor or other activities—generate an interactive and improvised whole social network of a character which evolves daily.

Residents of the community, excluding short-term visitors and some retired senior members, are required to complete 35 hours of labor per week. Particular types of labor are not assigned to individuals except in two areas: industrial quotas to support community-wide participation in the income-generating labor sphere, i.e. coffee-processing/production and shipping lines (five hours a week), and two hours a week of kitchen-maintenance work, e.g. dishwashing, cleaning floors and counters, etc. Individuals are then free to pursue their remaining labor hours however they choose. Honey Locust may be called a work-oriented society but an important key to the community’s economic successes, as well as to its infrastructural and social harmony, is its approachable labor validation system, which allows members to help the community (and get credit for it) in a great variety of ways.

Spheres of Labor

The primary financial base of the community is its coffee business, which I'll refer to as "Coffee Co."⁸ The community imports raw product from outside suppliers, roasts and processes it according to different varieties it supplies commercially, packages it, and exports it across the country for purchase. Operation of the business requires many steps, from manufacturing the product, storage of both raw and processed material, office-based logistical responsibilities, maintenance of facilities (nowadays subject to considerable FDA scrutiny due to the various high-profile foodborne illness outbreaks within the food industry over the last few decades), and all manner of other intricacies associated with operating a successful business capable of supporting 80 people.

As the most comprehensively invested-in labor sphere of the community, the Coffee Co. cottage industry provides perhaps the most complete population-wide labor-based integrative mechanism for the community. For the majority of the population, shifts taken "at the coffee house" are both randomly-assigned and individually-chosen responsibilities, except in cases of conflicting obligations or personal physical limitations affecting work availability. Taking over other people's shifts as a favor or in an exchange is commonplace, and is an example of structural freewheeling at the level of the individual. Each day a cumulatively large proportion of the community's population is organized into crews doing coordinated, often fast-paced work on production lines or in the warehouse. There is also an office-work branch of the Coffee Co. sphere whose personnel makeup is more established; elder members make up a significant

⁸ In an effort to avoid including information that would reveal the real identity of this community, "Coffee Co." and references to a community coffee industry stand in for Honey Locust's actual on-site business. However certain details expressed about Coffee Co. and community life accurately depict the realities of Honey Locust industry and business model.

proportion of workers there. The membership-shuffling effect of Coffee Co. shift assignments provides the community with a high degree of consistent intermixing and thus many different possible worker combinations. In a community of 80, it is plausible that various members might see little of one another, if respectively they were occupied primarily with mutually-distinct spheres of labor. However membership-wide shared work requirements in the coffee house circumvents the possibility for gaps to emerge between labor-based social cliques, e.g. the ranch crew v. garden crew v. office workers, etc., although other mechanisms of integration, notably shared meals, constant recreational opportunities, or other spontaneous opportunities for intermixing contribute to a sustained degree of community articulation. “The development of cliques based on labor type are impossible to prevent” one community veteran expressed, “but they are not really limiting, because besides the comfort of habit or routine, there isn’t any real incentive, economic or otherwise, for members to ignore other opportunities around the community” (Leo).

The community is highly invested in Coffee Co. and to a certain extent, members identify with the goals of the business as they do with the other goals of the community. However, the coffee house is the *primary* labor sphere for only around 15 community members at a time—office workers and maintenance specialists who are the most familiar with the industrial equipment—meaning that the rest of the community, although contributing to the income-generating labor sector when needed or as required, prefer to fulfill the bulk of their labor quotas elsewhere around the community.

The large array of community labor spheres can be organized into three general types. The first may be referred to as the “production” (P) type. These are the internal industries that are based on the production of resources for the community. Coffee co. is a clear example, for the selling of its products provides the community with income and thus financial stability. Another

is the ranch sphere, which includes primarily livestock handling and related chores, and contributes to community animal-derived foodstuffs. Garden work—planting, weeding, harvesting, etc.—and forestry work—harvest of timber, sawmill processing, delivery of lumber, mulch, and so forth around the community, are the other two main productive industries. These labor spheres maintain a primary (de facto, i.e. individuals can gravitate toward other spheres at any time if they desire) crew of 10-15 individuals who comprise the core group of routine workers in that area, although there is a high degree of regular overlap. Primary crews generally are the most aware of the particular internal routines of their labor sphere—milking schedule, planting schedule, etc.—and the general set of needs which can be seen to within the sphere or opened up to other freewheeling or opportunistic members of the community, as will be discussed shortly.

Second, the “service” (S) labor type. These individuals contribute to the fulfillment of the daily needs of the community (the area of the highest density of living and community-shared spaces). In other words, members occupied with these areas of labor maintain the community’s standard of living. There are numerous small (1-2 person) niches, often available in shifts, applicable to this area: community laundry-doers, childcare providers, comptoil (outhouse maintenance), and so forth. Within the (S) labor type, there are larger pools of members who devote a significant amount of service-type work to the kitchen—preparing meals is certainly one of the most important community services, as are general kitchen maintenance and upkeep, e.g. doing the dishes or cleaning up the food preparation and serving areas. While it is common for any member to step in to help prepare meals when assistance is desired, only a few (8>) community members were observed to be consistently involved with preparing the bulk of community meals (lunches and dinners primarily, occasional Sunday brunches), whether through

doing the cooking themselves or by working to recruit further help from others around the community. These individuals comprise what might be called the primary kitchen crew, with the standard addition also of members fulfilling their kitchen maintenance requirements (see below).

The kitchen maintenance (KM) sphere is highly improvised—recall that every member is required a few weekly hours in this sphere per community policy—but some patterns emerge regarding which members gravitate toward KM work as a regular labor strategy. A particular subset of the service-oriented community members I refer to as the “opportunists”. These individuals are likely to be relative newcomers to the community, and thus find localized tasks with frequent, patterned availability (like after meal times) to be the easiest route to getting available work. If an individual is short on labor quota hours, it is usually a manageable task to find some upcoming available KM shift. This is a common strategy for those coming for visitor periods, when difficulty breaking into certain social networks prevents much insight into those less “mainstream” albeit specialized labor opportunities, particularly in the production or service spheres. Around 14 members found their primary sources of labor as opportunists at the time of my visit. Although these members were noticed to gravitate toward KM work regularly, there are also many opportunities in which to “plug in” (in community parlance) to garden work or with respect to various odd jobs posted classified-style on the community message board, a common source for work-related (among other community-related) information, e.g. upcoming projects, requests for shift-takers, and so forth. The message board is a valuable source of intra-community communication. Along with the aforementioned labor-related news, it hosts an array of types of information—where members post invitations to workshops, concerns notes, meeting times, arrangements to host personal visitors, notices about legislative or political discourse, or any other type of bulleting deemed of importance.

The final assortment of labor spheres fall under the “independent” (I) type. This category includes a network of artisans, tradespeople, as well as other niche workers and odd-jobbers. These individuals mostly pursue labor hours on an independent basis, and differ from opportunists of the service type of labor in that these workers are situated well enough within information networks to detect available work more specific to their particular interests; or, they occupy a specific-enough niche (or one in high enough demand) that competition is not an issue. Some of the independent niches include those of the auto-mechanic, aquaponics caretaker, building maintenance headperson, herbalists, landscapers, artists, carpenters, tailors, and others. Around 20 community members occupy (I) type labor niches, although many members who ordinarily do work in the more institutionalized spheres might occasionally branch out to independent endeavors on the side.

Other Spheres of Integration

When I first arrived [in the 1980s] I didn't think there was much radically different here. . . . people go to work during the day and socialize during the evenings. But I began to understand. . . [that] the community is like a family. Out there, or in the city, you see all these people but you don't know anyone. Here you know everybody. You might not like everybody but you know where everyone stands. The city in comparison is alienating. (Brenda)

The labor system at Honey Locust is a dominant force influencing many of the processes of social integration although it is far from the only integrative mechanism of the community. The great flexibility allowed in choosing when and where to work increases the degree of variation existing between the daily routines and personal social environments of all community members. There seem to be very few times of the day or night when it is difficult to find people somewhere up and moving—cooking food, playing games, making conversation—often well into the morning hours. At times, I am told, Honey Locust has a consistent active subpopulation

of night-time members, some of whom who then sleep well into the afternoon on a routine basis (as did one of my roommates, a visitor staying over from the previous month).

The many different times throughout the day and night when it is possible to find social activity—usually at public spaces such as the music room or dining building (aka “community center”)—suggests that the near constant availability of opportunities to plug in to segments of the social fold have the potential to enhance an individual’s capacity to integrate into further reaches of the community all the time, depending on who happens to be present in a given place at a given time. A remarkable fact about spontaneous gatherings of people throughout the day was the constant recombination of community members within different settings around the community. While there are a few members of the population who are seen to keep to themselves for much of the time, the great majority of the population is actively engaging with subsets of the population for a substantial portion of each day. As one becomes familiar with the popular social areas it is intriguing to regularly recognize the company of new combinations of personalities present at a given time. A population of 75 can yield a great variety of groupings, each accompanied by the subtle shifts in tone of interaction and conversation reflective of present company. More time spent in community yields further exposures to these varied “mini-gatherings”, whereupon one can begin to recognize the character traits of members (against the varied subsets of the population with which they variably interact), as well as social conventions typical of the greater community.

Common social activities amidst informal gatherings include much casual conversation, coffee-drinking, playing music, smoking, or the occasional card game. Impromptu walks to the river or through the woods are enjoyed as well, particularly on nicer days. As mentioned in the discussion of space, types of group recreation that might require a bit more planning include

river canoe float trips and other more terrestrial camping adventures. On occasion group trips are also taken to nearby cities for the attendance of craft shows, concerts, or to other events of interest to groupings of community members.

Housing subgroups

Dormitory-style housing arrangements produce a de facto measure of association between members within each of the five dorm houses. Approximately 75% of the community lives within these houses. The two largest houses are homes to a more varied resident base, holding approximately 20 and 15 members, respectively. In contrast the other three accommodate “small living groups” and are characterized by residence of more particular groupings of people. One houses older members (population=5), another families and members with children (population 8-10) and the last group is characterized by the tendency for late nights, louder music, and parties (pop. 8-10). To an extent small living groups represent intentional communities within the intentional community, for they are established and to a degree, legislated, in terms of how the particular subset of the community desires to characterize their living space. All of the community houses engender the development of micro-cultures within their walls and foster another type of social sphere with which members can be associated. The significance of this type of association is variable, and it may be more pronounced within the living groups, particularly the family-oriented and party-oriented ones, than in other places.

Ideological Sphere of Integration

Honey Locust does not promote any form of religious thought above others. Although some members alluded to spiritual practice or belief, the presence of religious or spiritual

iconography around the community (mostly of eastern traditions, e.g. chakras, mandalas) were mostly to do with artistic and aesthetic expression—beautification of the community in the spirit of New Age themes popular with hippie and alternative movements reaching back to the 1960s. The few opinions expressed regarding religion encountered throughout the community could mostly be characterized in agnostic terms, but the overall insignificance of members' personally-held beliefs to the rest of the community negated much importance of the topic in the first place. Intentional communities oriented around or based entirely upon some kind of religious tradition are very common, as indeed it has been common for much of history for religious movements themselves to produce enclosed religious communities, evident, for example, within Indian and Christian monastic traditions. Patterned, religiously-inspired behavior can benefit intentional communities because these belief systems can provide a model from which a tight-knit and coordinated community can emerge. Moral codes, gender roles, labor norms, dietary restrictions, schemes of social hierarchy or differentiation—the ritually-inspired routine, so to speak—all can contribute to providing a basis for general social organization and patterning of community life.

In an absence of a religiously-inspired scheme of ideological orientation, large communities like Honey Locust might be seen to fall back upon other ideological structures in place to anchor community life in patterned behaviors that underscore a shared philosophy. In this community, the ideological core comes in the form of egalitarian principles per association with the ICAE. Egalitarian principles can be enforced materially, by limiting members' abilities to spend money freely, i.e. income or any financial resources derived from outside of the community, or through forbidding current members' from owning possessions on-site that could be perceived as relatively advantageous, such as personal vehicles. Notably, there is also a significant degree of stigma placed upon public usage of cell phones or similar technology at the

community. Perhaps not associated directly with enforcing egalitarian principles in particular, it more so suggests the community's rejection of the technology-based distractions and interruptions that have become so typical of the social mainstream in the modern era. Undeniably though, there is a component of gadget-prestige associated with owning the latest tech devices in mainstream society—a measure of prestige which this community is able to avoid.

An egalitarian system can also be maintained with the assistance of the element of chance. While the community possesses enough indoor housing space to accommodate its members, there are certain preferences for rooms or personal shelters which come to light when these become available. Regardless of seniority, new housing designations, when they are competed for, are determined by “rolling for it”, i.e. dice. Membership on the community's five-member governing board is also generated randomly and is based upon a broad rotation. This board makes decisions by consensus, though anything can be overturned by a 2/3rds majority vote after that. Any full community member can petition—and successfully with 10% of the voting population's signatures—to call a meeting during which a new vote will take place. A 2/3rds majority can be used to effect any legislative proposal. The community's overall system of political discourse is designed with flexibility at the forefront; the community was not envisioned to fall into the rigid use of any one system of decision-making—yet a 2/3rds majority (as legislative policy currently requires) for most community decisions ensures a reasonable degree of popular agreement to guide decision-making. Although the community board is essential for addressing certain types of concerns and logistical responsibilities, membership denotes no elevated position; board members merely hold a temporary association with this sphere of labor.

When I was first getting myself established down here, my mother on one occasion accused me of dabbling with a cult. I said “mom, for it to be a cult you have to have a leader—here we’re all leaders”. (Felix)

Communalism

Honey Locust members together share in efforts to obtain the basic necessities of life – food, supplies, shelter, etc. Members do have personal possessions certainly, but resources that are community-obtained or collectively-financed become property of the whole community, though there is accountability for individuals’ use of some community possessions. They may check out industrial equipment, library books, or occasionally community vehicles—but other kinds of resources can be taken at will. These include food (including meal leftovers kept in industrial refrigerators), medical supplies, herbal concoctions like teas and oils, shop tools, and even freely available clothing (“Commie Clothes” denotes the community clothing building—some residents dress themselves entirely out of this place, of course with a community laundry labor sphere available to keep clean community articles in rotation). Other facilities are shared as well. The main kitchen within the community center (a second kitchen elsewhere is primarily used for food-processing), except when community meals are being prepared, is used by members around the clock for making personal meals (such as breakfast, generally an independent endeavor), snacks, coffee, and tea. The location is also popular for general socializing and relaxing, particularly on its second floor, an art and music space.

With the exceptions of the kitchens, the Coffee Co. buildings, and the shower house, there is very limited indoor plumbing within the community. Bathrooms in any modern sense (including flush toilets) do not exist in any common facilities, and members instead share a series of outdoor privies. While all basic in their essential functions, three primary locations are constructed with the care of any modern building and feature multiple stalls. Maintenance of

these is also a community-shared task, with waste on a weekly basis needed to be relocated to the “comptail yard” to begin the process of becoming compost for future community agricultural use, a decades long process. The community is also dependent on a sole shower house located in the central community. Though a portion of the community has access to indoor showering stations within the larger dormitory houses, the rest of the community uses this shared facility (or the river).

Relationships with the Outside

The community maintains a large, seemingly stable population and a reputation as one of most successful large-scale rural intentional communities in the country. The time spent on a waiting list for membership may at times exceed a year, and the list is regularly added to—each month bringing in up to a half dozen new faces during visitor periods who could potentially pursue membership. A sustained interactive relationship with the outside world via visitor periods is important to the community. Visitors comprise a ready pool of potential membership, and from a broader philosophical standpoint, inviting non-members to the community provides a measure of influence over these individuals, who have the potential to use experiences taken from the community as a jumping-off point for spreading information about intentional communities beyond. As Honey Locust states in their legislative policy: “We are creating a society benefiting its members but also serving as an example of social organization applicable to the rest of the world.” And the ICAE pledge states⁹:

It is our goal for non-hierarchical communities to be well-known and accepted all throughout our society, and to provide an accessible lifestyle for any who seek it. Our network of communities intends to devote themselves to developing, supporting, and promoting intentional communities founded in the shared spirit of equality.

⁹ Because the organization’s pledge is available online, this section has been paraphrased to ensure anonymity.

As a result of this pledge to maintain channels of interaction with the outside world, points of contrast between community values and mainstream society are exposed. During visitor periods, cultural elements of the mainstream are brought into confrontation with the subtleties of the community environment. The patchwork of community spells a social fabric that clearly distinguishes between invested community members and those whose stay is merely temporary. The institutionalization of the visitor period virtually ensures a continuous presence of non-members who, if not geared toward pursuing invested membership, consequently might expect a relatively difficult task of integrating into elements of the social fold.

When I first got here it was strange, like...you know, people really aren't that friendly here are they? It really was that there is a social scene here, multiple ones, that go on, but you had to be here a while to really access them. You had to figure out how things are here. (Nick)

My firsthand experience as a visitor produced a similar view. The ethnographic skill set was very helpful in terms of making contacts around the community, though some individuals or cliques remained difficult to approach through to the end of fieldwork. But by avoiding types of work that were most typically slotted to visitors—like KM labor—my own process of integration was assisted greatly. A willingness to volunteer for any type of work whenever offered (and to get dirty) was helpful as well. There seems to be a natural apprehension toward visitors as certain cliques guard against inviting those about whom they know very little into an intimate social fold. The reputations of individuals diffuse quickly throughout the community and achieving general good standing is facilitated by an ability to establish contacts with those representing diverse spheres of labor and other groups when possible. The distinction between a full member and a temporary resident represents the clearer differences between Honey Locust culture and

that of mainstream society. Evidence of this distinction—in the form of passive indifference toward some visitors—can render acculturation a daunting process for newcomers. What visitors experience throughout the struggle to integrate is a necessary consequence of the community's efforts to construct a type of society that does not operate by the rules and conventions of the cultural mainstream. Regulating influences from the outside world helps to engender a cohesive internal community bound by a shared vision of “otherness”.

Distance and Estrangement

You'd think that you need a hazmat suit to enter Babylon the way some people here talk about it—in reality most of us are from Babylon. To some degree Babylon brought us here. (Dane)

The marked cultural distinction between Honey Locust and mainstream society demonstrates a common thread found throughout examinations of experiments in alternative and communal living. Intentional communities as self-defined efforts to purposefully construct the essence of “community” have often been successful in sculpting new types of social organization strengthened by distance from outside influences. For many rural communities the fact of geographical isolation from influences of the mainstream clearly signals a true sense of this distance. For others (but not limited to any type of setting) distance is established with respect to more clearly evident physical markers such as clothing and hair style, e.g. Amish or Hare Krishna traditional dress, hippie males with long hair or dreadlocks, and hippie females with dreadlocks and body hair, etc.

Some writers have expressed that a marked separation or “estrangement” from the cultural mainstream is a fundamental aspect of intentional communities as “utopian experiments” (Suvin 1973; Sargisson 2007). For intentional communities, as Sargisson writes, estrangement establishes the necessary space, facilitates group coherence, and encourages individuals' freedom

to come together to work cooperatively to realize some better form of existence. To be “estranged” is the suggestion that the community exists outside of normative structures or restraints. It operates with regard to its own standards and conventions, ones which encourage experimentation and discovery in terms of the self and of the group. Maintaining a degree of estrangement from the surrounding culture encourages the possibility that social reality is not rigidly structured as it appears to be out there, but instead is malleable, subject to creative innovation.

If a group exists in a protected space, its members can more easily focus on their collective vision and internal dynamics. However, intentional communities also need to be dynamic, and to evolve, adapt, and change. Strangely perhaps, estrangement can also facilitate this process. The tension between cohesion and stagnation presents a persistent challenge to all intentional communities, one which causes crisis and conflict. In order to negotiate and resolve problems, the community needs to represent a space into which the members can retreat and inside which they can reflect, debate, and negotiate the challenge. (Sargisson 2007:398)

Communitarian Identity

Community members do not materialize by accident. Membership takes time and investment—commitment to immersion into a social order that is inspired by alternative culture. To a mainstream “Babylonian” this community life would seem radical because to an outsider it is. Harmonious community existence is dependent on creative problem-solving and the hard work of dedicated members, but what qualitatively sets the community apart from Babylon is its equal insistence upon the importance of play and leisure. As one veteran member put it, “we take work seriously...but we take play seriously too.” In the community setting, what emerges from this philosophy is a way of life that doesn’t feel so radical for very long. It becomes evident that the ease with which the relatively gentle yoke of labor at the community can still financially support a population of Honey Locust’s size is not the blessing of some fluke, loophole, or low

standards. The community maintains a high quality of life regarding diet and healthcare (including optic and dental care) and access to any basic needs—and most wants—as a result of community income that is distributed toward community necessities, savings, and equally between all members (monthly stipends are currently \$175 a member). To most Americans, this modest income would be lacking. For the communitarian however, relief from exploitive measures of capitalist society—economic conditions and competition damaging to culture and humanity—trading some measure of earthly wealth may not seem all that tortuous given the safe standard of living and the social harmony the exchange allows in the community context. Certainly to long term members, the possibility of going back to mainstream society has lost most of its appeal.

Immersion into the community is marked by transition on many kinds of fronts; old conventions and strategies used to navigate an unforgiving society gradually fall away while the natural communitarian underneath is revealed. The process is well recognized by members who have watched it unfold many times:

People come here with all of this persona that has been finely tuned, perfected in the place they came from. But it takes a little while and the girls' makeup comes off, some of the "Babylonian" attitudes start to fall away, and you gravitate to community mindedness. (Nick)

The gradual shedding of one's old cultural skin is the first sign of an acculturative community process that is really an ongoing phenomenon, continuously affecting all members: "Here we're all in a rock tumbler, rocking off one another, polishing each other" (Manuel).

Transition to community mindedness for many community members is accompanied by the selection of a "Honey Locust name", which assists in symbolically establishing a community identity. Some 40% of the community members go by a name other than their family-given one.

The adoption of a new name marks for the communitarian the transition from mainstream life to a new type of existence that is characterized by self-determination—the ability to choose one’s social identity rather than have one assigned from above. The practice of taking a new name can be compared to rites of passage common to many cultural and spiritual traditions. Common to Abrahamic faiths and also seen in various Indian, East Asian, Native American, and other traditions, the practice of taking a new or additional name with special spiritual significance traditionally accompanies an individual’s transition to a more spiritually-enlightened or transitory status (Berry 2010). In the context of Honey Locust, the phenomenon is probably the most relatable to traditions derived from the hippie generation and the community movements inspired in the 1960s and 70s. Alternative naming themes that do not seem to have altered much from these later decades of the last century still include allusions to the natural world—names like Sunflower, Yarrow, Leaf, Meadow, Sage—to figures of religious or spiritual traditions—Abraham, Om, Shanti—and on to countless varieties of other individualized monikers. The tradition of personal re-branding influences aspiring communitarians during their initial foray into the alternative community environment. It appears to be a common occurrence to see new notes on the community message board to the effect of “Person X will now be going by _____”.

Re-defining one’s persona in the name of community signals a departure from the statuses an individual has held within mainstream culture. It marks the task of integrating into a new social reality—from a structural standpoint, one that defines itself in terms of its opposition to normative Babylonian structures: impersonalism, detachment, exploitation, and sterilized networks of relationships based on “the contract” (Gottschalk 1975; Katz 1966), rather than on more fundamental needs of the human being. The communitarian also grasps at a persona that

can exist in harmony with the rest of the community, though this does not imply that every individual likes and enjoys the company of each other member of the community—dissonances are bound to arise occasionally and large communities like Honey Locust will generally institute community-devised strategies for resolving interpersonal conflicts; this community refers to these kinds of exercises as “mediations”, which are not typically held publicly.

Archetypes

An interesting topic of conversation surfaced one night as members were identifying certain other members of the community as embodying the personality traits of various characters of a television show. The point was brought up that at Honey Locust, this “archotyping” of individuals seems to be a strategy inadvertently used to place community members into some common referential context. In other words, it was natural for members to use pre-existing conceptions of identity and character to “orient” others of the community into some type of scheme that was practical, at least on a superficial level. The process of *switching* archetypes—as a measure of integrating into the community—was discussed as well. Sarah says: “The people who find this community were out-of-place out in Babylon...they were probably the ‘black sheep’ of their families”. And Jesse offers: “Here I’m the sports guy; I come from a sports family...but to [my family] I’m the weird hippie”.

Sometimes carving out one’s place in the context of the community is influenced by the particular projects an individual takes on. The labor system encourages members to pursue their own niche and to personally invest in what they feel can be contributed to the community. One member who has taken on the remodeling of an art studio space comments:

The nice thing about community is that you personally can benefit from the work you put in. You have a sort of claim to something you create or help to create. I

put time and effort into the studio because I feel now that I need that type of space to continue to grow and evolve with my art. But the deal is once you leave, your claim to it is gone. (Dane)

Dane's claim refers to the idea that although the studio will remain a public community space, his personal work will be reflected in the benefit to his goals personally. Remodeling efforts are also undertaken in more individualized spaces like personal shelters, but as Dane expresses, these projects offer individual benefit for only as long as those members occupy them. If a member leaves the community or merely moves to a different dwelling, hours spent on that personal investment are transferred back to the general community, becoming available to new members.

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The significance of community identity and especially its relationship to the outside world will be a recurrent theme throughout this paper. The communities in this study each demonstrate this relationship and its effects in myriad ways according to their own cultural and historical context. In the following chapter we will examine how a common spiritual backdrop serves to imbue markers of community identity in the discussion of Bhakti Farm.

Bhakti Farm ISKCON Community

Bhakti Farm is a Hindu-offshoot spiritual community affiliated with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON). The community was established in the early 1970s on a stretch of rural farmland in the eastern United States. The community population spans three generations of membership and is distributed between properties both community and now privately-owned in a roughly one-and-a-half mile radius of the temple grounds, which lies at the heart of the community.

Population

Some sixty individuals comprise this community although only around half of this number participate in regular community life today. The rest have only intermittent contact with community headquarters (the temple grounds), mostly during Sunday gatherings, feasts, and a handful of festivals throughout the year. The community's founding members are aging, leaving the community's destiny uncertain, particularly regarding the degree to which their children (the second generation) may choose to involve themselves in community life in the future. Nevertheless the community has sustained a healthy population and a basic labor force, and in addition to the old devotees and families who have called the community home for four decades, the farm¹⁰ has attracted a string of successive new members and families in the past twenty years.

¹⁰ Used colloquially at the community "the farm" refers to all of the property and residences in contact with some of the community's 10,000 acres.

The ISKCON Context

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is the title of a religious movement derived from a succession of spiritual teachings that inherits much of its cultural orientation from the 15th and 16th century Bengali figure Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Believed by devotees to be the dual incarnation of Lord Krishna and his wife and consort Radhe, Lord Chaitanya, the manifestation of both of these personalities, founded the Gaudiya (referring to the region of present day West Bengal and Bangladesh) school of Hindu “Vaishnavism”, referencing the religious sect of the *Vaishnavas*, followers of Vishnu as opposed to those of Shiva, who are often referred to as *Shaivaites*. This school of Vaishnavas believe that Lord Krishna is the principle supreme form of Vishnu.

Lord Chaitanya and the followers of his spiritual movement popularized the *Bhakti* form of yoga, which inspires the main forms of religious practice of Gaudiya Vaishnavas, including those of ISKCON. These devotees believe that around 5000 years ago, upon the last disappearance (bodily death/departure from Earth) of Lord Krishna in his original form (the blue god), humanity entered into the *Kali Yuga*, the final stage of the cosmological cycle denoting the spiritual evolution of all mankind. The age of Kali represents humans in their lowest form of spiritual degeneration. They no longer have abilities to regularly connect or maintain relationships with sources, forces, or personalities of divine energy. The lives of humans during the Kali Yuga shorten, hampered by disease. Rampant problems plague humanity: conduct of compassion and mercy decreases, violence and oppression reign; corruption and sexualization of the formerly pure pervades in all societies.

Because of this inherent dis-ease of our current age, the content of original spiritual practice is disrupted. Human beings, who could in the so-called “Golden Age” or *Satya Yuga*, at

the beginning of the cycle, maintain a more or less constant line of contact with the divine, can no longer do so. Where life itself was once defined in terms of spiritual principles, they are now essentially absent. Lord Chaitanya, preaching some 4600 years into the age of Kali thus devised a system of Krishna worship that downplayed the importance of direct personal contact with divine energy, substituting instead a system of worship of the supreme *personality* of godhead. Essentially this “Bhakti Yoga” is a path of reverence for Krishna as he lived on earth: he is revered as a deity (or *the* deity) certainly, but also as a person with a family, friends, and numerous pastimes from throughout his life, which are taught and depicted by devotees and in ISKCON settings. Humans today, as materialistic, relatively aspiritual beings, can come into Krishna’s graces by pleasing him with attention to qualities of his existence that are material as they are divine.

A significant contribution of temple communities like Bhakti Farm is their attunement toward caring for Krishna in the form of his various historical manifestations. In Vaishnava temples these are represented in the form of highly cherished statuettes, usually in pairs, depicting a form of Krishna along with typically, one of his “expansions”¹¹. The deities are the symbolic center of the temple community, and every religious function conducted is devoted to their presence. Bhakti Farm cares for two deity sets: the first, named “Sri Sri Gaura-Nitai” presents Lord Chaitanya and Lord Nityananda (Nityananda being a later reincarnation of Balarama, i.e. Krishna’s brother and a sort of spiritual twin), and the second, “Sri Sri Radha-Radhakanta” depicting Radhe and Krishna (“Radhakanta” translated as “the one loved by Radhe”). Caring for the deities requires careful attention to their needs several times each day, which includes meal offerings, requirements of their bathing, fresh sets of clothes, and so forth,

¹¹ An “expansion” refers to an individual who lived contemporaneously with Krishna in an earthly form; popularly depicted expansions include Balarama, Krishna’s brother, and Radhe, his wife.

with each day's ritual-responsibilities meticulously scheduled. Satisfying the various needs of the deities is an important aspect of the labor responsibilities of the resident Brahmins, although members of the general community population frequently assist as well, notably in the preparation and offering of meals.

Srila Prabhupada and the Hare Krishnas

In 1966, at the behest of his Guru, Srila Prabhupada (known within the movement as A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada) left India for New York City, to begin his mission to spread Krishna Consciousness around the world. Taking advantage of a fertile network of alternative culture developing in the West, Prabhupada was able to expand the movement impressively, initiating hundreds of converts and establishing ISKCON temples around the United States, before surging forth to other continents. Devotees¹² to Krishna and Prabhupada's message, became colloquially knowns as the "Hare Krishnas", in light of the 16-word "Mahamantra" which emerges to define the group. Each of the three words of this mantra are terms denoting God. It follows:

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna
 Krishna Krishna Hare Hare
 Hare Rama Hare Rama
 Rama Rama Hare Hare

¹² A devotee in the context of Bhakti Farm can be of the first or second generation, initiated or not, who has nonetheless regularly participated in community functions in association with Krishna Consciousness. Many second generation members are thus grandfathered in with respect to this distinction despite some waning participation in later years.

“Who is a Hare Krishna? Someone who chants Hare Krishna” (Dhira Hari, 1st Generation). Use of the Mahamantra accompanies most rituals and ceremonies of the Gaudiya Vaishnavas. Its centrality within the movement is a hallmark of Bhakti practice. It is simple, easy to remember, and its power is believed to be amplified when it is chanted in large groups. Just as Prabhupada labored to spread Krishna Consciousness through the dissemination of literature (it is said he arrived in New York City with nothing but a trunk full of books) and outspoken confidence in the principles of just living, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had undertaken a similar effort to spread the Mahamantra chant throughout India five centuries ago. For initiated members, reciting the mantra to one’s self is a ritual obligation. These devotees chant using prayer beads, performing the mantra on each of the 108 beads, sixteen times around the whole string. This practice is called *Japa*, and ideally is performed daily. “When you chant Hare Krishna, Krishna is dancing on your tongue” (Tulsi Ganga, 1st Generation).

Community Arrangement

The temple community consists of the people residing within the originally-established domain of the temple, a piece of mostly developed land of some 40 acres. Around 25 people, including three young families comprise this group. Residence on the temple grounds requires regular service (devotional or more general types of labor). The roles of most of these adults include those of cooks, priests (Brahmins), and male monks (Brahmacaris). The community president, his wife, and two longtime grounds laborers also reside in the temple grounds. The rest of the community is dispersed along the patchwork of pasture access roads and county routes that surround the temple grounds within a radius of approximately a mile and a half. Although these members are not technically required to provide any routine service to the community, around half of this extended network of devotees are present on temple grounds on at least a

somewhat routine basis. However, only a small number (<10), are present more than once or twice per week, at least as was the case in the summer months of my visit. The number of community members, particularly of younger generations, making regular visits to temple grounds or participating in events and activities is likely to diminish a fair amount during the school year when many college-aged members of devotee families live away from home.

Participation in community functions for the rest of the extended population appears to be infrequent, limited primarily to attendance during religious festivals and feasts at the temple grounds, which typically host a significant number of devotees from outside of the community as well. While members residing away from temple headquarters still undoubtedly identify with the Bhakti Farm community and ISKCON, the general trend in recent decades toward pursuing work outside of the community has resulted in a gradually-lessened degree of direct participation for many adult members, although a few are still present on nearly a daily basis. And as suggested, the entrance into adulthood for the second generation has for some, resulted in a significant geographical detachment from community life for much of the time.

The widely-varying degrees to which various extended community members (including whole families) are involved with the organized function of operations on the temple grounds render precise reckoning of the overall community population (and its sub-population groups) somewhat difficult. In addition to the approximately 25 individuals living on the temple grounds, only around 15 people in the extended are observed to be well-immersed in community life, meaning they may attend temple regularly (there is a service every morning and other rites are performed throughout the day and evening). Or, they may come to take (eat), or help prepare, *prasadam*, meaning “offered food” i.e. for the deities, which is thereafter consumed by devotees at mealtimes. Often they simply congregate at the temple to socialize and otherwise maintain

relationships. The 20 or so members residing in lands adjacent to the temple but who are not regularly engaged, i.e. do not frequent temple grounds on a regular basis—bring the overall active population to 60, with an added reckoning of members presently residing away from the community for much of the time (such as second generation-students) bringing the number of the whole closer to 80, if only during certain intervals.

Generations of Membership

Of the many intentional communities founded since the 1960s, one might venture to say very few have been able to measure success in terms of the growth and stable presence of member-families the way Bhakti Farm has been able to. Of the community's current 13 families, at least seven had early beginnings at the farm, with an estimated 25-30 children born to devotee families between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s. These children comprise the group now known as the second generation, who appear to be between the ages of 18 and 35. At least five third generation members also live at the community today.

In the wake of the establishment of the community's first families, Bhakti Farm has welcomed over the years the integration of numerous other families and individuals into the community. Devotees and their families from around the United States as well as from other countries have been successful in establishing residences at ISKCON farming communities. It is commensurate with the spiritual ideals of the community to welcome devotees when they seek a home within the movement, and at Bhakti Farm arrangements are possible to make with regard to families coming from many different places. The three young families living on the temple grounds are each recently derived from overseas—one from Peru and the others from Bengal, the geographical origin of the movement. The community is home to an impressive array of ethnicities, including those coming from India, Russia, Latin America, and Polynesia. The

founding generation is itself derived from around the United States, responding to Prabhupada's call to establish farm communities in the early days of the movement.

Unmarried *Brahmacaris*, meaning “celibate pursuers of the divine” also constitute a regular portion of the population. These monks, who are more accustomed to regular travel between ISKCON communities, might spend a few months or years with a particular community before moving on to do work with other temples. However some are long-term members, as at least three of this community appear to be. Lastly, the community at a given time may be host to collections of laborers who are not necessarily devotees. Gardeners, primarily, comprise this group, which today includes WWOOF (worldwide opportunities on organic farms) workers who come for weeks and months to volunteer labor in exchange for food and a living space. This is the general type of niche occupied by myself during my stay. I sought out work in the land and offered assistance elsewhere if it was needed, such as in the kitchen at times, particularly during Sunday feasts and other larger events.

Element of Space

The Bhakti Farm community owns upward of 10,000 acres of rural woodlands and pasture. The temple grounds, comprising the central domain of the community, take up a small fraction of the total area, approximately 40 acres, while various plots of undeveloped land and pasture comprise the bulk of the rest. Although the community has greatly expanded from the modest size of its earliest days, the temple area still functions as a primary crossroads for social interaction at the farm. The temple community was initially established on only a few hundred acres; further parcels were acquired over the years as neighboring properties became available. A major initial incentive to acquire further resources in land was the community's goal to accommodate cattle, for the sake of their protection and their Vaishnava-Hindu spiritual

association. The later shift toward movement of families off of the temple grounds provided further incentive to retain land and property. Some of it has been acquired on an individual basis as it had become available and could remain separate from community-reckoned property in the future, if not ultimately purchased by the organization.

While the community's immediate surroundings are quite rural, it lies not far from a span of well-populated cities, including one whose own temple community established the initial framework of Bhakti Farm in the 1970s by way of planting gardens, purchasing the community's first cows, and repurposing old buildings for community needs. Eventually a subset of these workers elected to remain on the farm full time as the new ISKCON community was established. New devotees from elsewhere in the country soon followed. First directives to establish the farm came from Swami Prabhupada, who also designated the community with its official ISKCON name two years later.

The establishment of farm communities was an important priority of ISKCON in the early days of its development, as expressed by Prabhupada in a letter to a disciple in the United States:

Our farm projects are an extremely important part of our movement. We must become self-sufficient by growing our own grains and producing our own milk, then there will be no question of poverty. So develop these farm communities as far as possible. They should be developed as an ideal society depending on natural products not industry. Industry has simply created godlessness, because they think they can manufacture everything that they need. Our Bhagavad-Gita philosophy explains that men and animals must have food in order to maintain their bodies. And the production of food is dependent on the rain and the rain of course is dependent on chanting Hare Krishna. (Prabhupada correspondence to Rupanuga, 1974)

Bhakti Farm and other ISKCON farm projects were thus established to accomplish structural and ecological goals similar to those of many kinds of intentional communities, namely through

ideals of self-sufficiency and the creation of a type of social organization better suited to the needs of humans of the modern age. Its rural setting has greatly enhanced the community's degree of separation from mainstream society, particularly during the earliest days of development.

Our mentality was that of pursuing a separation from society. We were mostly on our own but there was this real communal energy. We slept on the floor, cooked, ate together. We bought toothpaste communally—everything was an experiment in group dynamics. Building, creating—we spent years working on fences, reinforcing old particle board structures—none of us were carpenters. (Dhira Hari)

The lush beauty of the community property and surrounding area spells a visceral attraction to the place, as one second-generation member expresses: “What holds me to this place, aside from my family? I live in paradise. We’re so blessed...clean, awesome water, trees...great air. In cities people are not allowed to live this way” (Sanjaya, second generation). The ability to accommodate and care for cows on community land also allows a measure of service to Krishna not available to urban temple communities. Cows are considered sacred to Vaishnavas as they are to virtually all Hindu sects. Cows within most Indian religious traditions are enduring symbols of the generosity and life-giving properties of the Lord. The peacefulness and docility of cows also symbolize elements of the most virtuous of the “three modes of material nature”. *Sattva guna* (the mode of goodness), leads those who embody it to purity, wisdom, and peace; the other two modes, those of passion (*rajo guna*), and ignorance (*tamo guna*) influence the characteristics and behaviors of humans in various imperfect ways. Gaudi Vaishnavas believe that a firm association with cows, the most sacred animal, can only assist in establishing the positive spiritual traits necessary to open one's soul to Krishna and to devote the self entirely to his service and love (*bhakti*). Members of Bhakti Farm maintain that an honored

responsibility to cows of the community translates to direct and valuable service to Krishna, who was himself a dedicated cowherd. Depictions of the youthful Krishna (often referred to as *Gopala*, meaning “cow-protector”) in the company of cows adorn many a Vaishnava temple and altar, and are present throughout ISKCON literature. “Always central is service to the deities; we care for the cows as our kids” (Tulsi Ganga).

Evolving Community

Most temples do not have the ability to incorporate or reckon so many families or different types of living situations or arrangements, and within such a close vicinity to the temple. (Gopinatha, 1st Generation)

The general availability of space continues to define much of the structure of the Bhakti Farm community in the present day. In the 1980s, as permanent membership had become quite established, a new reality, one characterized by the presence of families, had begun to overtake the community. Families and devotees not engaged in full time religious service were asked by management to move off of the main temple grounds and into more private properties adjacent to them. This development seems to have been fairly unique in the context of the Hare Krishna movement for it allowed an opportunity for devotee parents to raise their families away from any potentially dominating ideological influence of temple authorities while still allowing for regular involvement with community life. It also implied that the income generated by these devotees employed away from the community (outside employment as part of the “deal” of the transition) would not be directed to community funds. Instead, the economic relationship of these families to the temple organization would more so resemble the relationship the community has with its general donor base, which provides significant funding for the community still today. Temple president Gopinatha comments: “Most of our donor base has to do with cow protection:

American Hindus, animal rights activists, or vegans/vegetarians. Also some support comes from New Age types or those interested in yoga or India in general.”

There appears to be general agreement that the insistence for families to leave temple grounds, some twenty years ago, was a positive change. The temple community could and still does host some young families, notably those coming from abroad, who, unable to fully support themselves independently can in return provide the community valuable service.

It wasn't a bad thing [for some to leave temple property]. It allowed families to evolve more naturally, and it motivated adult children to get out and pursue their own lives, pursue individuality. It made some people, particularly the second generation, think about if they wanted to keep the community in their lives...when it came time for our kids to move out of our [their parents'] houses, they knew they had this solid community foundation here. (Tulsi Ganga)

For the founding generation the degree of independence from details of community operation facilitated the growth of a family-oriented attachment to the whole community when ideological pressures might have otherwise damaged community solidarity.

The community is there for you. It's there to help you, an oasis. Life is so much easier surrounded by friends and family. There are strong advantages to the strong family structure...less substance abuse, infidelity, and so on. (Nimai, 2nd Generation)

Life on temple property commands adherence to a strict set of moral principles, some more easily followed than others, particularly with respect to the second generation. Comparatively more orthodox enforcement was also a significant factor of the transition in the past. The current temple president, as it is told, replaced a more conservative figure in the early 1990s.

Nonetheless, certain temple guidelines must be adhered to, as he explains:

Pressure [to conform to religious guidelines] is of course the most detected in the immediate temple grounds. To reside on this property requires the subscription to

various tenets: no firearms, intoxicants, eating of flesh, etc. This is part of the arrangement people on the property have with temple authority. (Gopinatha)

Overall however, the degree to which individuals maintain a level of contact with the community is up to them:

[Bhakti Farm] is very individualistic. It is largely a voluntary devotional organization which engenders an environment of to a degree, external pressure—and some rules—but remains on most accounts lenient. Our goals are to *inspire* and encourage engagement within spiritual life and Krishna Consciousness. (Gopinatha)

Integrative Mechanisms

For much of the population, religious functions associated with the community serve as an important basis for the maintenance of social ties. As discussed, the temple community follows a variety of religious prescriptions: religious services, rituals, and so forth; temple life is the beating heart of all spiritually-oriented interaction. The individuals who reside near the temple count as the largest segment of the community population with a great (daily) degree of regularized contact with other members of their shared locale, i.e. others on the temple grounds. Regarding members of the extended community, unless they oblige themselves to attend temple on a regular basis, there might be little reason to enter temple land very often—if not for the serving of prasadam (offered food) three times a day. While not taken advantage of by most members—indeed, cooks only prepare food for around 20 people for daily meals—the ready availability of hearty and nutritious food provides an incentive particularly for second generation members living away from the temple to routinely venture back. This group was generally small, but its makeup varied day to day, allowing numerous devotees to maintain social bonds with individuals from all around the community on a regular basis; this opportunity almost certainly

would have been quite significant in years preceding the second generation's widespread transition to their college lives. As it was during my visit, around 20 different second generation members were occasionally present at mealtimes, providing me valuable opportunities to mix with segments of this group, along with other members from near and far spontaneously showing up for the same reason.

Naturally, in a community of families, several of which have called the community home for over 40 years, adults of both generations who have known one another for so long have decades of shared experiences—journeys, achievements, celebrations, and the occasional turmoil—from which to draw a lifetime's memories of community. Bhakti Farm's eldest members have spent the better part of their lives together, and have watched the community evolve and grow, as their own intertwined families (there are at least a few community family inter-marriages) do the same. While family, work, and school typically dominate the lives of most members, limiting the extent to which much of the extended population enters into the old common social space, many devotees maintain social relationships with old friends away from the temple, sharing meals and social gatherings together at each other's homes. The hot and stormy summers of the region especially invite leisurely hours of social front porch-sitting among home-owning devotees, a common pastime of the area.

The loose articulations defining the peaceful equilibrium of community life today confirm the individualistic culture of Bhakti Farm, which allows members to interact with the segments of the extended population with which they feel a natural camaraderie—not necessarily obligation. However, just as the usual spiritual practice and ritual orient and maintain relational structures of the temple community, all of the Bhakti Farm population is continuously obliged to

reaffirm a status of membership within the spiritual community at the behest of ISKCON's strongly participatory calendar of religious holidays, fasts, and festivals.

A very common feature of ISKCON temples in the United States is the tradition of the Sunday feast. Usually open to the public, the Sunday feast at places like Bhakti Farm serves multiple important functions for the extended community. Most importantly, the feast as well as the temple service that precedes it—which includes a *kirtan* (chanting) session and sermon (occasionally given by a visiting swami) each week provides a certain incentive for devotees to participate in community religious events compared with the generalized daily functions of the temple, akin to the draw of any Sunday Christian church service relative to lesser-attended rites outside of the Sabbath. Sunday events are open-door celebrations, meaning that they also draw families and individuals from outside the community to attend. They are free, and for temple communities in larger American cities scores of outsiders can take advantage of ISKCON's generous philosophy regarding food. On one Sunday, I had the opportunity to attend the Bhakti Farm gathering before traveling to another feast taking place at another temple in the region, which was attended by at least one hundred non-devotee residents of the city, who come to eat and socialize. These feasts thus provide ISKCON communities valuable potential to spread Krishna Consciousness to an expanded audience—important for a rural community like Bhakti Farm, with an otherwise limited potential for outreach. While Bhakti Farm's feasts were not typically as well-attended as the one in the city mentioned above, they did typically attract a number of attendees from the surrounding area—occasionally up to 25-30 people—who on occasion might select the temple for use of a special rite, such as a baby-naming ceremony, which did occur on one Sunday of my visit.

More organized and elaborate, numerous Vaishnava festivals also spell large gatherings of devotees and outsiders several times a year. Just as during Sunday feasts, a relatively large proportion of the community is present. Major celebrations, such as those marking the “appearance” (physical birth) of the most distinguished personalities of the Hare Krishna tradition appear to impact community attendance the most, and the two festivals during which I happened to be present—including the biggest of the year, *Janmashtami* (birth of Krishna)—gathered throughout the day and night nearly all of the recognizable population of the community—as well as likely double the membership population in attendees from outside the community, with total attendance easily reaching 200. Major cosmological events such as Janmashtami bring the whole of the community into the same phenomenological fold once again, uniting the population under the powerful spiritual—and communal—auspices that inspired the intrepid development of Bhakti Farm in its earliest days. Devotees of both generations come together to organize and prepare for events: cooking schedules and shifts are devised, as are ritual brahminical responsibilities; the temple and gardens are decorated, songs and dances are rehearsed, and preparations are made for visitors. In the context of a spiritual community that is no longer in its heyday of daily community-wide spiritual participation, religious festivals direct individuals’ energies back to the community, and devotees are immersed for the time being in a temple environment that powerfully affirms their place on a particular cultural and spiritual map. To be surrounded by family and lifelong friends, participating in traditional rites, praising the deities, and chanting Hare Krishna, members are reminded of the significance of community and spirit in full form.

The power of shared experience is true for the high times as well as the low. Bhakti Farm’s rural location makes for a perfect site on which to host large celebrations and events, to

maintain cattle, and to grow as a community. But rurality can come at a price, especially when it comes to cultural features of the surrounding community and region, which may stand in conflict with perceptions of the Hare Krishnas. Today life at the community is generally peaceful but difficult times of the past are imprinted on community consciousness.

Quite a few things happened in the early days. We had an original barn burned down by vandals. There's been harassment, people messing with the cows. More than one gunpoint encounter. I guess in a way these were growing pains...adapting to the surrounding culture. We outstayed the dangerous days and we're still here, and content. (Jilsara, 2nd Generation)

The surrounding population is comprised primarily of blue-collar poor and farming families. In a U.S. state that is not known for a history of tolerance or acceptance of lesser-known religions or cultural groups, the early years of Bhakti Farm were riddled with uncertainty as to the viability of the area for the devotee cause.

I think it mostly had to do with the mystery of our place compared to what surrounded us. People mostly had only their own ideas to go on with us. We dressed different, ate different. But eventually, as the years went by people must have accepted that we're here. We're peaceful neighbors—but we also shoot guns, trap hogs, tend the fields—we didn't come here to disrupt the area; we share in some of local culture today. (Nimai)

A second generation adult talks about the relationship with peers from outside the community:

Most of us didn't attend school in the local district until high school, on account of [our education system] here. People are still apprehensive; the rednecks that I've known still don't know what to think about us. I've heard someone say "I know two things about Hare Krishnas. They don't fertilize their fields...and they don't eat their cows". (Omkara, 23)

While some friendly relationships seem to exist between community members (more so of the second generation) and their acquaintances in the surrounding area, visits by non-devotees to the community have been rare, leaving the community youth to their own circles for much of

the time. Like their parents' generation, uncertainty from the outside world might spell difficulty in the building of meaningful relationships with people outside of the community¹³. Yet consequently, the group has been able to build an intensely integrated (recall mention of inter-marriages) network of relationships, supported by experiences drawn from growing up together.

Passing the Torch

Bhakti Farm's second generation occupies an interesting place within the community. While the group has diminished in size—many away at school or living in other cities of the region—around a dozen still live and work out of the community, while others still make frequent visits back for festivals or other opportunities to gather. Perhaps the most important factor for integration of the second generation was the *gurukula* schooling system. The *gurukula* system (sometimes referred to as “ashram”) in popular use at Bhakti Farm was (it has now been decommissioned) inspired by an Indian system of residential schooling, in which students live near or at their place of education. Although the youth of this community continued to live with their families away from the *gurukula*, much of their daily life—up through 7th or 8th grade—was oriented around peer-based education, taking place at a building on temple grounds constructed for that purpose. At the height of its use, a handful of devotee teachers were being tasked with the education of 35-40 children of the community. So seldom has an ISKCON community maintained a successful on-site system of education that the *gurukula* attracted a number of devotee families from around the United States—many of which are now gone—around the 1990s, contributing decently to the community's overall size at that time. Classes were organized

¹³ The Hare Krishna's perception of the state of otherness defining their cultural movement is reflected in their term *karmi*, used to refer to the “materialists” of mainstream culture. This term is in colloquial use in both generations of the farm.

in sections each roughly equivalent to a span of three grades. One devotee mother of five speaks of days of gurukula:

I helped organize and teach at the ashram, grades five, six, and seven. We [teachers] covered basic subjects as well as religious ones. We'd cover prayers, scriptures, songs, reading from the Gita. It was very successful, a handpicked faculty ensuring kids were protected and getting something out of the lessons. Everybody ate together, spent serious time together each day. (Lila Priya, 1st Generation)

The later successes of gurukula graduates have been a testament to the viability of the system to simultaneously enrich students' religious lives and to prepare them for stages of adulthood outside of the community.

Our education was excellent. Everybody had the attention they needed in the classroom. You knew everybody—the students, teachers. We were very comfortable in that environment and it showed. A lot of us, a far greater proportion than other students [in public school], were taking college credits early—10th or 11th grade. We were integrated into the public high school but our experiences even there were different. Many of us excelled and graduated early, went on to post-secondary and so on. (Nimai)

Aside from their shared system of schooling, the second generation has spent years socially engaged with one another. They have come together at festivals and celebrations, to perform skits, play music, and enjoy the festivities. They have played games and sports together, explored the community land, taken trips, and have spent childhood and adolescence growing and maturing together.

Our parents started this place, built it from the ground up in every way. They started here in poverty and started this community, where we did a hell of a lot of things [...] compared to the rest of the people around [in the outside world]; we got out so much more, going to other temples and festivals around the country, meeting hundreds or thousands of people, not to mention taking trips to India itself, which nearly all of us [second generation] have been able to do. (Radhanath, 2nd Generation)

The prolonged presence and participation of the second generation in community life has helped Bhakti Farm preserve some of the energy that was so prevalent in the early days of the community. The younger generation has forged a strong network of relationships that continues to endure when these individuals come together. During the summer months, when a number of these adults, ages 18-40 are again together at the community, they maintain their form of camaraderie in ways reminiscent of their parents' generation: they hold weekly communal "Wednesday night dinners" at each other's homes and at shared community spaces; they talk about Krishna and the nature of ISKCON philosophy or merely chat over current community or other matters. Birthdays are celebrated, bonfires are had, and hours are spent in relaxed company together with food, music, and the land. There are identifiable cliques within the community—small groups separated by age or by particular types of interests, or by degrees of subscription to ISKCON creed—but lines between these groups are generally blurred; social events like Wednesday dinners are mixed, attended by individuals typically representing at least a half dozen devotee families, and now a few third generation children as well.

The second generation, for the extent of their lives spent at the farm, have generally remained involved with community affairs and as a relatively active segment of the overall population. But they occupy an ambiguous position within the community, regarding the extent to which they might willfully accept the torch as it passes from the aging founding generation, which has steadily reached silver-haired status. A major cause for uncertainty lies in the younger generation's varying levels of adherence to a traditional type of ISKCON value structure.

In the early 90s we were in the thick of transitioning to a dispersed from a consolidated community. We are healthy today because we were able to adapt to the changing needs of families. [Ex-] President [...] ordered policies that were no longer fitting to the realities of where we had gone as a community. He stepped down. (Tulsi Ganga)

Although the popular movement of families off of temple land was certain to have consequences for areas of community organization and reckoning, it was not necessarily reflected in any real shift in many senior members' conventions of propriety, particularly within the bounds of the temple, an area that would remain a go-to source of youthful interaction with one's peers, as established in the days of the gurukula.

We had youth-group, a sort of precursor to today's Wednesday dinners, but with a few more organized activities that could keep us engaged in our adolescent and early teenage years. It was a healthy thing, to get together with your friends and have it organized so people would actually turn out for it. But of course normal things like crushes happened between people, some adults were uncomfortable and we were forced to disband. (Jilsara)

While being raised within ISKCON makes certain strong impressions on younger minds (for instance I would not anticipate the offspring of a devotee to readily eat meat, and certainly not beef), the degree to which second generation devotees can appreciate some traditional elements of Vaishnava spiritual culture—such as some conservative separation of the sexes or the wholesale avoidance of all intoxicants, even caffeine—must diminish to an extent—relative to the spirited energy and motivation required of the parental generation, which contributed to the solidification of these ideological structures in the context of the community in early years. The desire to separate from mainstream society motivates the establishment of most intentional communities, but those of a spiritual leaning are inspired under the auspices of something larger than misgivings about society. Founding members were empowered with the notion of a spiritual awakening ordering their efforts, and these were thus directed consciously to God each step of the way, with Prabhupada acting as His intermediary.

Prabhupada built a house the whole world can live in. He spread the notion of a spiritual practice available to everybody. And truly he intended to spread Krishna Consciousness worldwide. (Gopinatha)

It is believed that Krishna's grace guides the ISKCON communities, and is evidenced by the longevity of successful experiments like Bhakti Farm:

This is a spiritual family. We are more family than family. All of our shared goals go back to Him. People here are 'sold out' to Krishna. We have no doubt in the philosophy of Prabhupada. We have been given determination. The goal is to please Krishna always; this overcomes the petty personal differences. Our focus here is about as strong as it gets...this is what gives farm communities a unique flavor. (Tulsi Ganga)

The second generation unquestionably inherits a certain reverence for Krishna, but as they journey into adulthood the cultural factors that might have influenced the confident initiation of their parents into Krishna Consciousness decades ago may no longer have the same dramatic impact. Of the 25 or so second generation devotees I would encounter over my stay, I believe only one or two had been initiated. The prayer beads characteristically carried by initiated devotees (on which to perform one's daily 16 rounds) are virtually absent within the second generation. The consensus regarding spiritual pursuits—compared to the preceding generation—is tentative.

When a student reaches out to a guru with the intention to be initiated, the guru takes the initiate's prayer beads and chants on them first. With this process the guru inherits all of the negative karma of the initiate, and transfers it via his succession of gurus all the way back to Godhead. In this way it is absolved. When you enter into this succession, you are given your spiritual name and are purified. For this reason, only those determined to live by the four principles [henceforth] should pursue initiation.¹⁴ (Nimai)

Much of the second generation thus exists in a prolonged state of limbo with regard to a future with institutionalized Krishna Consciousness. These devotees, while appreciative of having

¹⁴ Four Principles: truthfulness, cleanliness, compassion, and austerity are satisfied with abstaining from gambling, illicit sex relations, eating meat, and intoxication, respectively.

grown up in the context of a tight-knit community, nonetheless may question whether the religion chosen by their parents can continue to be practically integrated into their own lives, as they also consider what a future away from the community might hold.

Our parents—of the hippie generation—were turning against the pitfalls of society, or Babylon, or whatever you call it...and pursuing a culture that seemed right to them at the time. That brought them here. Now we [the second generation] are [still] basically asking ourselves the same questions, about where we should go as individuals, what other possibilities are out there...do we have to challenge the status quo too? (Jilsara)

Evolving Spirit

Aspects of the future may hang in the balance, but many members see the community's transition to later stages of existence to reveal predictable—and necessary—changes in the evolution of Bhakti Farm as well as Krishna Consciousness. While many second generation devotees have gone on to pursue lives outside the immediate purview of the movement, a handful of this more youthful population have remained at the farm, invested in the life of the community. Like the founding generation, they have taken up various jobs and roles within and outside the community; they raise families and participate in community functions—some more than others. They now seek to satisfy needs akin to those that were addressed by their parent-generation, which are both economic and family-based—but with an enduring spiritual dimension as well. This is not a new phenomenon, but one that has been playing out since the 1980s and 90s, when the founding generation was shifting from the communalism of the temple to family lives nearby. Dhira Hari, who made this transition recalls:

Some devotees evolved. They went back to school, got certifications, started up restaurants, became truckers, massage therapists—all kinds of things. Education had begun to be—and remained to be—very important to us. Expanding one's potential is useful for the spread of Krishna Consciousness. Everything can be used in His service.

As Dhira Hari's five children currently enter into a stage of transition he remains hopeful that the seeds for peaceful and just living are being cast, and that society is becoming more and more susceptible to positive evolutionary growth all the time:

Society yearns to live simply. But most people don't know it yet. Today society is receptive to spiritual dialogue at an unprecedented level. It's the evolution of consciousness. First society laughs, then it attacks, then it accepts. Dogmatism is part of our childhood. It has to be overcome. Hare Krishnas aren't worried, especially today. Being part of this used to be something you had to hide with a stocking cap¹⁵. But times change.

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Despite some lingering questions, the community today appears to remain in a relatively healthy state. In the autumn following my departure it introduced another annual celebration, the Cow Festival, which has enjoyed high exposure and attendance. It features a performing lineup of well-known ISKCON-associated musicians and dancers, great expanses of food, and foremost a celebration and fundraising effort on behalf of Bhakti Farm's beloved cows.

After a years-long lull in efforts to develop the community's garden, the management has welcomed a well-known ISKCON-affiliated gardener who has attracted a productive rotation of volunteer gardeners in his wake. A new greenhouse has been constructed in the past year as well, to aid in the further expansion of garden capabilities. For hopeful devotees, the prospect of moving further toward self-sustainability is an attractive option, and with the community's two affiliated restaurant locations in the surrounding area it could be a very promising economic arrangement as well. As one second generation member potentially opening up a third location expresses: "We're so close to tying everything together. We've got an amazing amount of space, and the available personnel for it. The garden is the secret key to the future of Bhakti Farm"

¹⁵ Here Dhira Hari refers to the *sikha*, a tuft or lock of hair traditionally grown out by devotee men, identifying them as part of the movement.

(Sanjaya). Additionally, within ISKCON, there has been discussion regarding the establishment of an aging care facility on one of the temple communities in the United States, and Bhakti Farm is being considered as a potential site. The community is a long way from commencement of the project, but should it go forth, it would undoubtedly bring dramatic changes to the farm and also a potential economic boon.

The management of the community has also undergone a transition in recent years, as temple president Gopinatha has stepped down from primary organizational duties, clearing the way for the establishment of a community board to handle major decisions instead. While the community had maintained an informal cabinet in prior years, this decision was made to ensure a more representative system of political discourse, with the spotlight mostly falling on members of the second generation to take the reins in commanding the destiny of the community. Whether or not this particular goal is realized (one source tells me that at least two younger members are participating) the move mirrors similar developments at other ISKCON temples in the United States, and reflects the movement's task of adapting its message to an evolving membership base.

The Concept of Liminality: A Demonstration of Relevant Literature

One of man's more formidable creative tasks is exemplified by his efforts to alter the social structures in which he lives. (Robert Hingers 1976)

Creativity defines the intentional community. The establishment of communities may be seen as a response to the perception of pressures or shortcomings as witnessed and experienced by the future communitarians while they have lived as members of the social mainstream. However, clearly, no two communities adapt to the needs of their members in the same ways. But it is the ability—and objective—to react and to respond to pressures while meeting the needs of community members which sets these places apart from mainstream society. This is not to say that intentional communities are necessarily able to decide *how* to function in a formal sense, or have “in mind” an established conception of proper discourse. As Gottschalk (1975) discusses on the topic of the “communal” type of organizations (in contrast with those of the “formal” type), this type of organization—its structural elements and internal mechanisms—emerges as a result of a social process. The inner workings of these organizations are seldom preordained systems of discourse, and political decisions and adjustments are necessary to be made from even a rudimentary stage of community development. It is the strength of intentional communities to maintain a political and cultural atmosphere which allows values structures to evolve alongside and with the community, a process which for example, has been clearly visible from a historical standpoint at Bhakti Farm.

Intentional communities are able to maintain an internal ideological dialogue. Those existing also in a state of relative geographic isolation are allowed to pursue alternative types of solutions in response to group goals or internal obstacles far away from corrupting influences of mainstream society. The urge to occupy forms of existence outside of the norms of conventional

western experience is a firm installation of 1960s and 70s-derived alternative and counter-cultural movements. General values of the movement include emphases on peace, love, and freedom (Westhues 1972). These sentiments are reflected in the surge of interest in consciousness-expansion, psychedelics, and eastern and Native American spiritual traditions. Patrick Conover, writing in 1975, notes that over 35 Eastern religious groups had made impressive gains after years of latency (1975:456). Aside from Bhakti Farm's obvious demonstration of the eastern religious trend, the other two communities I visited for this study were also fertile soil for cultural and spiritual exploration outside of western convention. At Nomad Creek I met fire dancers who spoke openly about psychedelics, out-of-body experiences, and past lives; golden age hippies and polyamorous philosophers spread their messages during events. At Honey Locust a stony hilltop away from the community commons was visited under the full moon in order to imbue crystals and stones with its special energies, and images of mandalas and chakras decorated common buildings. This is the spiritual dimension of alternative communities and of alternative culture. However, these cultural phenomena are not limited to collectives. In fact, it may be argued that certain modern developments in western spirituality in particular can be attributed to the emergence of a "culture of individualism" (Motak 2009). In the modern era accelerated cultural change turns the individual away from the grandiose all-encompassing ideological narratives of the past. Society is characterized by unpredictability and fragmentation, inspiring belief systems toward eclecticism—independently-evolved personal credos to give value to existence in accordance with the individual's "own frame of mind, interests, aspirations, and experience" (Hervieu-Leger 2006). The question to be addressed in this section is this: In this modern social context, how do intentional communities accommodate—and incorporate—the elements of individualism and cultural heterogeneity to foster group cohesion?

Twin Paradoxes

On the subject of pursuing intentional communities as a means to develop a more fulfilling sense of self expression and identity, a pair of complimentary paradoxes must be outlined. The first pertains to conditions of the cultural mainstream: Individuals of complex western society are purported to enjoy something of an unprecedented degree of individual freedom and agency. This is not only a reference to socio-economic mobility, but more accurately to the incredible degree of labor division in our society, among other divisions as well, including ethnic differences, or those related to age, gender, and class, differences related to political persuasions, personal interests, hobbies, education backgrounds and so forth. In terms of societal divisions, in a Durkheimian sense, the markers of identity of the individuals of our society are so variously-derived that the notion that mainstream society has a sort of dominant influence or asserts the adoption of only particular courses of life seems untenable. Why should a society of some much variation and diversity and mobility of different kinds produce such a sense of collective disenfranchisement, including in, as Conover says, white children of affluence (1975:455)—who incidentally comprise much of the communitarian population of this country?

Most folks had money to begin with, this white, upper-middle class group of people who had enough privilege to see that something was off in the world and that they could do something creative about it. Often this is the demographic that pursues this type of stuff. (Jill of Nomad Creek *speaking of the origins of another community with which she is affiliated*)

The second, related paradox pertains to communities as destinations of the disenfranchised: In these comparatively small, often rural and isolated groups, with limited contact with the outside world and all its supposed field of opportunities, communitarians discover the means to discover

themselves—to learn how to express some type of personal identity seemingly unavailable in the outside world. The paradox here is presented in the notion that communitarians would depart from a cultural atmosphere dominated by diversity and individualistic sentiment to pursue instead a type of social world which would appear only to be further limited in its capacity to facilitate compelling new insights or opportunities for personal expansion.

What seems to be part of the explanation with respect to these twin paradoxes is that to be a member of the social mainstream carries with it an identity crisis of sorts for the prospective communitarian. In Ferdinand Tönnies' explanation of the "essential" or "natural" will of the individual, which will be explored further in the next chapter, he outlines the part of the human personality which is derived from experiences based in the onset of life, and namely those of the home environment, family, and an intimate—to a significant degree pre-established—network of social ties. Now, it might be understood that the essence of the intentional community is rooted in desires to reclaim pieces of the natural will¹⁶, as indicated in the accounts of interviewees: references to the significance of kinship and geographical familiarity to community life is alluded to in accounts from all three sites. However, as attractive as these features of community life may be, they cannot necessarily overshadow or replace individually-held constructions of the natural will derived from pre-communitarian existence (except of course in cases of community-born second generations).

"You'd think that you need a hazmat suit to enter Babylon the way some people here talk about it—in reality most of us are from Babylon. To some degree Babylon brought us here"

¹⁶ Tönnies; "natural" v. "rational" modes of will. The natural will (*Wesenwille*) refers to the sort of volition which is not calculated; it is acting on behalf not of that which is to come but what has already passed. It is the product of prior experience and is not employed for the attainment of any particular end. It is more or less unconscious. Rational will (*Kürwille*) conversely rules action taken as a means to an end.

(Dane of Honey Locust). Whether or not it is generally acknowledged, many communitarians are products of Babylon, and in addition to being born and raised there, first generation communitarians owe their present affiliations with communities to experiences and connections made while still active members of the social mainstream; Babylon itself provided some of the tools necessary to disengage from elements of mainstream life. Community life still exists within one's conception as derived from a point of reference anchored ultimately in pieces of the cultural mainstream. Be that as it may, very few members of (particularly rural) intentional communities would likely consider themselves to be a current member of the mainstream. The identity of the communitarian balances between two worlds: early life in the mainstream, home to relatives, childhood friends, and the institutions that comprise an upbringing—and the world of alternative culture.

The Intentional Community as a Liminal State

Intentional communities as holistic crystallizations of alternative culture have been described as occupying a “liminal” status within the greater western cultural ethos (Van Wormer 2006; Sargisson 2007; S.L. Brown 2002). In Susan Love Brown's *Intentional Community: An Anthropological Perspective*, an anthropological examination of intentional communities, the authors provide a considerable amount of discussion of the role that liminality plays in the construction of community identity. Much of the work of these authors hinges upon Victor Turner's anthropological application of this concept. Turner employed this term to denote a period of transition or transformation in the context of intimate group social life. “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner 1969:359). According to Turner, a liminal period marks the transition of human social relationships from one model to the next:

[The first model for human interrelatedness] is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions [...] The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, [communitas...]. (Turner 1969:360)

If we are to borrow Turner's concepts for the current discussion, intentional communities are to be viewed as a type of distinct social occurrence in the context of our whole society. Specifically, because intentional communities employ alternative types of internal social structures and observe distinctive sets of ideological and cultural conventions and traditions, they can be said to occupy a type of prolonged liminal status for their members. *Communitas* refers to a type of social solidarity in which social divisions are temporarily disregarded, and the true spirit of community is allowed to emerge. According to some writers, it is the ability to maintain liminal status and the sense of *communitas* that develops from it which separates the successful intentional community from those destined for decline. One of the contributing writers of Brown's *Intentional Communities* expresses this sentiment in her overview of the "In Search of Truth" (ISOT) community, a Christian commune:

The members of the ISOT community intentionally create and maintain certain conditions that are amenable to a continuation of *communitas* values, even while playing increasingly structured roles. Through the manipulation of symbols of liminality during secular and sacred ritual they counteract threats to their level of commitment to the group. (Siegler in Brown 2002:64)

As in the case of ISOT, many intentional communities variously utilize their own cultural elements to routinely attain—or maintain—a liminal state. For many, the prevailing cultural milieu characterizing the community environment accomplishes this task on a daily basis. Lucy Sargisson employs the concept of "estrangement" to describe how normative detachment from

mainstream society has the power to challenge perceptions of self and of connections to the social group.

Estrangement in the Case Study Communities

Estrangement is facilitated by space (especially for rural communities) and also by distinctive cultural features of the group. Sargisson's claim is that estrangement helps to engender a greater degree of group cohesion as well as vision (Sargisson 2007). When distinctive cultural features—ideological as well as material—characterize a community in sharp contrast with mainstream society, the community is thusly “set apart from ‘reality’ and utopian visions are powerful because they are estranged” (Sargisson 2007:395). Each of the communities in this study exhibit features that demonstrate this contrast. To illustrate how the element of estrangement impacts each of these groups, and to depict the ensuing state of liminality produced out of notions of cultural difference, I will briefly outline the cultural features of each of these groups which have an impact to this effect.

Honey Locust

This community is characterized by its alternative culture roots and its egalitarian social philosophy, resulting in a type of social organization of the community's 75 members markedly distinguished from prevailing mainstream norms. Individual members own only modest collections of personal possessions, and individual or couple and family dwellings are likewise small; there is scant available indoor space—or desire—for luxury. The community's egalitarian labor structure has a direct impact on social life. Individuals are all held to the same basic labor quota and the vast array of work options—and some required ones—result in an inter-networked and consistently re-combined community population. The community's 1970s alternative culture roots are still visible in the context of community life, demonstrated, for example, in relaxed

views on open nudity, some kinds of drug-use, as well as in popular adoption of Honey Locust names and some common trends with respect to personal appearance: long-haired men, other examples of “hippie style” dress, and tattoos¹⁷. Shared ideological preferences like emphases on environmental consciousness and self-sufficiency also strongly characterize the group, and without question sets it apart from basic social realities of the outside world.

Bhakti Farm

This spiritual community is characterized primarily by the distinctive religious traditions of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, which in the context of the modern movement originally set in motion by Srila Prabhupada is referred to as Krishna Consciousness or ISKCON. This community’s traditionally-conservative observance of established tenets of their brand of Hindu spirituality (directed to Lord Krishna) not only distinguishes the community from the mainstream cultural world, but also from other alternative culture groups and communities, including many derived from the same cultural era of the 1960s and 70s.

As in various traditional cultures, the influences of religion upon daily life are many. Members of the community, particularly those initiated or residing on temple grounds, are expected to abide by a code of just living, entailing dietary restrictions and limits on other vices such as chemical intoxication. ISKCON culture has a significant material dimension as well. Traditional articles of clothing are generally worn for devotional or otherwise festive occasions—women and girls in saris and men in a long style of shirt and loose, billowy pants, called *kurtas* and *dhotis*, respectively. Devotional life is draped in Bengali-style artistic imagery and conducted to Sanskritic chants accompanied by likewise traditional instrumentation.

¹⁷ An interesting trend beginning to emerge during the time of my stay was that of the “mystery tattoo”, in which a tattoo artist would volunteer to ink fellow communitarians without their seeing the design until after completion—with some entertaining results.

Although the intensity driving the movement in its earlier days has waned in some respects, and a few of the lines formerly separating the community from the outside world have blurred—particularly in terms of today’s members’ outside occupations and youths’ public school educations—all of the cultural features described above still remain strongly associated with the community—a now multi-generational entity.

Nomad Creek

At Nomad Creek, the youngest and least integrated community of this study, its generally liminal essence is perhaps the most clearly expressed and demonstrated. This community lacks any notable element of legitimately institutionalized social structures or mechanisms. The community borrows ideological influences from the New Philosophy movement, but lacks any invested population that would require much extensive organization or long-term planning.

While Nomad Creek’s future as an enduring community is uncertain, it embodies a particular sort of *communitas* which Victor Turner referred to as “spontaneous” *communitas*: “Social relations are simplified, while myth and ritual are elaborated [and it is] a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs” (Turner 1969:167). “[Communities and their members] are in a phase of openness, have little or no structure, are committed to equality among their members, and do not seek property” (Siegler in Brown 2002:43). Such descriptions in Turner and Brown describe the atmosphere at Nomad Creek accurately. While Victor remains ambitious in some respects regarding the expansion of the community, the lack of any precedent for community-building has cemented its status for most other members as a mere jumping-off point to future projects elsewhere—although the community remains an effective networking tool with respect to the range of New Philosophy influence in the region and beyond. One element of this philosophy reflected in Siegler’s

comment above about the diminished importance of personal wealth is familiar as expressed in this quote from Isaac:

I came from a very capitalist, corporate world, corporate banks. I became aware of the things that go on in the background of this system that create myriad problems and destroy pieces of the human being. A year and a half ago I started to plan my lifestyle shift. I sold both my condos, gave away all of my things and started to travel, mostly to intentional communities.

The nomads of the community, as Isaac has been (he has travelled to both US coasts, Europe, Africa, and the Pacific in the year since I've met him; he is now settled at a different community) venture into community as an experiment of the self and a challenge to negative elements of the mainstream. Nomad Creek's highlighting of individuality and self-expression and exploration outside of conventional mainstream life is part of what gives the community influence and demonstrates that even within communities of rudimentary structural development, a sense of liminality can contribute to cultivating a sense of shared identity.

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For each intentional community that will endure into the future, there is no question that at a certain point the elements of organization and order—structures of the developing community—must emerge to accompany such underlying forces as serendipity and creativity. The differences between the structures of community and those of society involve differences in the character of the links connecting individuals to others and of those tying people to spheres of community life. As societies grow, becoming increasingly complex and internally varied, the types of links existing within which bind and associate individuals and institutions with others become likewise increasingly diversified.

Fred Katz writes that in complex society, “social networks involve a large and highly variegated set of contacts”, and in modern complex nations, social links join “geographically-dispersed individuals [and between] persons who are ‘separated’ by economic and status differences” (Katz 1966:200). That Katz should specifically denote differences in economic status in this context is significant. Recall Jill’s reference to the three-legged stool in the Nomad Creek chapter¹⁸. The links of our complex society must necessarily incorporate on a comprehensive level a multitude of labor and economic demographics, arranged within a hierarchical class system seemingly in place for the benefit of the upper echelon. This dominant class can, perhaps inadvertently, maintain a favorable status quo in terms of society’s economic structure which can be enforced in top-down fashion via *contracts* detailing methods of cooperation, interaction, and transaction between elements of an organization or between organizations¹⁹ within the overall system. In a market-driven social system ruled by formal organizations, an emphasis on competitive economic growth necessarily depletes our culture’s attention to the other legs of sustainability, those of the ecological and social dimensions of a cultural system.

Katz says that a large portion of a given (professional) individual’s social networks—which provide clues “to the strands which actually hold a society together” (p.200)—undergo phases of latency much if not most of the time, only to awaken for particular purposes, such as job-seeking or other economic pursuits (pp.200-1). This comment might suggest that in today’s culture, social relationships have a significant and disproportionately large economic component, at the expense of other, perhaps more fundamental, dimensions of social life.

¹⁸ See pg. 11

¹⁹ “Organizations” in reference to Gottschalk’s (1975:11) classification of the formal social organization.

Throughout the unraveling phase, people will have preferred (or at least tolerated, the exciting if bewildering trend toward social complexity. But if the crisis mood congeals, people will come to the jarring realization that they have grown helplessly dependent on a teetering edifice of anonymous transactions and paper guarantees. (Strauss and Howe 1997:274)

Paradoxes Revisited

The prospect of a state of liminality within the intentional community presents the opportunity to extend one's social network outside the confines of the overarching subset of cultural institutions which implicitly shape much of our lives and prescribe the conditions and limitations upon social networks in mainstream society. Individuals as products of mainstream society and of western culture, coming to terms with the scope of their own individuality—the notion of a free society—may begin to realize that they face what Garrett Hardin calls “The Tragedy of the Commons”. In his piece of the same name, Hardin outlines the problem as so: a population of free enterprising individuals each bearing incentives to maximize personal gains while dependent on resources shared by all are destined to pursue private interests while ignorant of the precise limitations of the commons, i.e. common resources. In a society unhindered by “tribal wars, poaching, and disease [...] ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons” (Hardin 1968:1244).

It is certain that concerns over environmental exploitation and economic injustices provide structural incentives for intentional communities to emerge. But communitarians are not mere activists; communities by and large are not in the business of improving society, save for perhaps providing a new model (Smith 2002:107). They instead are the basis for an altogether alternative culture and reality. Those best poised to sustain this sense of otherness and to sustain

fertile grounds for community identity to emerge and to nurture it are those slated to succeed into the future.

This is the significance of liminality and the solution to the paradoxes. The key to understanding the attraction of what may appear otherwise to be a lessened cultural field of opportunity is the phenomenon of liminality, and the new transcendent possibilities it can offer to those seeking new ways of life. Communities offer an alternative to the seductive but damaging prospects of Babylon. This metaphysical essence of what the intentional community represents cannot be explained completely in material terms, although material culture certainly plays a role in supporting a liminal state, strongly evident at Bhakti Farm and Honey Locust. It is fundamentally an attraction to other people, and to human-first ideals which drives the membership of communities, in contrast to the individualized goal-oriented culture of the mainstream. Economic advancement or prospects of material accumulation, in the eyes of the communitarian, have little to do with the notion of personal well-being. Joy is to be found through the company of others who share in the journey of finding collective happiness, which can only be obtained away from elements of competitive, potentially asocial elements of mainstream culture. Individualism in the context of mainstream society has become moot to the enlightened communitarian. So-called upward mobility only serves to distance one's self further from foundational elements of human social reality, as will be discussed in the next section with reference to Tönnies' "natural" and "rational" wills of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, respectively. "By the early 2000s, people will no longer be able to deny that [...] individual empowerment has led to antisocial behavior and a dangerous degree of institutional decay" (Strauss and Howe 2007:251).

In essence the liminal state of the modern intentional community provides an escape from structural elements of mainstream society, providing a context for experimentation. In this environment outside of normal reality, it is not the absence of structure that defines the community but the freedom to produce new structures commensurate with both the goals of the group as well as those of individual members as they arise. The transition from social complexity to small integrated collectives constitutes from a social evolutionary perspective, an anomalous transformation in effect. It is the novelty of this type of evolutionary phenomenon, particularly in the modern western context, that inspires the re-use of a typological approach which in the past was reserved for reflections on the more or less “linear” emergence of social complexity. To explore the phenomenon represented by the contemporary adoption of comparatively less-complex models of social organization, the following sections will be devoted to the application of the selected typological schemes as presented by Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies.

Analysis: The Typologies of Durkheim and Tönnies

In order to examine characteristics of intentional communities in light of typological schemes like those of Durkheim and Tönnies, features of each of the case study communities will be examined with reference to core concepts introduced by these theorists. For the sake of rounding out the discussion of intentional communities in general, some contributions of more contemporary ethnographers and researchers of modern intentional communities will supplement data from this study.

Population Size

There is no question that regarding overall population size, the community (*Gemeinschaft*) or societies of the mechanical order of solidarity average a significantly lower number compared to societal types on the opposite (complex) end of the spectrum. Therefore with respect to intentional communities (lower) population sizes relative to more complex integrated societies serve as a basic indication of some distinctive threshold in terms of degrees of internal complexity. The average active populations of each of the communities in the study are 11 at Nomad Creek, 75 at Honey Locust, and 65 at Bhakti Farm. Within smaller groupings of people it is possible to maintain a greater number of familiar relationships. Indeed a powerful factor in compelling individuals to join or remain with (particularly secular) intentional communities is the lessened degree of overall social detachment or anonymity experienced in those types of social environments compared to mainstream life. The smaller populations of these communities relative to urban zones in particular—which incidentally seem to supply many prospective communitarians to their rural destinations—clearly characterize these communities as disposed to a lessened degree of structural complexity and social detachment.

The populations sizes of the case study communities are (based on exposure to numerous American communities through the process of screening for potential fieldwork sites) generally typical of established rural communities. Even the most successful established communities rarely maintain an invested population exceeding 100 individuals²⁰, and emerging communities (like Nomad Creek) may persist for years with population numbers less than twenty or even a dozen individuals. Very few intentional communities—based on population numbers alone—might grow to challenge a general characterization as being structurally-simple types of societies. This conception is based on the general opinion of anthropologists that smaller group size indicates a lesser degree of social complexity. Joseph Tainter provides a general overview with respect to less-complex societies:

Simpler societies are, of course, comparatively smaller. They number from a handful to a thousand persons, who are united within sociopolitical units encompassing correspondingly small territories. [...] One can know most everyone in such a society and can categorize each person individually in terms of position and distance in a web of kin relationships. (Tainter 1988:24)

Kinship

At the foundation of Durkheim's and Tönnies' conception of the "simple" society is unity. Tönnies' basis for unity is essentially derived from the family unit—of blood relatedness and the progression of lineage through successive generations of offspring; he calls the family the "prototype of all unions of *Gemeinschaft*" (Tönnies 192). The element of kinship is central to any discussion of populations in comparatively simple societies. Tainter's passage in the previous section aligns with Tönnies' position that "*Gemeinschaft of Blood*" (in terms of genetic inheritance and mixing of genetic stock) is a generally necessary condition from which the other

²⁰ One notable exception is The Farm, an intentional community in Tennessee which at its height had a population of around 1200 individuals. Today The Farm stands at around 200 and is structured akin to a small town.

two forms of *Gemeinschaft* are allowed to arise, that is the *Gemeinschaft* of Place (shared land or locality) and *Gemeinschaft* of Mind (shared experience, custom, and conception of the world) (Tönnies 1952:42). Not unexpectedly, within social units based in kinship, there will be a high degree of similarity based on appearance, as Durkheim notes: “The more primitive societies are, the more resemblances there are between individuals from which they have been formed” (Durkheim 105).

While social bonds within the family are certainly based on more than mere physical similarities, there is indication that shared traits in terms of appearance can play important identity-reinforcing roles within the intentional community. Given that many communities effectively live as “extended families based on something other than blood ties” (Kozeny 1995:18), unifying ideological as well as physical markers of group identity can enhance a sense of collective-cultural distinction and thus separation from mainstream society, as discussed in the previous chapter with reference to liminal states continuously reaffirmed, particularly in the cases of Honey Locust and Bhakti Farm²¹. In the context of the intentional community, distinctive physical traits supply the basis for identification with one’s people, akin to those markers—cultural as well as biological—which have served this same basic function within human groups, likely from the onset of rudimentary social organization.

Affinal Ties

The concept of *Gemeinschaft* is founded in the most fundamental processes of nature—in the production and re-production of organic life. In describing this “natural condition” by which human wills are “linked to each other by parental descent and by sex” Tönnies highlights three

²¹ See pg. 95

fundamental types of kin relationship: (1) the relationship existing between mother and child; (2) the relationship between husband and wife “in its natural or biological meaning”; and (3) the relationships between siblings. While the relationship linking mother and child may be established in its deep, probably universal significance, that which begets this child is subject to a broader range of conditioning factors:

Among [some] people marriage exists only in a very rudimentary state. Even if this has not yet been demonstrated with certainty, it is even likely that there was an era in the history of the family when marriage did not exist [...] The relationships between mother and children are very clearly defined, but those between the two partners are very lax. (Durkheim 48)

In *The Division of Labor* Durkheim outlines a sort of evolutionary scheme in which “conjugal solidarity” is gradually increased alongside other measures of group solidarity. Durkheim claims that as individual labor roles, as well as the physical characteristics, of marital partners diverge over eons of progress of human society, the significance of the institution of marriage as a set of contractual obligations becomes more established. What Durkheim concludes is that if one were to trace the evolution of the division of labor to a time predating distinct labor duties of either sex, “marital life” in our conventionally-held sense would disappear, to the reduction of reproductive relationships to mere ephemerality. “If indeed the [genders] had not separated off from each other at all, a whole style of social living would not have arisen”. On today’s societal norms he continues: “Individuals are linked to one another who would otherwise be independent; instead of developing separately, they concert their efforts” (Durkheim 1984:49).

In relative contrast to the sentiment conveyed by Durkheim, Tönnies casts monogamy or “marriage in its moral sense” in a different light. Whereas Durkheim describes the psychological

differences between the sexes as a product of cultural evolution, Tönnies more confidently describes men and women as *inherently* opposite in nature: feminine intuition countered with masculine calculation; feminine sensitivity to masculine stoicism; feminine creativity to masculine cleverness (Tönnies 154-155). Instead of marriage functioning as a confirmation of differentiation begotten in this union, it reconciles, most swiftly through instances of Gemeinschaft of Place, then Mind, and finally Blood through the rite of reproduction, generating new degrees of the familial bond.

[Marriage constitutes a] perfect neighborhood—living together, constant physical proximity. Community of daily and nightly abode, of bed and board, it its very essence; their spheres of will adjoin but are one, like the communal fields of the villagers. (Tönnies 192)

To the extent that the spirit of cooperation and complimentary marital roles produce and are produced by the sentimental elements of this partnership, in addition to the general practicality of such a relationship, Durkheim may be in agreement with Tönnies:

It is because men and women differ from one another that they seek out one another with such passion. However, [...] it is not purely and simply contrast that causes reciprocal feelings to arise: only those differences that are assumed and that complement one another possess this power. (Durkheim 46)

Gender Roles within the Case Study Communities

The insights of Durkheim and Tönnies into the basis for marriage roles within complex society are primarily intended to illustrate the broader context of gender role construction. The notion of gender roles still have many reverberations in mainstream as well as alternative culture. The topic of gender equality within alternative culture derives much from 1960s and 70s civil rights and related movements and remains firmly imprinted in the general intentional community ethos today. But no two communities share the same ideological scope; to characterize too

broadly in terms of this particular topic within the intentional community movement as a whole would be a mistake. For instance, to associate a spiritual community like Bhakti Farm too closely with those of a sexually-liberated streak such as Nomad Creek would surely be folly. However, even a conservative spiritual movement like ISKCON can be subject to internal pressures to make progress in this area. Men have traditionally been sole bearers of positions of authority and prestige within ISKCON, and efforts to pave the way for female *Diksha*²²guruship have in previous years been met with controversy. With regard to domestic life ISKCON has also been faced with some scrutiny, and some of its women with dismay, for its early integration of traditional Indian values in which wives may be seen as subservient to their husbands, and be disproportionately directed to the duties of the home and to childcare. However, much progress has been made in this area throughout the last two decades, and women of ISKCON now serve as priests, gurus, temple presidents, and so forth throughout the movement. In the context of the farm, positions of influence are available to all of the general community of permanent members including women.

With regard to the topic of marital partnerships within the community today, there is little to suggest that married members' roles associated with childcare, domestic chores, or jobs and careers outside of the community differ markedly from their mainstream counterparts. Traditionally, unmarried devotees were divided between chaste (perhaps temporarily) Brahmachari or Brahmacharini (female) monks, and the typical devotee was likely slated to marry within the movement, as would have been the case for most of the first generation couples still at the community. Later years would see the system pass into a degree of unorthodoxy, as the membership base developed its various intricacies, and relatively typical family life—

²² “Diksha”, meaning to consecrate or prepare; these gurus are those qualified to initiate new members.

particularly for families outside of the temple grounds—would follow. Efforts made by the community in the last twenty years to adapt the farm’s particular brand of ISKCON culture to its maturing and evolving membership base indicates its potential to keep making progress in ways contrary to what ISKCON’s historical precedent for male-centric biases might otherwise suggest.

The other two communities of this study demonstrate themes more closely aligned with alternative culture’s traditional opposition to rigidly-defined gender and sex role distinctions. As an egalitarian community Honey Locust reserves no positions of power or authority based on any dimension of identity. Virtually no general labor spheres at the community (including childcare) are dominated by either men or women. Another example of departure from mainstream gender norms involved some peculiarities of dress. While not an all-encompassing trait, on days of increasing heat, it becomes usual to witness a number of community men trading in shorts and jeans for loose flowing skirts; these were particularly popular among the gardening crew (also including women). Both sexes frequently conducted daily life naked from the waist up. With regard to marriage, out of more than a dozen partnerships, and several of considerable longevity, there was only one confirmed legally married couple in the community, suggesting a level of disregard for this feature of mainstream romantic convention, although the gender imbalance within the population may be somewhat to blame.

By mainstream standards Nomad Creek perhaps best demonstrated alternative views regarding sexual identity and relationships. As noted, the community as well as the New Philosophy network have adopted alternative individual as well as social philosophies, and have incorporated polyamorous elements into the culture. The group advocates for experimentation within romantic and sexual relationships with the claim that through liberating one’s self from today’s deterministic and dichotomous sex-role establishment culture, there can be realized once

again a more open, adaptable system of group and family sociality and coherence, supposedly reminiscent of elements of group life pre-dating modern forms. Proponents of New Philosophy might find with Durkheim's conception of archaic pre-division-of-labor relationship fluidity a degree of agreement, although the communitarians' belief that individuals might find a more fulfilling existence in the departure from a conventional marriage partnership and such conventions might have puzzled Durkheim in his insistence that efficiency as well as happiness are increased through role-defined, standardized cooperative arrangements—including within monogamous marriage. Nonetheless, principles of gender equality which underlie elements of the New Philosophy worldview are relatable to some of Durkheim's understanding of pre-divided society, namely, that the women of the pre-civilized world occupied themselves with roles within their respective societies less distinguished from those of men than would be the case in more modern times (Durkheim 46).

Appeal of the New Family

As previously noted, Tönnies regarded the human institution of the family as the foundation of the notion of *Gemeinschaft*. What may logically follow with respect to his consideration of the significance of kinship within *Gesellschaft* may be the notion that the family of modern society has ceased to be the *primary* orienting force acting upon individuals' wills. "In the *Gemeinschaft* [individuals] remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors, whereas in the *Gesellschaft* they are essentially separated in spite of all uniting factors" (Tönnies 1952:65). Although his distinction here is telling, his conception of *Gesellschaft*, like *Gemeinschaft*, is based generally around it as an ideal type and more so as a conceptual tool; it would not be accurate to assume that in Tönnies' view, the individual is only functionally-bound to allegiance to one or the other type of social system. He implies instead that both sides of his

dichotomy continuously supply opposing sets of associations and influences. Although an individual may be subject to Gesellschaft-derived “rational” influences toward “deliberation, decision, and [conceptualization]”, objects of the “natural” will: “liking, habit, and memory”, do not merely lie dormant within the Gesellschaft environment (Tönnies 134). Individuals are subject to motives of each type of will as they maintain associations with elements of the mainstream while they invariably engage in more intimate social relationships. Regardless of entrenchment within requirements of Gesellschaft, it is evident that as long as the individual maintains ties with the family as the conceptual progenitor of Gemeinschaft, the influences of this latter social type remain intact. In terms of complex society, Tönnies, like Durkheim, illustrates a network of social activities and behaviors divorced from the dominant character and influence of the tight-knit social environment of the family. In terms of what results from operating within mainstream society: “...every relationship of the character of Gesellschaft constitutes the beginning and the potentiality of a superimposed artificial person” (177). Tönnies suggests that the individual of complex society becomes dominated by the influences of rationality, logic and calculation, and becomes an instrument of the social reality which now encompasses them. The rational individual of Gesellschaft relates to society via new sets of social contracts that are now essential to maintain a place within the system. Although aspects of the individual’s character inherited in the Gemeinschaft may still reside in the person, new instinctual requirements of Gesellschaft now overpower what was previously a more “natural” state of being (177)²³.

The drive to reunite with the essence of family motivates many communitarians, who reject the sterilized and artificial-seeming social requirements of the mainstream world.

²³ See page 99 (Katz)

American intentional communities even before the modern movement have been intrinsically linked to the significance of family. In the intentional communities in this study, family-based rhetoric, if not the actual presence of nuclear families (such as at Bhakti Farm) highlight this theme as a core strength of community. The sentiment conveyed by Brenda of Honey Locust could speak for members of many of intentional communities:

When I first arrived [in the 1980s] I didn't think there was much radically different here....people go to work during the day and socialize during the evenings. But I began to understand... [that] the community is like a family. Out there, or in the city, you see all these people but you don't know anyone. Here you know everybody. You might not like everybody but you know where everyone stands. The city in comparison is alienating. (Brenda)

Time spent with the integrated group can impart a sense of “family” that may be a little more reflective of the realities of a particular community as well, as expressed by Victor at Nomad Creek:

You're free to roam about to the world, to seek the things you desire for yourself and expand as a person. If you reach a point when you're ready to return and share new aspects of yourself with your family here, you can do that whenever you'd like. Whether you were here for ten days or ten years.

While some research suggests that living in urban environments does not altogether eliminate individuals' sentiments derived from their “local communities”, i.e. the social connections of kinship and friendship (Kasarda et al. 1974), other work does support the notion that existence within comparatively urban locales does engender some deviation from so-called traditional values regarding issues such as chemical intoxication, birth-control, or degrees of religiosity (Fischer 1975). With respect to the current research, these studies suggest that a transition to life of urban complexity does entail a departure from types of values structures that might have been associated with the traditional family.

While Tönnies' archetypal construction of the "pure" family is useful for illustrating its contrast with complex society, the typical family from which today's communitarians often derive share in terms of values much with the cultural mainstream. It is well within convention today to seek to motivate the youth of western culture to become individually empowered, to seize opportunities that the world has to offer, and to elevate one's self through the ranks of society—possibly at the expense of others. What results is a society that is youth-driven and which moves quickly, with younger generations continuously molded in preparation for a future imminently unfolding yet unyieldingly mysterious. For the world's indigenous cultures the phenomenon has been well known for decades or centuries. In her article *The Future: Prefigurative Cultures and Unknown Children*, Margaret Mead posits the transition of our world society from a "postfigurative" culture (in which the children learn from the old) to one that is "prefigurative", in which younger generations learn largely from one another, and in which they are also tacitly responsible for teaching older generations the new ways as well.

Today, nowhere in the world are there elders who know what the children know, no matter how remote and simple the societies are in which the children live. In the past there were always some elders who knew more than any children in terms of their experience of having grown up within a cultural system. Today there are none. (Mead in Toffler, 1972)

The individual coming of age in western society today is no longer faced with the sort of binary fork-in-the-road life path dilemma which faced the peasant's son at the onset of the 20th century. Instead, today's young generations (though the scenario is not limited to the youth as suggested by Mead) enter into a dominating cultural system that permeates every aspect of life, and compels the family to reflect certain features of the mainstream. The family no longer exists at the other end of the spectrum; it behaves as an agent for a social complex that envelopes all under its gaze. Tönnies' notion of *Gemeinschaft* today asserts an essence of family that only

partially remains in what he perceived to be its original form. Indeed the role of the family in modern society has been said to suffer for both its diminished size and functions:

The nuclear family of modern urban society lacks economic, political and even religious functions of the extended family of smaller, “simpler” societies; the nuclear family concentrates (intensively, to be sure) on a few functions: The socialization of young children, sexual gratification for the spouses, and emotional gratification for adults and children. (Katz 1966)

In the community context, members benefit from their place within a social network that minimizes the level of disconnect existing between sources of emotional or personal well-being—traditionally supplied by the essence of family—and other spheres of activity ordered around labor and economics. In Patrick Conover’s analysis of sexual and gender relations within intentional communities, he concludes that the merging of domestic life with other facets of group culture is a core strength of intentional communities. Creatively devised structural arrangements also help foster a sense of otherness and liminality.

[The] alternate culture can become institutionalized in the meeting of domestic functional necessities without giving up distinctive values [...] alternate culture can meet the domestic needs of its adherents and thus sustain their commitment and identification [to the values of alternative culture].” (Conover 1975:462)

Extended Community

In addition to the foundational social relationships characterized by the nuclear family, focus must necessarily be expanded to recognize further components of the intimate social group as represented in traditional as well as in modern community settings. The clan, which Durkheim refers to as a segmentary aggregate²⁴, although fundamentally rooted in the elements of recognized kinship, also incorporates relationships more symbolic in nature (Durkheim 139).

²⁴ Like parts separated by space but not distinguished in terms of function.

The composition of solidarity within such a group characterized by gradients of affiliation (internal differentiation of various kinds) evokes reference to sources of affinity not dependent on kinship but sentiments derived in part or wholly from the sharing of experiences and customs. Tönnies refers to these types of relationships or associations within *Gemeinschaft* as “most perfectly interpreted as friendship [...] *Gemeinschaft* of spirit and mind based on common work or calling and thus on common beliefs” (Tönnies 192).

Particularly important to Tönnies’ *Gemeinschaft* of Mind is the presence of shared experience in the construction of group identity. While the element of kinship generally establishes the basic condition for instilling an enduring sense of camaraderie from the onset of socialization, it is the interplay of mind and space in maturity—of shared friendships and locales—which ensures that the bonds of enduring relationships can be developed. The binding of individuals’ experiences under common conditions and through shared events, be they routine ordeals or those under special circumstances grants the possibility of associations not exclusively derived from common lineage to be recognized as examples of *Gemeinschaft* nonetheless; common space and experience are not limited to a kin network. The element of common locale traditionally has provided the basis for much camaraderie: fields to share in the work, hearth and table to distribute the fruits of the toil. However in terms of *Gemeinschaft* of Mind, which is comprised of shared mental content within a population, Tönnies also describes associations more voluntary and of an order beyond the mere obligations of the occupation: “These are especially the corporations or fellowships of the arts and crafts, the communities, churches, and holy orders” (Tönnies 192). In terms of the broader culture of the intentional community movement, this aspect of *Gemeinschaft* is represented in the ideological qualities of particular communities.

The foundations of the ideological components of intentional communities lie firstly in the conceptions of what these communities themselves represent culturally. That these communities are “intentional” suggests a degree of pre-established motivation and direction from members. For newcomers, the attraction to an alternative way of life is borne out of experiences rooted in mainstream society, as discussed in the previous chapter. These individuals volunteer to become members of a collective in an unfamiliar place and with unfamiliar people. Yet the philosophical substance of camaraderie, i.e. the ideological domain of community—spirituality, egalitarianism, sustainability, etc.—may be a dominant attractive feature, despite its initial strangeness in the new context—and indeed its “estrangement” from mainstream norms—which paradoxically may spell difficulty for new members to penetrate the social fold of developed communities.

Tönnies’ recognition that the presence of a single element of *Gemeinschaft* (Blood, Place, or Mind) can be influential to the point of characterizing a relationship or aspect of a social network—despite the potential absence of the other elements—sets his scheme apart from Durkheim’s in its applicability to intentional communities. Tönnies sees the communal mode of the *Gemeinschaft* ideal as an intimately interwoven group, with shared occupations and customs, situated within a common place. However he does not imply that within a community characterized this way its overall *Gemeinschaft* character is profoundly greater than the sum of its parts. Community as a manifestation of *Gemeinschaft* is not an emergent sociocultural phenomenon. To represent *Gemeinschaft* in the modern context does not preclude the presence of elements of the opposite type, i.e. *Gesellschaft*. Durkheim makes much less of an allowance for this sort of possibility. “This [organic] type relies upon principles so utterly different from the preceding type that it can develop only to the extent that the latter has vanished” (Durkheim

143). In contrast Tönnies employs his dichotomy to refer to particular relationships within a given social environment which may be loosely-defined with regard to size or scope. For a relationship to be characterized as *Gemeinschaft* it is not required to represent each of the three elements of the type. One may consider many instances derived from normative mainstream life which support this possibility: Most people experience enduring camaraderie with acquaintances and friends from whom they are geographically separated most of the time; or, we maintain bonds with family members with whom we may at a given time share little in common aside from blood, though social media today might determine a level of relationship maintenance (sometimes more than we would like). Conversely there are individuals we may see every day, at work or otherwise who we wish we did not—perhaps the feeling is mutual though this is not the sort of camaraderie Tönnies is suggesting. It is clear that fellowship in the “brotherly, comradely, and friendly manner” (Tönnies 252) does not arise merely from professional or routine association. Although such a relationship shared between colleagues or work associates suggests the elements of shared space and mind, Tönnies refers to associations originating in professional settings as “fictitious” as they are derived from special interest groups” of *Gesellschaft* in which the interests of few are served by the labors of many. These are not the conditions of fellowship or of commonwealth, which require a consensual unity of wills, that is, “having life of its own and existing in the endless community of its members” (Tönnies 214).

The communitarian seeks a new home not for the draw of industrial productivity or material gain, but on the basis of finding within community an outlet for latent tendencies for the expression of *Gemeinschaft*. States of *Gemeinschaft* or *Gesellschaft* cannot be seen as mutually exclusive, for as a member of Babylon, it is experience within this cultural environment which awakens the drive to explore new options. It is a nostalgia for simplicity but an alluring new

potential as well—one that once individually-pursued may become collectively realized. In this way *Gesellschaft* begets new expressions of *Gemeinschaft*. There is little to suggest many sympathetic parallels allowed in Durkheim's work, for the polarity of his forms remain squarely in the inevitable progression of labor division and role differentiation; his modes of solidarity are measures of the functional productivity of social groups of varying stages of organizational sophistication. In contrast Tönnies' work gravitates toward highlighting the sentimental qualities of relationships within his types, and a readier consideration for instances of overlap between them²⁵.

In terms of the intentional community, the various unifying elements between members—those outwardly material and those sentimental—undoubtedly produce a sense of *Gemeinschaft* as a quality which can characterize the group. Integrative mechanisms of community—labor requirements, religious ceremonial functions, or other community customs performed to the effect of cultural conditioning or the strengthening of core philosophies—ensure that cultural traits as proclaimed by the group sustain through the medium of interpersonal or intragroup interactions. The greater the extent to which group ideological structures are allowed to enter routine or perhaps mundane domains of social existence, the more that core community values will permeate the overall character of the group. In this state, the physical condition of *Gemeinschaft* (Place), is accompanied by a counterpart in mental content, the product of shared experience. Collections of individuals who share the most in common and who spend much time with one another are likely to develop more significant associations and

²⁵ Ferdinand Tönnies experienced firsthand the interplay and overlap of rural culture with new elements of mechanization and commercialization in his native province in northern Germany. From the introduction of his translated work: "[Tönnies'] oldest brother was engaged in trading with English merchants so that he had while very young, firsthand contact with the two worlds—the world of the peasant rooted to his soil and the world of the merchant whose soul is in the profits of his trade." (2)

friendships. Bhakti Farm's generational cohorts or Honey Locust's labor sphere cliques are certain examples. The on-site population of Nomad Creek can be thought of as single clique in itself, and set apart from other groups especially in the context of certain events.²⁶

Integrative Role of Labor

Shared values and realms of collective experience provide the basis for group solidarity, and a varied distribution of individual roles and responsibilities can contribute to a comprehensive integration of engaged individuals and subgroups of the community. Honey Locust best demonstrates a pattern of regular community-wide integration, through the circulation of members between spheres of labor as well as other domains of community life. The organized scheduling of chores and shifts and the high degree of voluntary cooperation characterizing daily life fuels a strong sense of community interdependence. As member Jesse commented: "Everybody takes care of one another and everybody does their job...the difference here is that anything a person could do to contribute was just as valuable as somebody else's job." According to Durkheim, labor-based reciprocity has a stimulating effect upon group social solidarity, and is evident even at a basic level of human companionship:

We seek in our friends those qualities we lack, because in uniting with them we share in some way in their nature, feeling ourselves then less incomplete. In this way small groups of friends grow up in which each individual plays a role in keeping with his character, in which a veritable exchange of services occurs.
(Durkheim 46)

²⁶ I was relayed an anecdote stemming from an event held at the community weeks prior to my visit. This event, under the coordination of a new organizer within New Philosophy imposed an unprecedented policy of limiting casual social contact of regular community residents with paying guests, certainly disgruntling members but also providing a context for this strong sense of group sentiment. Perhaps shared resentment may foster group solidarity as effectively as shared satisfaction.

Though he acknowledges economic benefits to labor specialization and the reciprocal exchange of services, Durkheim often highlights the “feelings of solidarity” such arrangements produce as well. Indeed Jesse’s comment above indicates the level of satisfaction derived from providing a valuable service to the community and benefitting from those supplied by others. At a place like Honey Locust, with work quotas required to be met, the exchange of labor between members is assured. However, in communities of different types, difficulties can emerge. At Nomad Creek, member Isaac lamented the tendency to feel “resentment toward others who are supposed to be contributing more”, stemming from the relatively low level of serious investment the community asks of its members. While Bhakti Farm has experienced some difficulties similar to those affecting Nomad Creek, particularly highlighted in the withdrawal of some of the second generation, this community does seem to maintain a harmonious arrangement of labor division. Particular spheres of community-focused labor correlate with members’ areas of residence. Those fulfilling regular priestly duties typically live on the temple grounds, and those focused on community needs of different kinds—cow milkers and caregivers; tenders of the fields and gardens—live amid the rest of the extended community or at the periphery of the temple grounds (allowed as they still are engaged in service per community policy)²⁷. From Durkheim’s standpoint there is no greater sense of solidarity than that attainable through the division of labor. Group efficiency is maximized when each individual knows their role, and “cooperation [is] automatically produced by the fact that each person pursues his own interest” (Durkheim 158).

²⁷ The residential split seems to alleviate tensions potentially arising between members representing distinct types of labor contribution, which have been noted to develop in the context of the spiritual community between the “worshipful” and the “efficient” (Hingers 1976:34). At Bhakti Farm’s advanced stage of development, community division of labor is adapted to the realities of a diverse and complex membership base.

Between the case studies one can see that each community maintains a unique relationship with the concept of collective labor vis-à-vis the outside world. Nomad Creek in its elementary stage of development maintains only a rudimentary system of individual role allocation; only four full-time members were occupied with a routinized set of general tasks, and the rest of the community played a more opportunist-type role (with reference to the analogous Honey Locust labor sphere). During Nomad Creek community events the more routine of responsibilities are temporarily exchanged for those which amid the bustle of activity are more abruptly necessary, in addition to the particular roles pre-established each morning throughout the event, such as in the organization of kitchen, cleanup, and other specialized crews. During times aside from the periodic liminality of events, two areas of labor are most critical. One is that designated to the grounds manager, who mediates the use of camp sites by outsiders. The other is denoted as the work shifts taken in town at the community-affiliated establishments. As these assignments are shared with non-member locals (commensurate with the vision for an “intentional village”) only one or two community members need regularly fill shifts in town. Additionally, primary community coordinators Victor and Serena generate important income and provide big picture organizational talents from vantage points away from the community, and although they remain important members, given their limited influence upon daily life, their capacities to be recognized as totally invested still remains somewhat dubious. However, this fluid, somewhat loosely articulated community arrangement is in line with the freedoms denoted in the philosophy of Compassionate Anarchy, and the whimsical ebb and flow of intra-community relationships is variously expected. In terms of the role of shared work, Nomad Creek depends little on an ordered division of labor for the sake of instilling group solidarity, although the community’s capacity to network through the unrestrained movements and activities of its members and affiliated individuals allows it to retain a sense of regional

interconnectedness with other people and organizations. The opposite sort of situation can be found at Honey Locust. Work-oriented and geographically-confined, the fruits of community labor serve in the interests of community engagement and productivity. Multiple types of labor spheres and the ease with which members are encouraged to move between them results in a malleable network of mutual dependence that can be adapted to individual wants and community needs. The community's ability to provide many opportunities within the realm of labor assists to overcome the burden of monotony which invariably afflicts specialized laborers of modern society:

The objection will be made that among civilized peoples life is more varied, and that variety is necessary for pleasure. But accompanying a greater mobility, civilization brings in its train greater uniformity, for it has imposed upon mankind monotonous and unceasing labor. (Durkheim 190)

Honey Locust provides the best of both worlds, with an organized division of labor that allows individuals to adopt projects which appeal to them, as Dane expressed:

You have a sort of claim to something you create or help to create. I put time and effort into the studio because I feel now that I need that type of space to continue to grow and evolve with my art.

Additionally, several times a week, required work in the coffee house allows members time with others with whom they may not share other spheres of activity. Though the community's commercial production is primarily aimed at the general public, the processes on-site require very limited contact with structures of the commercial mainstream, allowing even this dimension of community life to retain most Gemeinschaft-type qualities. While there is a degree of labor division associated with work at Coffee Co. (there are multiple specific responsibilities associated with production, inventory, storage, and office-related work), the high degree of

coordination required between all areas of the business ensures that specific goals, tasks, or crises all are interactive events.

While Honey Locust has remained relatively enclosed Bhakti Farm has expanded its reach at home, nudging devotees into expanded lands, and beyond—children attend public schools locally and then universities further away; adults not employed in full-time service to the community seek jobs and careers in towns nearby. In the farm’s earliest days, every aspect of devotees’ lives was imbued with communal energy. Structures were built, meals were cooked, and importantly money was raised through collective efforts. A significant portion of community cash flow was based on the bulk purchase and resale of goods such as candles, incense, art, articles of clothing, and of course books. Efforts to sell these items would take the rural communitarians out in groups to surrounding cities. They would run a large circuit from place to place pitching items to vendors at record stores and head shops. They set up kiosks, bargained on the streets as well as intersections, college campuses, or any spot that seemed appropriate.

In those days our subsistence was based on piling in and running these circuits. We sold a few things...oil paintings got big. We made a little money to start working on other parts of the farm. (Dhira Hari)

Dhira Hari’s wife Lila Priya also was present for the action:

I don’t know what happened in the 80s! We were cloistered. A lot of selling. I made tight friends...ladies, mothers. We all worked, often together. It was a fun time.

This founding generation, so active in the development of the community, would eventually grow up, start families, and relocate to nucleated family domains, separate from direct temple influence. This degree of separation, which would come to characterize the families of the founding generation, also incentivized many individuals to later pursue paths outside of the

community. What is inevitably produced from this context of variable individual experience is further diversification in terms of different members' goals, aspirations, and the means required of each person to realize these. Today only a small number of adult devotees remain absorbed in community activities on a daily basis, and at least half of the residents of the temple grounds have jobs outside of the community. Yet community affiliation persists as does a common spiritual identity and heritage. These are realms of association—with reference to *Gemeinschaft* of Mind—which represent enduring conceptions of personality or identity. These dominant markers do not require any regimented rite or process of reaffirmation to remain between members a common virtue. To be recognized as a devotee within the framework of this community requires only some kind of association with it, which once established in a practical sense is not easily challenged; a community-based identity strongly remains despite the present dispersal of many segments of the population.

Configurations of *Gemeinschaft*

Values systems affect the structure and broader character of communities and influence their position within the greater society. Examples of influential values systems include spiritual and traditional family-centric values of Bhakti Farm, egalitarianism and work-oriented life at Honey Locust, and at Nomad Creek individualism and the pillars of New Philosophy. These systems contribute to the basis of community formation—from the first inception of the project and to the selection of a site—as well as influences how a community further develops, grows, and evolves. Labor responsibilities inevitably are adopted and sometimes assigned, individual niches are carved out, and the character of daily life gradually takes shape. Desired conclusions for hopeful collective aspirations—the development of industries, new ambitious projects, and

celebration in moments of triumph— are cautiously admitted to the future, as the steady procession of work transforms the uncertainty of tomorrow to actualizable potential.

In Tönnies' conception of *Gemeinschaft* there can be discerned two primary forms. In its more intimate, linear form, *particular relationships* may possess its character despite some ongoing influence and interaction with greater mainstream society, or *Gesellschaft*. It is the possibility of this more intimate form that allows for the spirit of *Gemeinschaft* to persist in various contexts of the real world outside of the confines of it as a conceptual type (which generally implies the broader *collective* form). An interpersonal relationship characterized by *Gemeinschaft* is founded on one or more of the three elements of *Gemeinschaft*, delineated as Mind (shared values, knowledge, etc.), Place (shared geographical points of reference), and Blood (relationships derived from bonds of kinship).

The second primary form of *Gemeinschaft* refers to its more conventional use as a description of an integrated community or social network. Such a social system is likewise characterized by the presence and influence of the three elements—Mind, Place, and Blood. However, analogous to the possibility of *Gemeinschaft* relationships persisting separate from an enclosed social system, for example in the specific linear bonds between friends, kin, or others for whom one feels a predilection for an enduring companionship, the same elements comprising a community of the *Gemeinschaft* ideal can be viewed in terms of each separate element holding relative degrees of influence upon the whole system in a modern community context. In other words, whereas a traditional *Gemeinschaft*-type community would be constituted of a tightly interwoven system of relationships between the elements of Mind, Place, and Blood, an intentional community characterized by *Gemeinschaft* today establishes its character based on the variably proportioned capacities and influences of each of these three elements.

Gemeinschaft of Mind

Gemeinschaft of Mind is defined broadly, and incorporates references to general kinds of common cultural affiliation or identity, as well as to increasingly specific references to experiences shared on a frequent basis (such as through common labor) and myriad instances of shared exposure to community-derived and relatable phenomena. Because it can be applied to virtually any type of shared interaction or experience, the role of Gemeinschaft of Mind is central to intentional communities, and it is especially significant for communities within which core ideologies are applied to the structure of routine life, such as in religious communities or those rooted in some particular social or organizational philosophy. Because numerous examples of the role of shared experience for the formation of community identity have been highlighted with regard to the unique cultural characteristics of each of the case study communities, further definition of Gemeinschaft of Mind will not be necessary. However the other two elements of Gemeinschaft are more varyingly present within intentional communities, and their respective roles within the communities in the study can be exposed in greater detail.

Gemeinschaft of Blood

In many modern, especially more recently-established communities, Gemeinschaft of Blood in the conventional consanguineal sense plays a rather limited role for the simple explanation that insufficient time may have passed for there yet to be successive generations present. However, this form of Gemeinschaft may be realizable in new forms specific to communities like those of this study, and the importance of “family-like” networks of relationships for establishing elements of group identity becomes more apparent. For instance, members of Nomad Creek community (which possesses no biological links of kinship), nonetheless make references to the individual liberties made possible by the community’s

“modern family structure” and related philosophy²⁸. Likewise in the context of the much larger population of Honey Locust there is a suggestion that the general sense of harmony enjoyed within the community can be attributed to the overall degree of familiarity members are able to maintain with one another in a manner akin as to that of a large extended family²⁹.

The role of fictive kinship may extend beyond mere regularized contact as well, particularly from the standpoint of the transmission of knowledge and experience from older members to younger ones. The ages of adult members at Honey Locust range from eighteen to at least mid-sixties, and it is typical to encounter casual groupings of members representing ages spanning this range. Although certain labor spheres seem to remain somewhat age-homogenous, e.g. elder members comprising much of the Coffee Co. office crew or generally younger members (<30) comprising the ranch labor sphere, other areas of work are generally mixed. Notably, elder members were noted to more likely occupy Independent-type labor roles, but seemed also to maintain one or two relatively close relationships with younger members who might presumably be drawn to inherit the same area of trade or interest sometime in the future³⁰. In any case the community is characterized by a perpetual degree of casual inter-generational communing rarely encountered in mainstream society today. The presence of longtime members provides a ready support base and de facto direction for aspiring members of the culture, a recognizable analog to elder folk of traditional societies. This intergenerational system has certain reinforcing effects upon an enduring *Gemeinschaft* of Mind, for it supports a tradition of

²⁸ Victor quote pg. 18

²⁹ Brenda quote pg. 50

³⁰ During a visitor period one will be provided orientation sessions (“Oreos”) for each of the general labor spheres: garden, kitchen, ranch, etc. However, gaining familiarity with specialized I-type spheres requires one to forge a bond with those individuals who represent them in particular. These members, whether seasoned tradesperson or protégé, were of comparatively reserved personalities, conducting affairs much of the time away from more lively social environments. Incidentally these individuals, ready to bond with the inquisitive observer, make excellent informants, as I learned during one-on-one labor hours obtained with the community auto mechanic, building maintenance person, grounds maintenance person, and a public installation artist.

the transmission of wisdom related to Margaret Mead's (Toffler 1972) concept of the "postfigurative" culture in which elders possess and share cultural knowledge with younger generations, in this case in the context of community. What is produced is a fluid social equilibrium in which those separated by age can develop close bonds easily, and valuable pieces of community experience are allowed to extend to all corners of community consciousness.

In contrast with the fluidity and the lack of consequential social categories in place at Honey Locust, Bhakti Farm's nucleated family structure appears to present less of a departure from mainstream conventions. Individual families maintain their own properties and their own affairs, generally away from direct attention of the greater population. Today most of the adult second generation living at home or visiting were not observed to venture far beyond the realm of their parents' homes under normal circumstances. They are generally expected to attend community functions at the temple grounds when they occur however, and around a dozen then residing at that community were observed to faithfully attend independently organized Wednesday night dinners—though whether or not these still go on is questionable; the consistent population of second generation community residents is likely to have since decreased on account of new jobs, more invested college lives, and other developments in the midst of adulthood.

While younger members' level of exposure to the rest of the community population today is typically much less than that which their parents experienced, the natural place of second generation members within their own families is an analog to the place of individual families within the broader community. Some contribute more and are present more routinely; others maintain some distance and appear when it is perhaps most appreciated such as during holidays and festivals. Nonetheless, between families a deep camaraderie is rooted in decades of close

association. Members recognize one another beyond a purely individual basis of community affiliation, incorporating for each relationship also a contextualized appreciation for the family groups each person in turn represents, their relationships to other families, and to other segments of the farm and dimensions of community life. The second generation spans some twenty years in age, and exhibits a level of social complexity in itself. Friendships crisscross between families; affinities between older siblings are replicated in those between younger ones. Romantic relationships emerge, occasionally to the chagrin of the parental generation³¹, at other times having resolved in marriage.

What ultimately has emerged between community families resembles a large network of aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins, and siblings—a patchwork of real and fictive kinship. To have come of age in the context of this extended family is no underappreciated fact as expressed in the words and memories of the second generation³². Even so, the relationship of these younger members to the community is distinguished from that of their parents, for whom the formation of the farm was marked by the consolidation of individual wills and the relinquishment of certain personal liberties—an unquestioned embrace of the communal ideal. The arrival of the founders' children marked the halt of a more so homogenous community consciousness, and the onset of a community organization reckoned in increased variation and in gradients of space.

Gemeinschaft of Place

The proximity of dwellings, the communal fields, and even the mere contiguity of holdings necessitate many contacts of human beings and cause inurement to and intimate knowledge of one another. They also necessitate co-operation in labor, order, and management, and lead to common supplication for grace and mercy to

³¹ See Jilsara's quote p. 84

³² See Nimai's quote p. 75

the gods and spirits of land and water who bring blessing or menace with disaster.
(Tönnies p.42)

In the context of the modern intentional community the expression of Place has a significant impact upon the strength of the other elements of Gemeinschaft with respect to establishing group identity and solidarity. Honey Locust best demonstrates the power of shared space. The community itself is located further away from large cities than the other communities and through such measures as prevention of members from owning personal vehicles limits one's ability to leave this shared space on any regular individual basis. While many necessary community provisions including a significant portion of the food supply for much of the year are obtained outside the community, they are purchased by only small groups at a time (sometimes only two people) and many members appear indifferent toward supply trips or avoid going on them altogether. On the basis of shared space, familiarity between members of Honey Locust is virtually enforced. Immediate access of all members to environments of social exchange ensures that any need for company can always be met through personal contacts within the community population more or less exclusively, and although this reality is not without certain drawbacks³³, it facilitates a level of interconnectedness unlikely achievable otherwise.

Typical daily routines and activities are situated within well-defined geographic limits at Honey Locust. Because the community does host a developed system of labor division which engenders a high degree of interdependence within the community there might be some inclination to identify therein the seeds of Gesellschaft; the formation of labor sphere cliques suggests some progression of labor specialization and the formation of differentiated Durkheimian "organs" of activity. However from the standpoint of community labor equality

³³ See Dane's quote p.37

(the value of labor does not translate to individual-specific economic profit), general social egalitarianism, limits upon mobility, and importantly the absence of any notion that individuals must devote themselves to single occupational pursuits—eliminates any real possibility of the consolidation of exclusive interest groups within the community.

Where Honey Locust is the essence of a contained intentional community, Nomad Creek is not, and Bhakti Farm has ceased to be to the extent that it was. Nomad Creek's individual-oriented social philosophy precludes any substantial limitations upon personal mobility, as pointed out with reference to the community's brand of labor division. Because members are encouraged to pursue new goals or interests wherever they may arise, any connection to the site of Nomad Creek—especially when spending time away from it—comprises only a minor dimension of one's association with the community. In addition to the ideological traits community members derive from New Philosophy, many seem also to possess similar perceptions of the significance—or lack thereof—of any particular locale in which such philosophies might be practiced or applied. The perception of the Nomad Creek site within the New Philosophy movement—as a retreat site—may thus penetrate even to the community's own membership who as noted, may regard this manifestation of Place as merely a stopping point along the way toward further personal discovery.

Bhakti Farm's relationship with space has affected the character of the community in many ways. Although community land consists of a generally-defined space it is by most accounts rather permeable—properties associated with the extended community are interspaced with non-member area locals and whereas Nomad Creek and Honey Locust are each contained within contiguous plots located at the conclusion of private gravel drives, Bhakti Farm properties are dispersed throughout a grid of public county and pasture roads, often with much space

between. Most telling perhaps is the manner in which members travel between certain areas of the community—or away from it—of their own accord and on a regular basis. Most adults own vehicles and use them on a regular basis, notably in making regular trips to the temple grounds and by members of the extended community (as well as approximately half the temple grounds residents³⁴) who go to work in nearby towns. The dispersal of the second generation also challenges the notion of an integrated community in situ.

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Among the case studies we can see three veritable configurations of *Gemeinschaft*. Nomad Creek, guided by Victor's vision of an expanded "intentional village" but currently without the foundation of an invested established community, implicitly prioritizes shared ideology—non-geographically dependent content of Mind—as its sustaining element. The community embodies features of a New Philosophy-inspired social ideology, which although meant for application in a social context, highlights the spirit and integrity of the individual—expressed through communicative honesty and the highlighting of freedom to pursue one's own will. Because these liberties extend to prospects of travel and new endeavors away from the purview of the community, the element of Place is only of secondary focus. That of Blood, or kinship, is least ingrained, despite some rhetorical efforts to emulate the virtues of a familial network of support. Family-related themes seem to be intended to enhance the sentimental quality of community fellowship, and, importantly, the liminal quality of the somewhat intermittent gatherings of the extended community, i.e. gatherings including members such as

³⁴ The duties of priests are highly regarded but alas do not generate income—though they do earn room and board for themselves and their families. Thus they seek employment in neighboring towns and cities—often for night shifts.

Victor or Serena who reside elsewhere most of the time, as well as during events attended by further reaches of the New Philosophy following.

The two more formally established communities of this study each exhibit a more integrated combination of elements of *Gemeinschaft*. Honey Locust derives much of its character from an interplay of the element of Mind and Place with limited influence attributable to the concept of kinship. As noted previously, Honey Locust achieves an elevated level of continuously reaffirmed group identity, on account of its relationship with space—internally and relative to the outside world—reinforcing the cultural values of the community via the medium of shared experience. Although there is a superficial degree of structural similarity between Honey Locust and Nomad Creek—secular but with a defined ideology, socially intimate but not biologically interrelated—differences with respect to members’ relationships to the Place of community are what encourages the maintenance of social solidarity at one locale (Honey Locust) and spells its hindrance at the other (Nomad Creek).

Bhakti Farm perhaps exhibits the most balanced configuration of the elements of *Gemeinschaft*. The community has been able to uniquely balance the interests of individuals and families within the broader cultural framework of the temple and extended population. The farm’s ability to adapt to an evolving membership base is a reflection of both the availability of space and a willingness of community authority (mostly of the past—there is no longer any such centralized authority³⁵) to encourage a more liberal basis for members’ association with the community. Thus the integrity of a relatively conventional family structure is preserved alongside an accessible community body representing both a unique cultural identity (upholding

³⁵ See pg. 87

a dimension of Mind) and a large supporting network of friends, long-time acquaintances, and relatives.

Although the somewhat unorthodox membership arrangement of Bhakti Farm enables devotees and families to more easily adapt themselves to the community and vice-versa, it also produces structural conditions in which a formerly more unified *Gemeinschaft* of Mind (of an era of intimate spatial relationships, few outside jobs, and a more homogenous degree of religiosity throughout the population) might show implicit signs of division or separation of parts from the whole—though the willingness of the community to accept new members from a range of backgrounds, comprising new or younger additions to the adult population including Brahmins, lay devotees, and their families (often to the temple grounds but occasionally amidst the extended community as well) might be seen as a strength of the community and of ISKCON in general. Unlike Honey Locust, wherein a well-defined space limits such a possibility, Bhakti Farm is situated in such a manner to make concessions for the variations which characterize the population. In contrast, the conspicuous absence of families (one family) or second generation adults (one adult in his thirties) present at Honey Locust—despite the community having been established the same year as Bhakti Farm—is likely explained by the community’s relative inability to grant families the freedom to have private control over their own affairs—economic and otherwise—that is enjoyed at Bhakti Farm. But the element of isolation which accompanies so many rural intentional communities may be to blame as well, as one New Philosophy visitor to Nomad Creek perhaps articulated best:

When you grow up in [a rural locale], all those shopping malls and videogames and blow dryers are awfully tempting. You hit those teenage years and it’s like “What am I doing here?” Some of the Farm’s [of Tennessee] second generation is coming back. Much of what is going on is dependent on what’s going on in the rest of the world...what individuals’ imperatives are. Ideally there is as much flow in as there is out...who comes and goes is anybody’s guess.

Conclusion: Reflections on the Application of the Typological Schemes

The three communities of this study each demonstrate a collection of unique traits under varying sets of spatial and organizational conditions. The communities range in size, and from humble beginnings to healthy stability and on to further stages of structural evolution and flux. In conjunction with these states the communities also demonstrate different implicit strategies for facilitating group integration, and importantly exhibit the significant roles value systems and ideology play in establishing a premise for members' identification with the group.

The strength of group cohesion depends on a number of factors, but the extent to which a community is able to establish a heightened degree of integration can be distilled to the comprehensive role of group-sharing characterizing community discourse and functions. The notion of sharing might apply to many different aspects of individual or group experience. Occupational roles as well as recreational activities might be shared in the community setting, as certain beliefs or facets of worldview may be held in common. Of course the significant influences of space and of the expression of spatial relationships upon levels of group integration were highlighted as well. In the previous chapter some of the central components of shared experience were outlined with respect to Tönnies' concept of *Gemeinschaft*, and it was demonstrated how the variable influences of the elements of Mind, Blood, and Place affect the development and maintenance of unity in a community setting.

The themes of intra-group homogeneity and tight-knit social relations are emphasized in the concept of Durkheim's mechanical order of solidarity as well, but although the typological schemes presented by the two theorists exhibit some parallels, the perspectives of Tönnies can more appropriately be applied to the idiosyncrasies of the intentional community ethos. Although

Tönnies like Durkheim recognized the impending disappearance of pre-modern types of social structures (particularly from the western world), he did not believe that they must necessarily disappear forever, and in fact sought to have a hand in their revival. Adair-Totefeff comments that Tönnies was “unwilling to simply describe [but] wished to prescribe as well” (1995:63). Tönnies does not hesitate to place more explicit value judgments upon interactions based on Gemeinschaft versus Gesellschaft and his analysis occasionally extends beyond postulations about whole social systems and on to the increasingly specific implications for individuals. The individuation of will (rational will) from the previous state of unified (natural) will signals the diffusion of singular “spheres of activity” within which actions are no longer “derived from an a priori and necessarily existing unity” (Tönnies 65).

Durkheim makes the point that the implicit functional reciprocity begotten of the differentiation and specialization of labor roles in society can engender an enhanced level of collective interdependence. In Tönnies’ view the development of these specialized roles are symptomatic of the broader differentiating process in which the essence of Gesellschaft comes to characterize society, ultimately producing a state in which “everybody is by himself and isolated, and there exists a condition of tension against all others” (65). As referenced earlier, Tönnies goes as far as to say that associations within Gesellschaft are only conducive to the development of the “artificial person” (177). This is to say that links within Gesellschaft occur between artificial social beings, motivated only by one’s own economic prospects to engage with the great majority of the rest of society, in the punctuated intermittency of specific economic goal-oriented contracts and transactions.

Tönnies did not consider even academic institutions to be immune to corrupting influences of Gesellschaft, as evidenced in his correspondence with fellow German philosopher

Friedrich Paulsen (Tönnies and Paulsen 1961:120). He writes of his desire to establish a sort of alternative academy to be characterized by unfettered transmission of knowledge, friendship, economic equality, and the mutual care and support for all members. The project was also envisioned to actualize in the rural countryside, removed from the “stifling environment of the city” (Tönnies and Paulsen 1961:157; Adair-Toteff 1995:63). Although Tönnies’ own community ambitions were never able to materialize, his efforts and the reasons for which he desired a separation from elements of the social mainstream of his time are echoed in the similar goals pursued by communitarians today.

The solidarity exhibited by intentional communities and extolled by Tönnies is felt more deeply than the utilitarian solidarity associated with Durkheim’s organic type. The communitarian desire for social accord and for internal group familiarity naturally reflects the orientation of sharing—of Mind, Blood, and Place—concomitant with *Gemeinschaft*. Moreover the sentimental origins of the modern day communitarian derive not from communities themselves but from within individuals who are products of mainstream society, whose yearnings for a more meaningful and humanist manner of solidarity stem from an aversion to elements of society which engender interdependence, i.e. labor specialization and role differentiation—but also may produce a sense of isolation, inequality, cultural divide, and moral crisis. This is not to say that labor division is inherently antithetical to the goals of the intentional community. Each community in this study exhibits a certain division of labor and there is no question of the necessity of such arrangements in this type of setting. Indeed, the system of assorted labor roles and responsibilities at Honey Locust must be seen to enhance the overall quality of community experience as enjoyed by members of its varied and diverse population, who are granted the freedom to pursue elements of community life which most appeal to them.

However this freedom is confined to certain limits, and this is how a community of such attributes and certain structural dispositions toward *organic* solidarity is able to retain the essence of *Gemeinschaft*, through many types of sharing and the realization of common identity reinforced in this way.

Nomad Creek and Bhakti Farm can be cast similarly as exhibiting traits of both organic solidarity and *Gemeinschaft*. Members of each community are able to recognize their associations with the rest of their respective groups via common values and certain shared locales. But they also present a degree of internal diversity reflective of the varied ways in which members interact with the world outside the confines of their respective communities. Bhakti Farm in its earliest days, prior to the arrival of the second generation, might have been the most reminiscent of the true concept of mechanical solidarity, with its somewhat strict religious prescriptions (a hallmark of the idealized Durkheimian type), homogeneity of physical appearance (dress), and highly unified, concerted system of labor.

The general rigidity of Durkheim's conceptual types, and specifically of mechanical solidarity, precludes much of its practical use for the characterization of modern intentional communities, aside from some analogies it invites (such as the reference to common dress constituting Durkheim-termed "physical resemblance", above). Perhaps more useful for the purposes of this paper are some of Durkheim's elaborations on certain perceptibly negative consequences of the transition to organic social solidarity, which occasionally bring to mind comments made by Tönnies in his disdain for elements of *Gesellschaft*. Although often expressed more directly in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* than in *The Division of Labor*, both men's descriptions of modern society evoke imagery of the modern world as conveyed by communitarians, and of the elements of it deemed threatening to the health of individuals and the

overall well-being of human society. From Durkheim's standpoint, the pleasures and productivity offered by modern society invariably produce only new voids, needs, and sensitivities which in turn must be grappled with. "[Many] stimuli that were agreeable have become too strong for us, and are in consequence painful." Perhaps channeling the Buddha he remarks "If we are sensitive to more pleasures, we are also sensitive to more sorrows" (190).

Durkheim indicates that the process of role specialization in modern society marks the divorce of individuals from a collective consciousness. In a "small society" states of consciousness are held to have prevailed more or less uniformly, because:

[Everyone] is similarly placed in relation to [the same objects and forces;] they affect every individual consciousness in the same way. The whole tribe, provided it is not too extensive, enjoys or suffers equally the advantages and inconveniences of sun and rain, heat and cold, or of a particular river or spring, etc. (226)

Though this is a somewhat simplistic view the point to be made is that in the dissolution of a more perceptible collective consciousness, the newfound sensitivities as described above become of increasingly focused individual concern. As efficiency and quality of industrial production increases, now independent and successful individuals are allowed access to new means of attaining happiness, now realized through the medium of material comforts.

The resources that [the division of labor] places at our disposal are more abundant; they are also of better quality. Science is carried out better and more quickly; works of art are more plentiful and more delicate; industry produces more and its products are more finished. Now, man needs all these things. Thus it seems that he must be the happier the more of them that he possesses, and consequently be naturally induced to seek after them. (Durkheim 183)

The modern pursuit of material pleasure obscures the indigenous proclivity to bask passively in the natural currents of life. Instead, attention and effort are directed toward

increasingly specific and often economically-based goals. Success in a given profession establishes one's place within a network of exchange thoroughly rooted in the material; the strength of organic solidarity lies in the element of dependence that participation within this network engenders. "The need to play, to indulge in acting without any purpose and for the pleasure of so doing, cannot be developed beyond a certain point without detaching oneself from the serious business of life" (Durkheim 188). The notion of "pleasure of so doing" calls to mind features of Tönnies' concept of the natural will. This type of will is considered to represent emotions and motives derived chiefly from past experiences. Behavior produced from the natural will is unconscious in the sense that it is not directed toward any fixed objective or goal. In contrast, the rational will motivates behavior that is undertaken for a particular reason. Such action is calculated based on future events and outcomes, particularly with respect to economic motivations (Tönnies 104). It is the excessive dependence upon this calculated volition within *Gesellschaft* to which Tönnies refers when he describes the formation of the "superimposed artificial person" (177).

Since all relations in the *Gesellschaft* are based upon comparison of possible and offered services, it is evident that the relations with visible, material matters have preference, and that mere activities and words form the foundation for such relationships only in an unreal way. (78)

Dealings with *Gesellschaft* entail a departure from the natural orientation of the family. The individual of *Gesellschaft* is conveyed as the scheming agent, engaging in new relationships only so far as his own interests are duly served.

In the conception of *Gesellschaft*, the original or natural relations of human beings to each other must be excluded. The possibility of a relation in the *Gesellschaft* assumes no more than a multitude of mere persons who are capable of delivering something, and consequently of promising something. (77)

A system established in the values of personal empowerment, direction, and interests will be prone to certain afflictions at the level of the individual. In *The Division of Labor and Suicide* (1897) Durkheim introduced the term “anomie” into popular sociological consciousness. Anomie as presented in the former relates primarily to relationships between social institutions, and particularly to describe a manner of discord between functional entities of society (Durkheim 1887: 287). More applicable to the motivating factors for communitarians, the anomie presented in *Suicide* takes a different tone. Here, Durkheim outlines social conditions of which *anomic suicide* may be symptomatic, e.g. rapid social and technological change and moral diversity. Central to Durkheim’s discussion is the element of rapid change and the negative effect it has upon the relationships of people to the greater society of which they are a part, with the focus frequently on the economic parameters involved with types of sociocultural transformation but also with attention to factors such as education and certainly religion (Durkheim 1897). Durkheim often references the transition from totalitarian to comparatively liberal political arrangements to account for the greater preponderance of anomie on a national scale. As a sort of metaphysical analog to the transition from mechanical to organic modes of solidarity, such a political transformation demonstrates the disintegration of enforced collective consciousness, yielding next conditions of economic and moral differentiation³⁶.

In the context of the perpetual modernization of contemporary society and the individualization and diversification of spheres of labor and cultural experience, any prospect for the unity of a collective consciousness appears to be slipping always further away. Sociologist Marvin E. Olsen’s interpretation of anomie as a “relative state of inadequate moral norms for controlling social interaction” (1965) seems apt for the veritable eruption of cultural diversity

³⁶ See Pray et al. 2013 for a discussion of contemporary suicide rates in the former Eastern Bloc.

within modern society, entailing an aggregation of interests and values all clambering to be understood and accounted for. Hardin says:

[Here in the commons we] want the maximum good per person; but what is good? To one person it is wilderness, to another it is ski lodges for thousands. To one it is estuaries to nourish ducks for hunters to shoot; to another it is factory land. Comparing one good with another is, we usually say, impossible because goods are incommensurable. Incommensurables cannot be compared. (1244)

In youth-driven “prefigurative” culture young people confront a social reality defined by rapid technological change that is without precedent in terms of the level of sophistication yielded by such advancement and the ways in which it influences culture on a global scale. However despite the trend toward global interconnectivity—the sharing of ideas, information, and awareness—those entrenched within newly established networks of communication are only all the more aware of byproducts of conflict and dissonance generated by humanity’s collective pursuit of progress and advancement. One may be brought to recognize the modern imbalance between the so-called “three legs of sustainability” as invoked by Jill of Nomad Creek. With the emphasis of mainstream society on the economic leg—on production and consumption—the legs representing care for the natural environment and for the social well-being of people are neglected. Moreover, as Durkheim indicates, material gratification and happiness from an existential standpoint are not one and the same. “Pleasure is local; it is an affective sentiment limited to one spot in the organism or the consciousness. Life resides in neither, but is everywhere present” (1893:190). “[Is] is true that the happiness of men increases in proportion as men progress? Nothing is more doubtful” (1893:189). These are the proverbial truths which characterize much of alternative culture philosophy. Conover sums up this dilemma of the future communitarian:

We can follow the argument of anomie and alienation which would, on the one hand, hold that youth have large and unmet felt needs for community and, on the other hand, hold that the parental generation, for all its financial success, does not present an image of happiness that would attract youth to the parental values. (455)

Despite the societal ills of the modern era, its saving grace paradoxically is the one which defines much of it in the first place, that is, agency. The hyper-individualized spheres of personal experience, comprised of unquantifiable collections of unique exposures to other people, ideas, cultural environments, and media, leave up to the future communitarian the exceptional ability to choose a manner of living which, all things considered, might provide the most fulfillment. If such a self-conscious undertaking does lead to the intentional community, the experience will not be without its own adversities and toil, not unexpected in the task of devising a new cultural identity. It is not a resentment toward the prospect of work which repels the socially-conscious; it is an aversion to the reigning premises which define the value of work in the context of mainstream society. Communities of longevity like Bhakti Farm and Honey Locust almost certainly would not exist today if not for years of conviction and concerted effort, which now include the contributions of multiple generations.

“One generation does not suffice to cast off the work of generations and install the new man in the place of the old. In the present state of our societies work is not only useful, but necessary: indeed everyone feels this to be the case, and this necessity has long been felt. However, those who find their pleasure in regular and persistent labor are rare. For most men it is still unbearable servitude. For them the idleness of primitive times has not lost its old attraction. Such metamorphoses thus cost a great deal, without bringing in any return for a long while. The generations that initiate them do not garner the fruits, if there are any, because these come too late.” (Durkheim 1893:189)

Recommendations for Further Research

Although the intentional community is by no means a new object of study in the social sciences, there remain many opportunities for further research. The overarching goal of this particular work has been to highlight points of contrast between intentional communities and what is broadly denoted as mainstream society in terms of structure and the function of values systems. Considering the broadly-defined constructions of *Gemeinschaft* or mechanical solidarity and of *Gesellschaft* or organic solidarity, a correspondingly general set of observations can be made in this regard. However with respect to the many diverse elements of today's intentional communities which distinguish them as an alternative way of life, more precise areas of research could be undertaken.

One potential area of research concerns the status and role of the nuclear family in the intentional community context. Although effort is presently made to describe the intentional community as an extended fictive kin network, there is limited evidence in this data addressing the nuclear family in the context of community as unique entities in and of themselves relative to mainstream counterparts. This question has implications for contemporary communities in particular. While research in the past has described characteristics of alternative community family structure, including child autonomy (Berger 1972) or the significance of additional parental figures (Conover 1975), such work is becoming somewhat dated as some communities—including Honey Locust and Bhakti Farm—are seen to have moved away from community-specific institutionalized forms of child-rearing as embraced in earlier decades of the movement in favor of more nuclear-based approaches (Maital 2003). The timing of the research conducted for this study precludes much in-depth discussion of the character of community families with regard to child-rearing and related elements of the formative years of family

development. Honey Locust and Bhakti Farm are past the decades of their highest rates of fertility, and such rates of fertility have not yet been achieved at Nomad Creek. New research into how families in modern communities are ordered and oriented within extended group populations can shed more light on acculturation of children in these settings, community values regarding the family, and the relationship of these values structures to mainstream conventions.

Another potential area of further study concerns community economic arrangements. Communities sustain themselves in many different ways, and a more comprehensive picture of the various strategies employed by communities, families, and individual members is required to better understand how this dimension of collective life impacts internal solidarity and affects types of exchange undertaken with the cultural mainstream. Large scale single sustaining cottage industries as at Honey Locust are comparatively rare among intentional communities today and increasingly diversified labor models such as that suggested at Bhakti Farm are being looked to more often. Although the multiple income model is typically more viable in the proximity of cities, the advent of a greater variety of computer-based jobs allowing community members the possibility of working away from traditional commercial centers could also allow rural communities more economic options than in past eras. Developments like this one derived from advancements in the cultural mainstream are important to consider for their effects on intentional communities, impacting how communities interact with and see themselves relative to the outside world. Similar points could be made for virtually any mainstream cultural developments, especially given the hyper-connected nature of communication today, allowing members of even isolated communities to keep abreast of outside currents. Communities as responses to perceived inadequacies of mainstream society necessarily should also be seen to retain a degree of

inspiration from the outside, and a disposition toward reacting to it and its various transformations.

[We] are now experiencing a [new] wave that began in the 1980s and is characterized by eclecticism. Contemporary intentional communities are not as alienated from mainstream culture as were their predecessors; and they appear to be more adept at balancing individual and community needs. (Smith 2002:111)

With regard to the myriad ways in which communities are influenced by the culture of the mainstream, the relatively brief stints of research conducted for this study only scratch the surface in terms of the subtleties of this relationship. The three case studies presented here are only snapshots of the ways their interactions with the outside world have been shaped. What's more, the three communities here represent a small sampling of community life. Comparatively longer research periods or time spent with other communities along the spectrum—including those of urban locales or those defined in terms of other ideological backdrops—certainly could enhance the breadth of understanding contributed to here. Additionally, with regard to components of community life such as the family or economic strategy, and the ways these or other features are distinguished from mainstream expressions, a more comprehensive research agenda might include contextualized data supplied from sources firmly anchored in mainstream society as well, in order to delineate the nature of contrasts and dichotomies in broader experiential terms.

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