"DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS" IN EGALITARIAN INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES:

SEARCHING FOR THE GOOD LIFE IN PRACTICAL UTOPIAS

Mari Hanssen Korsbrekke

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores egalitarian social experiments in a section within the Intentional Communities (ICs) movement in the United States of America. The central ethnographic investigation of the thesis concerns an analysis of egalitarianism in self-proclaimed "egalitarian" ICs—a social movement that can be conceived of as cases of practical utopian experiments, "real utopias," or "everyday utopias". "ICs" are groups of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose or are motivated by shared values. The main argument is that the expression of egalitarianism in the movement can be seen as a type of processual knowledge creation that develops skillsets. The thesis contributes to the necessary and continuous unpacking of concepts, such as egalitarianism, and frames this particular expression of egalitarianism as *practical egalitarianism*. Further, this thesis argues that egalitarianism as such a prism or mode highlights egalitarian paradoxes that structure utopian social organization and inform new experiments and intentions. This thesis makes its argument in six chapters and builds on multi-sited participating observations during 17 months of fieldwork in various ICs in Virginia, USA, from 2015 to 2018.

This thesis departs from different discourses and tensions within the paradoxes of equality and equity in the experiments of a small group of ICs. These ethnographies of practical experimental "real" utopias, where I highlight events and topics where egalitarianism is unpacked in its various forms and processes, and the study shows how these processes anti-hegemonize unjust hierarchies and introduce new ways of navigating social life without reproducing social injustices and oppressive hierarchies.

This thesis delves deeper into some of the most important and highlighted experiments where, these ICs have made significant efforts to produce egalitarian social values and organization. I show how these issues also touch on environmentalism, frugality, asceticism, feminism, and various forms of political activism, and how these emerge as common tropes of egalitarian intent in these "social laboratories". By examining the initiation process and some of the exclusionary processes of unwanted behavior or members, this thesis explores the skills developed within an egalitarian

norm and value system and argues that “good egalitarian” emerges as an ideal type committed to egalitarian social conduct and the community. This thesis then explores how they go about what is often referred to as the “radical sharing” of income and property to create egalitarian futures while tackling the country and its peoples’ colonial past and current political insecurities. This study explores such radical sharing as a method toward sustainable redistribution. Another experiment studied here is how members go about “consent norms” to establish safe spaces and self-determination, personal empowerment, and communal boundaries. The sixth chapter reviews how issues related to experimental labor systems that generate equality among members create new ways of being equal, but these can also create new inegalitarianism. Throughout the thesis, I show how communards address ambiguities and paradoxes of equality, equity, justice, and liberty through everyday acts, mediations, conflicts, and tensions as self-proclaimed “egalitarians”.

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Some notes on language

I have used the preferred pronouns of individuals to show commitment to the non-heteronormative and non-binary peoples' struggles. Most often, these are "co," "they," or "ze," but "co" has a double meaning regarding these sites, as it is a common way to refer generally to communards by calling them "co" in policy or discussion texts. The use of the non-binary pronoun co is now more widely accepted. However, at Twin Oaks, the pronoun was used as an expulsion of gendered language and for shaping a collective: co is used in policies, general statements, or text, where an individual is being held anonymous, or the community prefers to keep the description non-gendered—this has been the practice since very early in its development during the second wave of feminism. Although many interlocutors still use gendered language and pronouns, they challenge these conditioned practices of the mainstream to create an opportunity for the individual to experiment and transform.

Throughout the dissertation, I deployed typographer-styled double quotation marks ("…") to indicate my direct quotation or concepts used by interlocutors and to select words and terms. To indicate differences when paraphrasing my interlocutors, I either summarized without quotation marks or put these in a separate paragraph for longer quotes.

PREFACE: WHAT IS INTENTIONAL ABOUT INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY?

While shaking his head and raising his voice slightly, the young man sitting down on a couch in front of me said, “What part of intentional community is it that they don’t understand?” A group of communards and I discussed a recent conflict where the provocation in question had received such strong reactions that the Twin Oaks community was now seeking formal conflict resolution. The conflict was about a member’s inability to fulfill the labor quota.

The group present was the fraction of the community that felt the conflict had not been handled well by the community. It seemed like the group’s general sentiment was that the community had failed to help an individual through hard times, although they had committed to this person when they included him as a member. The community was growing weary of the hours spent handling these issues and spending its resources to cover the member’s work hours. The little group discussing the issue felt that the communards who had engaged in the open conflict were not being mindful of what the commitments to intentional communities are, or rather, should be.

“I don’t think that in community, we can just pick out the best ones and not have anyone here that we have a problem with. That can't be the revolution! We have to be intentional! And egalitarianism is never ever going to be this one-size-fits- all-project, that’s not how that works,” one of the other younger men in the crowd said, waving his fist up toward the sky. He had previously spoken about changing the labor credit system so that the community could take better care of people that, for some reason or other, could not work as much as others in periods. The young members had suggested that they would collect their surplus labor hours into a common pool that could be drawn from when someone could not work their full quota. Others had thought these suggestions were naive, and that the labor system was too pressed for them to have members on the farm who could not work or, at least, would work much less than the others. Both sides claimed that the other’s suggestions were “inegalitarian,” as some of them would say. If they left room for that freedom in the system, they could end up being exploited, and some would work, and some would

coast on that work. However, excluding people with problems, physical handicaps or health issues was argued to be necessary.

This type of discussion highlights some of the central issues of the egalitarian organization of their society, manifesting and exposing the cracks in the egalitarian idea. “Being intentional” in this intentional community often means that social behaviors and control mechanisms should be geared toward “being egalitarian.” It is a reflection of how to create more equality in every social interaction. Such conflicts happen regularly and highlight the core tensions surrounding egalitarian organization and participation in this specific case and more generally. One can argue that sharing resources, experiences, and commitments emerges as the prism from which egalitarianism unfolds regarding hierarchy. Here, we also see that this is an issue of what kind of commitment could be expected from egalitarians. The intricacies of living in a small village like Twin Oaks are many; they must find ways to make the community last, get new members, and hold on to those they have. They nurture their elderly, manage businesses and finances, children, schooling, shopping, laundries, and bills while also learning to know each other and live together and create the institutions that manage conflict.

Was egalitarianism about equal access and equal sharing of resources? Or was it more about equal contributions to the community? Was egalitarianism about organizing labor in ways that would benefit the weaker links or relieve them of oppressive working conditions? Was it about climate change, perhaps? Or about the economy? In a utopian social experiment, conversations, and tensions like these are everyday occurrences; evaluating everyday practices is essential so that the experiment can be improved, and changes planned for. This thesis is a study of what I have called here chosen to call *practical egalitarianism,* and what this may look like in intentional communities that are morally directed toward improving their lives and creating new ways of living together.

CHAPTER 1 UNPACKING EGALITARIANISM IN INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES

FIGURE 1- ALL THE STRANGE WITH TWICE THE RANGE— DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

Description: A collaborative drawing of Mari and S. G. done over a conversation about the different needs of interns and members of the community while living at Living Energy Farm

INTRODUCTION: EGALITARIAN INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES (ICS)

This thesis explores egalitarian experiments in five different North American ICs in which the pursuit of a better world is conceived of as a struggle for equality. Based on fieldwork for 17 months in 2015–2017, this thesis explores ethnographically what I argue to be egalitarian experiments in the context of such politically utopian formations. As part of my research, the five communities presented here are Twin

Oaks (TO) and Living Energy Farm (LEF), which are the most central to this study, in addition to Cambia, Acorn, and East Wind. These are income-sharing, collaborating communities. All, except Cambia and LEF, are self-proclaimed “egalitarians”. In the public discourse on politics, as I experienced during my fieldwork, there was a demand for a reevaluation of the past and its consequences for the current political context. Social movements were in this period gaining a surge of interest from many sides. In the time before Trump won the election, both the far right and the new left were gaining support, the left building on the enormous strides made by protest movements that had challenged the status quo of American society before them. Rural ICs present us with different forms of protest than other political and social movements. Rather than engaging with big politics, they frequently retract into their communities to learn how to re-engage and live better in a society that does not fit them or their needs.

Although egalitarianism is a wide-ranging ideology and frame of reference for everything having to do with ‘equality’, for the communards in this study it covers many of their experiences, paradoxes, conflicts, tensions, and negotiations in their daily life. Their approaches to egalitarianism influence events and behaviors and how they relate to bigger societal pressures. I will argue for an unpacking of the practical elements of egalitarianism and explore how this drives a type of utopian experimentation. The thesis engages with this field by demonstrating how egalitarianism can be a process and an ideal that destabilizes what communards consider past oppressive behaviors and embodied knowledge. They develop certain skills to navigate and correct social life. My interlocutors emerge as "practical philosophers of the egalitarian" and work hard to determine what forms of social life equality might entail.

I have coined and framed this mode of egalitarianism as a type of "practical egalitarianism." With this, the thesis contributes to the study of egalitarian utopianism in anthropology and expands the study of the practicalities of integrating such endeavors into everyday life by intentional experimentation with social forms.

THE PROMISED LAND AND EGALITARIAN EXPERIMENTATION

The different and sometimes contesting narratives about inequality in the US are exposed through various events in history. The colonization of America itself can be interpreted as a long utopian experiment that created rapid opportunities for many forms of social experimentation. People fleeing persecution in Europe or just searching for a better life, sought the New World, where land was readily available, and no strong government was formed. We might say that what we now call the IC movement developed from that spirit of coming to “the New World”. The first of these communities in the US is Swanendael, established in 1663 by Mennonites fleeing from Europe (Metcalf 2012:23). Several utopian scholars like Michael Barkun (1986) and Brian J. L Berry (1992) have argued that utopian surges are exemplified through the intensification of IC development.

The promises of the New World allowed the utopian desires to be actualized on what settlers and colonizers considered a type of *tabula rasa* land, ripe for development that centered itself upon the individual’s rights of freedom and equality. There was an intense fascination for John Locke’s understanding of ‘the state of nature’, as one where one has the right to pursue life, happiness, and property, in the New World colonies, and this legitimated the colonization of land based on the argument that land could be seized if it was ineffectively managed (Duschinsky 2012). Locke’s philosophy and the new social contracts of the New World opened up for the exploitation of land and peoples, and these hierarchies and oppressions reverberate into the present in the US. American exceptionalism (see Tocqueville 2003) is attributed to the conviction that the US holds a special place among nations because it was a country of immigrants and democracy.

One may outline four historical waves of utopian settlement developments in North America. The first wave sparked during this early settlement. It mainly involved different religious projects—like the founding of the New Haven Connecticut Colony in 1638—which was an attempt to create a “church compact within itself, without subordination under or dependence upon any other but Jesus Christ” (Archer 1975). These churches and ICs often sought refuge from persecution in Europe.

The second significant wave occurred in the 1840s and was essentially a reaction to the believed immorality of the surrounding society. Around this time, industrialization had produced an extensive proletariat and groups of intellectuals in the cities that gathered to discuss social change, and some of these utopian movements were spurred by such fraternizations. Many of these developments were millenarian religious communities that rejected the reformist Christianity that had dominated the settler societies. The communities of the 1800s and onward wished to return to more orthodox Christianity or desired another transformation of Christian beliefs. Many of these were millenarian movements settled down on small pieces of land (Kanter 1972:88).

The most famous example of such an early utopian settlement is the case of Oneida. Initiated by John Humphrey Noyes, Oneida saw its early stages in Virginia. Noyes moved on to Vermont and developed a community on perfectionist ideals—implemented through the complete sharing of beliefs, property, and sexual life (Kanter 1972:18,133). The Oneidas believed that the Second Coming of Christ had already happened in 70AD and that it was up to them to create Heaven on Earth. Through systems of complex marriage rules, he believed that one could achieve a community of only "the best" of individuals (Olin Jr 1980:285–288). The Second Coming of Christ had induced the potential for spiritual perfection and purity. Perfectionism was long a significant influence on various utopian programs (Jennings 2016:293–325).

The Shaker movement arose around the same time and became quite a substantial grouping; the Shakers believed that sexual intercourse was the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, and by eliminating it, God would bring onto them his kingdom. (Brewer 1992). After these surges of utopian settlement development, a whole mass of ICs appeared. Still, the third wave of popularity did not happen before the “human potential movement” or the “Hippie” movement of the 1960s and 1970s brought about behaviorist notions of values and procession dynamics toward sometimes distinct egalitarian ideals of a healthy society. The first of these was a little commune for recovering drug addicts, Synanon, which originated in 1958. These forms of ICs believed in self-improvement, positive and creative reinforcement, and

self-reflection, and very often have specific ideals of sharing and viability through constant change and improvement. Other spiritual, political, new-age, or new-Christian movements took a foothold in these alternative movements and influenced many of the renunciatory communes that emerged in this period. Many of these were also concerned with the inequalities of the outside world and wished to obtain freer lives with often voluntary poverty as one aspect (Carden 1976:11–22). Most importantly for this thesis, this third wave also includes the Walden Two-inspired communities, where humans could be improved, and cultural critique could unify the struggles of peoples looking for better ways to live. Twin Oaks (TO), a central case study in this thesis, was one of them.

Arguably, we are currently in what could be understood as the fourth wave, one in which "intersectionality" and environmental sustainability and activist imaginaries stand as strong influences in the movements. Essential to this type of communal experimentation is the idea of producing “community.” Robert D. Putnam shows, in *Bowling Alone* (Putnam 2015), how “community” has been a prevalent force in discourse about life in the US and that community has not necessarily been weakened over the last centuries, but rather that civic engagement that shapes and generates a sense of community comes and goes in waves. Related to this search for community, Hochschild (2016) argues that American society, driven by competition and skepticism toward state intervention, has developed various social security hubs, such as the military, the religious community, the police, different social movements, and so on. These offer the individual’s restoration of community and honor (Hochschild 2018). Americans tend to "cluster" close to people they share values with, sometimes even ignoring their own self-interest and fighting for causes counterproductive to their own life situations. Hochschild reasons that we could learn much from exploring the "deep stories" of such security hubs, meaning the underlying longue durée developments that shape such connective narratives that people may cluster around. The ICs in question attest to people looking for community and security through social connectedness, yet ICs differ from other social groupings. Let me explain the IC intentions that are relevant for this study a bit further.

Exploring ICs- utopian experiments

Defining an IC may be difficult. Kat Kinkade, one of the founders of the second community field site from which ethnography for this dissertation is drawn, wrote:

> "Intentional community" ... (has) its own clear borders and membership. Some people call it a "utopian" community. The essential element in any intentional community, ours included, is that people who want to live in it will have to join, be accepted by those who already live there, and go by its rules and norms, which may in some ways differ from those in society at large (Blue 2017).

IC includes many social formations and is an umbrella notion that includes social forms such as eco-villages, co-housings, residential land trusts, income-sharing communes, student co-ops, primitivist communities, and spiritual and religious communities. Cults and sects are also related to these in their conceptualizations, but most ICs treat these as a different kind of organization that might be based on drivers other than a voluntary commitment[1]. They often comprise people who have chosen to live together, not bound by kinship ties, basing their cooperation on shared values and beliefs. As I will show, this practice is informed and fueled by the desire to rearticulate a better world or lifestyle. For the ICs studied throughout this thesis, this, in practice, means a united intention of making egalitarianism a common platform where the aim is a change toward the betterment of different societal afflictions.

Scholars often understand ICs to be utopian, namely because they are places that are "eutopian" in intent and therefore represent utopias in process: "spaces where the good life is pursued" (Sargisson 2007:393). In this perspective, 'Utopia' is understood to be an ambiguous and paradoxical concept. The concept is derived from Thomas More's novel by the same name, where he created the pun originating from the Greek word *ou-topos* meaning "no-place," and *eu-topos* meaning "good-place"

[1] The ICs presented throughout the thesis often reference that they have implemented a "no cult clause," meaning that they emphasize that people can leave any time they want and implies an ethical commitment to refrain from strong structures of coercion that might be harmful to any member or visitor.

(Levitas 2013:3). The last 20–30 years of scholarly explorations have induced a rethinking of utopias as immanent, critical, and reflexive and have called for a reopening of the concept to better understand how it is grounded in local life (Levitas 2013).

Utopianism, more broadly, has been suggested by one of the most critical scholars of Utopia, sociologist Ruth Levitas, to be a type of method or mode to pursue a better life or future, meaning that utopianism can be a method rather than a fixed ideal or goal (Levitas 2013). For Levitas, the concept of utopia has been limited by its past and narrow definition, which emphasizes the perfect or ultimate ideal, arguing that this is not how utopia manifests itself in social life. Thus, she suggests a new and much broader understanding of the term that centers on the notion of *desire*—“the desire for a different, better way of being” (Levitas 2013:209).

Although "utopia" was not conceptually conceived until Sir Tomas More depicted an imaginary island society in the novel published in 1516, some commentators believed that utopianism might be a significant part of human nature (Levitas 1990). More's novel, in this view, only marked the beginning of what is understood to be the utopian tradition (Garforth 2009). Utopian tradition has since tackled its paradox of imagining the no-place, which is a good place, both in fiction and through practical experiments, such as those presented throughout this thesis. Various utopian desires and impulses can also be traced, particularly in European history. Especially, millennial movements made utopian impulses essential and played a great role in structuring societies that aimed at creating heavens on earth, either waiting for the New Time or intentionally trying to generate such a rupture (Cohn 1970). The Renaissance, a time of massive exploration, colonization, and restructuring of feudal relationships, parachuted the European Empires into massive change, and people dreamed of and set out to explore new ways of living. Myths about parallel worlds or lost cities produced fantasies of radically different ways of living through literature and storytelling.

Critiques of utopias as unrealistic, romantic, escapist, or naive have dominated much of the debate surrounding utopianism. Significantly, the critiques of the

perfectionist agendas of totalitarian utopias in the 20th century spurred a wave of anti-utopianism that has depicted utopias as dangerous and often genocidal machines (Sargisson 2007). From fascism and nazism to communism and the human perfectionist movement, which aspired to produce the ideal humans or social formations through biological and social engineering, utopian impulse influenced some of the significant social experiments in the New World in the 19th and 20th centuries. The world has experienced how utopian aspirations led to great human suffering and become impossible to endure (Sargisson 2007).

However, Jameson (1974:302) also argues that it is the oppressed that will claim the most urgency for utopia. A sense of mainstream oppression is certainly also maintained by the ICs. Ideologically, historically, and theoretically, utopianism and egalitarianism have often been intrinsically linked through examples of inversions of power structures, resistance movements, and various other social processes and social modes of innovation, where various forms of equality have been emphasized. With this, we can see that utopianism revitalizes itself continuously and that it cannot be bound up to unhealthy totalitarianism necessarily. The utopian desires for new ways of being, away from or in the periphery of American society, are embodied by the ICs in this thesis through their quest for equality and community, and away from oppressive hierarchizations. Communards envision an egalitarianism that strives to overcome forms of oppression by implementing what is better or "good" through egalitarian reform. Here, "egalitarianism" is a locally grounded concept used frequently as part of local vernacular in the community among members, and it is also embedded throughout their extensive policies. As Levitas argues, we have learned from postmodern critiques of utopia that utopias are always imperfect and processual and, indeed, often accepted by utopians to be limited, not ideal and imperfect (2013).

Today, utopia is regaining momentum in popular discourse. The “return of utopians”— as was coined by journalist and writer Akash Kapur (2016)— and this calls for attention to the socio-political context of Americans today and why some of them chose to explore life outside of society at large in smaller enclaves. My interlocutors will be the first to note that they have not accomplished a "utopia." It

remains for them a non-existing state that they still relate to in everyday life. In these communities, the saying "Not utopia yet" is common, which could be argued to be evidence of their processual take on egalitarianism.

Anthropologist Henrietta Moore (Moore 1990) highlighted that what makes utopians exceptionally interesting is their relationship to "willed intentional change," and the tensions these projects lead to. Often scholars have failed to recognize the complexity of social movements that “make futures happen”, reducing such spaces or efforts to the imaginary realm, projections or mere strategies (see Austdal 2016). The utopian political organization and social life of the ICs, which I will introduce here, present a social field in which egalitarian governance is based on desires and hopes, balanced with collective needs and ideals of radical sharing. This point also gives insights into the politics of disillusionment, failure, resistance, and transformation and the everyday lives of peoples that have chosen to disengage or renunciate various elements of American society to live in these communities to make better futures happen.

Similarly, one may outline two significant trends in IC making: religiously and spiritually oriented communities, and psycho-socially oriented communities, but sharing a search in utopia as ‘the good place’ for the emotional fulfillment of the individual through community participation (Kanter 1972).

In comparison of similar topics, Louis Dumont stresses the potentiality of the individual stepping outside society. He shows how this is the case in, for example, the Indian caste system, where being outside the world is a recognized role of the renouncer of ascetics or *sannyasin.* They leave the world to achieve total liberation, providing society with an institutional perspective from the outside. That case provides a comparative contrast to other cases where individuals choose a disjuncture similar to these and actively pursue a rupture (Dumont 1980). The people in the ICs studied do not leave the world like the ascetics in India, although their liberation projects are admittedly similar. They disengage with the majority to explore a higher purpose and understanding of their own structural situation.

Renunciation in the ICs allows the individual to self-explore and develop toward a greater good. Individualism meets with a holistic project of attempting to connect to the group and to their common interests and project. In a way, we can say that egalitarianism informs a restructuring of what individualism *should be* for transitioning to a more just future; thus, they are encompassed by various modes of egalitarianism/hierarchical modes that continuously generate new frictions. Hence, I will try to make clear how they successfully produce an alternative to individualism in the US, but also how they never achieve a complete rupture from the systems they are challenging and with this process develop skills to engage with the world as egalitarians.

The communities explored here embrace a wish to share, often what most people in the US would not choose to share outside of their family or kin group, such as property, sexual partners, labor, food, child-rearing responsibilities, or even children, and intellectual work. They have chosen these radical life choices, such as quitting their jobs and joining a community, often ridding themselves of their property and possessions, sometimes even family ties or friendships. Before joining the movement, potential new members engage in a liminal trial period before they are invited to participate as equals in their various social settlements if proven worthy or a good fit. This requires developing certain systems and skills to navigate a more egalitarian mode of being together. The strategy of the community members in these forms of communes is to establish a form of egalitarianism that serves as a break with what can be understood or assumed to be distressing or repressive socio-political structures and institutions. Dystopic or apocalyptic imageries or influence lies as a backdrop to such social activism. Since the communities in question focus more on the practical day-to-day activities that will alleviate such tension, I choose to focus on the utopian processes explored here through the ways egalitarianism expresses itself.

Communards often share a communal wish to serve as models or social laboratories from which others can follow and learn from. By having various interconnected communities, they believe they can also gain influence on politics

beyond their own borders and, therefore, frequently engage in "movement support" with other social movements, such as "Idle No More" and "Black Lives Matter."

The case with voluntary associated ICs is that they are constantly related to the state order of the US while also producing alternatives to it. As they see it, they cannot achieve total independence within the state territory, and their perspective is instead to change American society from within by doing good. Following the argument made by Hicks (2001:13), "utopian communitarians are dedicated participants in American culture, regardless of their apparent desire to secede from it." There is a paradoxical resiliency in living in the state periphery, still contesting parts of its workings and incorporating others with different logics and strategies.

Similarly, Firth (2014) argues that it is helpful concerning ICs to examine the distinction between counter-and anti-hegemony. As conceptualized by Day (2005), counter-hegemony refers to the idea that social change can only be achieved through simultaneous mass revolution or by influencing state power through pluralistic processes of cooperation and conflict. "These strategies… imply both an organizational form and an approach to knowledge production that rest on assumptions of unified voice or 'truth' that can speak as or to power, through vanguards or representatives"(Day 2005:8; Firth 2014:159). However, anti-hegemony refers to processes of radical change that do not seek to take or influence state power but rather act autonomously by creating alternatives in the here-and-now (Day 2005: 8; Firth 2014:160). I suggest that specific processes of such anti-hegemony are at the core of what I call practical egalitarianism, as the ongoing, everyday denaturalization of American social norms and the anti-hegemonic modes that affect communards' perceptions of themselves. Price, Nonini, and Fox Tree (2008:133) ask, "What of movements that do not aspire to gain political power within the modern state or to challenge capitalism- but whose internal identity-work transforms the lives of their members, and even the social setting around them, as they seek to bring about a more satisfying world?". The anti-hegemonic impulses in ICs, similar to what Price, Nonini, and Tree coined as "grounded utopian movements," have been neglected in theories of social movements. They especially considered those movements that had been

distinctive in that their visions of strong utopias and in movements that had formed to counteract conditions of racist imperial oppression:

> By grounded, we mean that the identities, values, and imaginative dimensions of utopia are culturally focused on real places, embodied by living people, informed by past lifeways, and constructed and maintained through quotidian interactions and valued practices that connect the members of a community, even if it is a diasporic one (2008: 128–129).

Furthermore, these

> …have emerged, persisted, disappeared, and re-emerged across decades, even centuries. These movements are “utopian” in that they point to an “ideal place” (utopia)-like the new world of the Ghost Dance or Mount Zion for the Rastafari-and by implication, to a better time and more satisfying social relationships and identifications (…) Although all movements have a utopian dimension because they imagine alternative futures (Gusfield 1994:69) and their interest in utopia points to a commonality across movements, grounded utopian movements have been distinctive in that their visions of strong utopias have formed to counteract conditions of racist imperial oppression (e.g., slaughter, ethnocide, displacement), and have focused on group integrity and identity instead of on instrumental action with respect to states and capitalism. In this sense, they might be deemed “impractical” (2008:129).

Though the communities featured in this thesis comprise mainly "white" people, they are strongly influenced by and resemble in many ways all such grounded movements that work to decolonize diverse, multicultural spaces (though this is not without its contentions), as I will show.

Egalitarian experimentation and failure

The contemporary intentional communitarians that I am particularly interested in also often share the traits of what is known as New Social Movements, and similarly consider themselves moral pioneers in sustainable living, personal and cultural transformation, and what many of them refer to as peaceful social evolution and radical changes of consciousness (Shenker 2011). The strategy of the community members is to establish and co-create a rupture with what can be understood or assumed to be distressing or repressive socio-political structures and institutions in what they call “the mainstream,” “Babylon,” or “outside” by implementing egalitarian reform. They all share an egalitarian "mission," framed through income-sharing, lack of hierarchies among members, through mutual aid and labor organization, and equal access to direct democracy and resources. Some of them are sister communities, and members of a solidarity organization between egalitarian communities called the Federation of Egalitarian Communities (FEC) and adhere to their principles. The Federation connects the movement and facilitates cooperation between communities. It also offers financial solidarity and alternative forms of insurance. The Federation holds that:

> We, the Federation, are a union of egalitarian communities which have joined together in our common struggle to create a lifestyle based on equality, cooperation, and harmony with the earth. We believe that this is a fundamentally different approach than that offered by most cultures throughout the world, and one that holds the promise of realizing the human potential lost through the unequal distribution of wealth, power, and opportunity. Our communities affirm the right of all people to equal access to knowledge, resources, and decision-making. It is the Federation’s goal to reach the point where egalitarian communities are a well-known and accepted lifestyle, and readily available to all who seek it (FEC, n.d.).

Each of the FEC communities must, as members, follow a set of principles the Federation has co-created. This is meant to create a common platform that allows for transparency and accountability... The member-communities will

- Hold its land, labor, income, and other resources in common.
- Assume responsibility for the needs of its members, receiving the products of their labor and distributing these and all other goods equally, or according to need.
- Practice nonviolence.
- Use a form of decision-making in which members have an equal opportunity to participate, either through consensus, direct vote, right of appeal or overrule.
- Actively work to establish the equality of all people and do not permit discrimination regarding race, class, creed, ethnic origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity.
- Act to conserve natural resources for present and future generations while striving to continually improve ecological awareness and practice.
- Create processes for group communication and participation and provide an environment that supports people’s development (FEC, n.d.).

In the community, the ideal egalitarian is voted in and becomes part of the system through various initiation processes that develop egalitarian skills and dynamics of coercion and cohesion through the egalitarian communal body because sharing needs to happen on very specific terms. Here, sharing is thought of as an open concept that addresses several ways in which communards materially and socially exchange things. They share resources, responsibilities, and spaces through relationships, and work in most aspects of their personal lives to achieve material and status equality. Ambiguities of sharing in achieving solidarity, communitas, friendships, egalitarian organizations are in constant tension with the need to be balanced with the community's limited resources, be it time, energy, money, or similar resources. For instance, labor organizations must take meaningful and ethical forms, while managing conflict and laziness and must ensure equal participation on an equitable footing. Ambivalence toward the egalitarian communal project is thus prevalent, and ideals are sometimes at odds with an individual's rights or their egalitarian backdrop. This cannot end with or be reduced to tensions or contradictions between the individual and the communal but instead inspires proceedings and negotiations where these tensions may be transcended or explored. These tensions are controlled by developing a flexible policy system that allows for some differences, and not for others. This social dynamic denaturalizes, anti-hegemonizes, and reassembles failure and disillusionment as a significant part of the prefigurative politics in the ICs

being explored. The ability to handle failure is essential for the sustainability of the community, failure sets in motion improvements or necessary exclusions. Therefore, success should not be measured by longevity, as argued by one of the most quoted researchers on ICs, sociologist Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1972,1973).

Throughout this thesis, I will be highlighting some of what I deemed the most critical strides for egalitarian innovation through their experimentation. The initiation process is part of a socialization in which skills are developed to navigate certain egalitarian social terrains. The same goes for the work these ICs have done regarding what they call "creating consent culture," in which members engage with embodying egalitarian ideals and values and integrate this in how they relate to one another in safer and less oppressive ways. This experimentation also influences the enormous development they have accomplished in producing extensive labor systems that both assure equality and yet reveal tensions, paradoxes, and contradictions within the egalitarian paradigm. Degrowth and sustainability discourse shows how they relate their experimentation to more significant societal crises, such as exploitative labor, poverty, and climate change. Bigger crises also shape the way members relate to their own activism and solidarity work with other social movements. I will also show tensions between communal and individual pursuits for improvement and egalitarian experimentation.

My interlocutors thus engage in constant philosophizing over how to go about the willed change of their world into the egalitarian new time or the transformation into new forms of being, especially within the boundaries of their communities. Often, these negotiations are about everyday activities. Musings over various strategies happen frequently. How can a space be made safe for everyone? Can we draw on old technologies to face new problems, like climate disruption? How can feminism be integrated as a norm in social interactions? How can we produce leadership without patriarchy, or can we have leadership without hierarchies? Is my touch oppressive to the person I am touching? How can we ensure that income-sharing and the way we organize work do not alienate the workers? Can we have unequal access to decision-making and still be equals? How can we have status without reproducing class

distinctions? Is there a need to decolonize their policy and reform it to fit minorities better? Is it unfair for people of different sizes to have equal amounts of heavy lifting? Why do people of color not stay in our communities for very long? Can "consent" be reconceptualized to produce egalitarian relationships? What does it even mean to live as egalitarians together? Can one be egalitarian and still control and dominate the non-human, or rather, should we? Can we be equal to our animals, or are we already? These endless questions are reflected over communally. The practicalities of everyday life gave me better insight into the actual workings of producing egalitarianism in even the seemingly mundane; for instance, how can we avoid people leaving food out for mice and ants to frolic over? How can we get people to fill up the ice trays when they are finished and not just leave them in the freezer empty? Can we learn from former community discussions about how to deal with water waste from food production? How can we use all the food before it goes bad? Why do people not throw away broken things? Are the cows healthy enough? Can ducks be a good addition to fields to control bug infestations? Who will care for a struggling person? Can someone fix this or that? Which are the best batteries with which to store solar energy, and can we afford them? Utopians are problem finders, experimenters, entrepreneurs, and solvers, and this is why I consider them so important.

Before delving into the egalitarian experiments imposed in everyday life's practicalities in ICs, it is useful to explore how egalitarianism has been approached in a myriad of ways in anthropological investigation.

Anthropological Approaches to egalitarianism

As an analytical tool for philosophy or as a concept, egalitarianism has long been part of different thoughts in political philosophy and social sciences that favors or focuses on various forms of equality. Egalitarianism is also a significant concept in anthropology. While utopia is often seen as a Western ordeal, early anthropology often placed egalitarianism in the non-Western context, describing the equality of members of smaller stateless or pre-state groups and as being organized with low levels of social stratification. As such, egalitarianism has often been conceived in anthropological

inquiry as opposed to hierarchy, such as in hunter-gatherer adaptations. Meyer Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (2015) argued that African political systems were either hierarchical or egalitarian. The latter comprised "societies that lack centralized authority" in which there are "no sharp divisions of rank, status, and wealth" (Flanagan 1989; Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 2015). For clarity, we should distinguish between this concept of egalitarianism as a social system that organizes people and egalitarianism as it emerged, for instance, during the French Revolution, as *liberté, égalité et fraternité*—liberty, equality, and fraternity (brotherhood), and became an ideological value system.

Studies of Melanesian cultures were also referenced as "simple egalitarian societies" or "aggressively egalitarian" (Forge 1970; Robbins 1994). The force of the binary logic implicit in this mission to study the "other" has often led to the labeling of the societies they study as "egalitarian," "acephalous," "non-stratified," or "primitive communist" (Robbins 1994:22). With the dawn of a more 'mature' anthropology, however, and casting out its colonial baggage, these conceptions were deemed futile.

Marshall Sahlins criticized the idea that an egalitarian society is a natural state and closer to the origins of human society, claiming that no such egalitarian society exists: "Theoretically, an egalitarian society would be one in which every individual is of equal status, a society in which no one outranks anyone. But even the most primitive societies could not be described as egalitarian"(Sahlins 1893:3). James Woodburn, building on the *hxaro* partnerships of the !Kung, published a suggestion that the distinction between egalitarian and non-egalitarian societies should instead be based on a distinction between two types of economic systems (Woodburn 1982). Egalitarian societies have economies based on an immediate return on labor, whereas social inequalities are generated by economies in which the return on labor is delayed. This offered some explanation into why explaining the difference between genuinely egalitarian societies, where equality is "asserted as an automatic entitlement which does not have to be validated" (Woodburn 1982:446), and other acephalous societies— such as those in Melanesia, where equality at this point was seen to be

earned through fierce competition, which invariably results in a substantial degree of de facto inequalities (see Brunton 1989).

Adding to understanding egalitarian societies as low-stratification societies, the influence of French philosophy on understandings of egalitarianism has also been influential for anthropological inquiry. Like Rousseau, some of the French philosophers saw the free individual as the fundamental element of all value, existing prior to social relations (Rousseau 1964). Rousseau thought of egalitarianism holding a liberating promise, but it could also suffer a dehumanizing potentiality (1964). For Rousseau, an individual was a moral ideal that was to be realized as individuals freely subjecting themselves to the common good, making the political the emancipatory force of egalitarianism. "Natural man, by contrast, was undifferentiated, free as in equal, but unable to fully develop its potential" (Gold and Zagato 2020:11). Egalitarianism in that context explored the *State of Nature* alongside the potential of the future humans, and these surges asked questions about whether the natural human state was set in competition, conflict, or, instead, in egalitarian cooperation.

Broadly speaking, egalitarianism as a value-based framework became a project of the Enlightenment and the revolutionary forces that paved new ground in 18th and 19th century England and France (Dumont 1979). Egalitarianism became a project for the intellectual elites and the new powers that confronted the hierarchies of feudalism and the Church. Feminism grew out of many of the same urges, especially in France (Taylor 1999). The French revolution introduced egalitarianism into legal principles, which inspired the new movements and legislatures but also commenced debates where inherent paradoxes of egalitarianism became apparent, like tensions between nature and culture, male and female, freedom and slavery, equality and equity, or between the individual and the communal (see Claeys 2007).

Lately, egalitarianism in the West has emerged and been understood as a concept that encompasses forms of hierarchy related particularly to forms of individualism (Dumont 1980). In *Homo Hierachicus*, Dumont criticizes approaches to holism, where there is a stark distinction between tradition and modernity, and argues that this distinction itself is grounded in modernity (Dumont 1980; B. Kapferer

2010b). Dumont stresses a binary between individualism and holism, which would affect how encompassing values function in different societies. He proceeds from the case of India, where hierarchy is "natural" and claims that, in the West, emerging "equality" is structured on a different logic but is equally hierarchical (Macfarlane 1992). Based on the conundrum of Brahmans being superior to Kings in ancient India, Dumont argued that purity was more crucial, a higher paramount value than that of political power. Brahmans were of the highest purity and status. Each element in such a society must be evaluated according to the other parts of the whole. In egalitarian society in the West, we also find an absolute hierarchical value, but this one is structured around the individual's freedom. Contrasting to Marx, Foucault, and Bourdieu, who saw power structures as inherently universal, Dumont argued that we could not assume that the merger of hierarchy and power were universal realities (Iteanu and Moya 2015:117). Dumont built his argument on the definition of hierarchy as a relation between higher and lower, meaning between that which is encompasses and that which is encompassed (Dumont 1980). Thus, hierarchy/equality and holism/individualism can overlap. Dumont poses the individual as the Western cardinal idea of equality and liberty. Even when separated from the whole, the individual is a complete moral being that encompasses the totality of the social. These understandings speak to the encompassment of various values in the IC movement as well, where tensions exist between the individual and the whole, between community and state, and between hierarchy and equality.

These insights break with the idea of egalitarianism as simple, primitive form, and instead posit it as a modern ideology that places the individual as the supreme value. Thus, egalitarianism becomes a way of framing both an ideology and a form of

social organization. Like other value systems, it encompasses and captures its own contradictions internally[2].

Bruce Kapferer holds that egalitarianism is an energy underpinning most human action when confronted with forms of oppression that deny, destroy, inhibit, or limit human potential achievement. He notes:

> Egalitarianism is profoundly contradictory and perpetually locked in a struggle with itself. It is virtually its own impossibility, as Rousseau highlights regarding the irresolute contradiction of the state-society relation. Inegalitarianism is the enduring potential of egalitarianism's other side, the many-headed hydra that continually springs up against egalitarianism in the moment of egalitarianism itself. There is a madness in egalitarianism as there is a madness for it, especially once it is cogently materialized and concretized in the form of a concept (égalité) that can be held up as a firm ideal, as it was in immediate pre-Revolutionary France, the veritable birthplace of the concept. The magnificence of the idea and also its impossibility are manifested in the great event of *La Révolution* itself. The impossibility is starkly apparent in the madness of the Terror, a rage that in the urgency to attain the ideal of egalitarianism, equality as the foundation of reason, saw instances of inegalitarianism at every turn- so much so that the new life and its conditions to which the egalitarian idea gave birth, as the world of its virtually infallible reasoning, foundered against itself. (Kapferer 2015: 108).

[2] This perspective havs greatly influenced other studies of egalitarianism (see B. Kapferer 2005, 2010a; B. Kapferer and Morris 2003, 2006; B. Kapferer 2011, 2015; J. Kapferer 2020; Rakopoulos 2016, 2017; Brown 2011; K. M. Rio and Smedal 2008, 2009; K. Rio 2014; Gold 2018, 2019). Building on this argument, anthropological contributions, especially central in recent studies on egalitarianism, have been some studies on Scandinavian social life (Gullestad 1984, 1992, 2002; Bendixsen, Bringslid, and Vike 2017; J. Kapferer 2004; Bruun, Jakobsen, and Krøijer 2011). Studies on ritual, for instance, and Christian movements, have also been a central contribution to expanding on this argument (Eriksen 2014, 2012; Gifford 2004; Haynes 2015, 2020).

I believe that this argument can be expanded on by considering the social processes that reveal the everyday contestations that illuminate egalitarianism's own impossibility and processes of inegalitarianism, expanding on egalitarianism as a social value. Hence, I argue that the practicalities of how this many-headed hydra unfolds must be continuously grounded and unpacked in understanding how this relates to the complexity of social life. Thus, I will expand on Kapferers' argument by delving into the practicalities of experimentation with egalitarian form in communities in which egalitarianism is a stated goal in itself- showing a multitude of differentiating ways to approach egalitarianism as an intrinsic part of identity.

In the recent *Pink Tide in Latin America* (2020), Alessandro Zagato and Marina Gold claim that:

> Egalitarianism is a process by which hierarchical structures of power are subverted (in Latin America defined by ethnicity and class) where issues are momentarily questioned, opened up, and potentially transformed. Nevertheless, for its potentiality of ruptures, it also always has the capacity for oppression and the destructive effects of homogenization (2020: 197).

Gold and Zagato further argue that, regarding the Pink Tide, egalitarianism is simultaneously a dynamic of power and an ideology. This ideology determines the constitution of a person and their relationship to, in this case, the state. Thus, equality is just one of many potential expressions of egalitarianism (2020).

Bruun, Jakobsen, and Krøijer (2011) edited a volume for Social Analysis, *The Concern for Sociality—Practicing Equality and Hierarchy in Denmark* where the contributors critique Marianne Gullestad's idea of Norwegian egalitarianism as "equality as sameness" (2002) as a gatekeeping concept for studying equality in Scandinavia,. Based in the collection of arguments found in the volume they conclude that proper egalitarian sociality in Denmark require what they coin as "value-mastering" of hierarchies as egalitarianism is generated by these hierarchies. I shall draw on this concept to make sense of such processes, and link value-mastering to

processes of egalitarian enskillment– I draw then of an understanding of enskillment that emphasizes an immersion into the practical world and flow of everyday life, and is thus more than a process of mechanical cognitive mapping of a “cultural model” (Pálsson 1994; Quinn and Holland 1987).

However, expanding on this argument, in utopian experiments like the ICs studied here, these hierarchical ordering and value-mastering are continuously questioned through practical concerns- are these values good? Do they serve us? Are they just? This shows that egalitarianism in this context is more than a set value system - but is processual and intentionally geared toward finding new ways the individual should be considering the whole- it is experimental. Mastering these value-negotiations can be tricky since they are constantly and intentionally revised for more profound egalitarian commitment. This relates to this study because I consider precisely how these hierarchizations happen over time and see how intentional shifts can affect the everyday practices of such orderings. This, I argue, requires a skillset to navigate such flexible orderings, and that these skills are integral to being a "good egalitarian" when mastering this experimental form of sociability. This also relates to how the individual will meld into the community, and why.

In anthropological texts mentioned above, vernacular or 'emic' terms are typically distinguished from 'etic' and given their own space by marking them in italics. This distinction suggests to the reader that they are foreign or concepts of special significance and marks that they are "concepts" proper to other semiotic universes (Austdal 2016:x). In my thesis, the concept of egalitarianism is used as an analytical category that draws on a long line of anthropological tradition and knowledge. But it also includes "egalitarianism" as a concept used in everyday spoken language by my interlocutors. Mainly, the latter informs the study, as egalitarianism vernacular expressions are imperative for opening the analytical scope of explicit everyday formulations of "egalitarianism." I suggest that the "egalitarianism" derived from the ethnographic accounts described here, as driven by everyday social negotiations and experiments, has not received sufficient attention in anthropological analysis. Studies of utopias challenge anthropological investigation to look at social

movements that offer examples of social commentary, critique, and potential blueprints for a new future. In this thesis' ethnography, I show how egalitarianism is a tool kit to achieve this utopian horizon. As mentioned, I have called this *practical egalitarianism*. The events described in the ethnography will highlight the problematics of such pursuits, of the will for a rupture, a new way of life, and better worlds. With these moments, one may see that egalitarianism can be the event itself or a potential event that brings rupture and transformation. By putting all such former theories of egalitarian society behind me, this thesis focuses on the micro-socialites that this other IC form of "egalitarianism" opens for in practical negotiations of day-to-day activities and events.

Fieldwork and methods

Clarifying my methods and approaches to various field sites is imperative. For this study, I emphasized the methodologies of participant observation but also did semi-structured in-depth interviews where I collected life histories. I understand participant observation as a form of knowledge creation that happens through "being and action" (Shah 2017:45). Although one can do participant observation in many ways, some of the critical aspects of this methodology that stands out as crucial for this study is that the resulting ethnography is based on the knowledge generated through praxis that is dialectically produced (Shah 2017:48). Alpa Shah (2017) has argued that ethnography holds potentially revolutionary effects. The potential of such effects comes from deep, long-term engagement with strangers where one tries to engage with their lives by attempting to develop an understanding of their perspectives and actions, aiming to capture knowledge as holistically as possible (Shah 2017:51). As Shah further argues, "holism is important because it recognizes that we cannot understand one aspect of social life in isolation from another"(Shah 2017:52). Although critiqued often for its difficulty when defining the role of the anthropologist researcher, this flexibility of such a role can, if navigated correctly, be advancing the data collected (see Jarvie 1969). This fragile but fruitful dialectic between being intimate yet estranged is key to "being surprised" so that we can unravel and

investigate cultural assumptions (Shah 2017), often done through comparison to generalize across fields (Schnegg 2020). Though we do not always do this correctly and undoubtedly make mistakes along the way, the way we as anthropologists reflect on these mistakes yet stay vigilant in staying with this kind of uncomfortability is key to extending the ethical commitments to our interlocutors.

The interviews happened after 10-12 months in the field after establishing rapport with the respondents. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews allowed for the flexibility I needed to query for information. I did not use the same interview guide for all respondents other than asking all ten for their life histories at the beginning of the interview. In most cases, this story collection opened for some conversations, yet I also had a few questions I designed for each respondent based on our previous interactions and the information I wanted to probe for with those specific individuals. All respondents answered the question of what they look for in new members. Other questions would be based on their work preferences or their backgrounds. Each interview lasted for over 2 hours, the longest being 7 hours long. The open-ended nature of semi-structured and unstructured interviews have been argued to be helpful in especially social movements research, as they, for instance, create depth in knowledge creation, understanding of contexts of social movement participants, understandings of semantic context, and makes room for co-production of knowledge (Blee and Taylor 2002).

Multi-sited fieldwork has allowed me to become a part of a network of ICs and social relations. The benefits of multi-sited fieldwork are many and well-known in the field of anthropology. However, particularly relevant for this study was how it allowed me to create a network to compare the different organizational principles of each community and how this relates to different and similar expressions of egalitarianism. I have focused on the similarities in this thesis but mainly centered the study in the two communities I spent the most time in, LEF and TO. As George E. Marcus states:

> In practice, multi-sited fieldwork is thus always conducted with a keen awareness of being within the landscape, and as the landscape changes across sites, the identity of the ethnographer requires renegotiation (Marcus 2007:112).

It might be useful to explain why I chose these ICs for my study. I have long been interested in anarchic social experiments. By chance, I have also been introduced to ICs early in my studies after a semester in Tamil Nadu, India, where I visited Auroville, a "universal town" built on the teachings of the guru, the Mother Mirra Alfissa, and Sri Aurobindo, where human unity through diversity would induce evolution beyond the human mind—the "Supermind" or "Supramental." Through my continued traveling in South–East Asia, I began becoming increasingly aware of the effect of social insecurity and the long-term effects of disaster, as the consequences of the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004 still shaped the lives of the surrounding people.

After this, my anthropological interests brought me to the US to consider the long-term effects of the natural and human-made disaster Hurricane Katrina, where I spent my time reviewing how public life in New Orleans shaped narratives of the changes in social life in the aftermath. It was there that I gained an interest in topics of mutual aid and social movements, and I began writing about the beginnings of Black Lives Matter. These experiences eventually led me to this project, which is part of a collaborative project funded by the ERC and hosted by the University of Bergen called *Egalitarianism, Forms, Comparisons, and Processes*, where our main objective has been to unpack the concept of egalitarianism to understand its changes and theoretical implications properly. The quest to find egalitarian experiments and problematics created a productive environment for collaborative work, and many of the insights I have shaped in my work are due to the conversations in this group. I decided to conduct my study on groups which actually called themselves "egalitarian" to understand such conceptualizations' grounded notions better.

My entry into the community was enabled through internships. In the first community, I did fieldwork at the IC Living Energy Farm, where members are oriented towards environmental sustainability and minimizing their carbon footprint. I

participated here as an intern and lived with the interns in a cabin. Everyone was informed about my research, and all visitors were informed as well. The second field site, Twin Oaks, fared with more considerable complications simply because it was a bigger community. When pursuing fieldwork there, I agreed with the membership team that it would be best to apply for membership because it was the easiest way of unrestrictedly staying on the farm.

I joined the mandatory three-week visitor period, where the community and the potential new members essentially tried to determine if membership was a potential option. Like all the visitors, I wrote a public letter to the community and informed the community about my research, background, and motivations for membership. After finishing this work, I explained that I was there for research. After my approval to apply for membership following a mandatory membership interview, I applied and was voted in as a member. I joined after a mandatory period away from the farm; I moved into my new room and jumped into my new responsibilities as a member. I continually communicated to members that I was there for research.

After six months, my provisional membership was up for input from the membership at large, and I again made my intentions clear through another letter. In this period, I also posted multiple public notes urging people to communicate with me about my research and tell me if they had any concerns about me taking notes or doing participating observations. I took notes on and off, mainly after the work was done, sometimes audio-recording my thoughts or important quotes I heard throughout the day as well.

Sometimes people would say they wished not to be studied, and I would refrain from taking notes. I tried to be considerate when I was smart enough to be.

While in the field, I met at least five other social scientists or students present at Twin Oaks in periods to do research[3]. Due to the academic interests and similarity of the communities, through their traditions of internal scrutiny and focus on articulations

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[3] These were two sociology students interested in Walden Two Communities, one sociology professor interested in gender for a few days, and two anthropology undergraduates doing shorter fieldworks, focusing on gender and emotions in the community.

of social problems, this was often socially accepted. Some would remark, "We are used to being studied," or similar sentiments.

I believed I was quickly accepted into this group because I made myself helpful labor-wise, and I clearly explained how I resonated with some of the core projects of the communities. I received many acceptance votes. For my second poll concerning the decision to move from provisional to full membership with more benefits and rights, I received only two concerns for my full membership. These were mostly because I clarified that I was going to leave at some point and that I was not committed to the community fully and, therefore, should not receive the health benefits full membership includes. Before this, I voiced to the membership team that I had my own health coverage and would not need the community's financial support if I encountered any problems in this area.

I collected ethnography from five different communities, visiting and working through work exchange programs in the communities I was not a member of. I spent two weeks in Missouri at East Wind Community, and at other times, I would visit other communities for a few hours or an overnight stay, most often at the experimental and small IC, Cambia, or bigger anarchist-inspired community Acorn. The network of communities allows for exchanges like these.

Participating as a full member at Twin Oaks meant that I had to fulfill my duties and my labor quota, which made more extended interviews difficult to conduct sometimes, and it would be hard to schedule with other busy communards. Most of my data was collected doing manual work or in social settings, but I also conducted in-depth life history interviews and short interviews with visitors and new members frequently. I also used the archives of Twin Oaks and the various written documents that the communities produce. Worth mentioning is the newspaper, or zine, that the community produces, in some periods, more often than others: *Leaves of Twin Oaks* records the more critical events, conflicts, and the comings and goings of members. I was, during this period, a part-manager of one of the work areas, and I also did work for the community traveling around to various fairs selling the handcrafted hammocks that Twin Oaks produces.

Due to my limited resources and time, I saw the need to limit my work areas, and consequently, my research interests early on. Although I would have benefitted from being trained in all work areas, about 100 different jobs must be done on the farm, making this impossible. Therefore, I decided not to work with and write much about child-rearing and schooling. Although it is an important topic in this community, I lacked time to devote the energy this sensitive topic demanded. I was also not involved in seed production, although I packed or cleaned seeds for a little while. I was aware of the knowledge gaps in understanding egalitarian motivations in child-rearing and plant cultivation. The areas where I had time to be trained and became somewhat efficient in were dairy farming, garden maintenance, food processing, cooking, milk processing, tofu production, hammock production and sales, deep cleaning, seed packing, and various kinds of woodwork.

There were ethical considerations made as well, and I removed some sensitive information from my presentation and made certain decisions about my data to avoid conflict with the community or the potential for harm being inflicted on the community from the outside. Most members and visitors received pseudonyms here, but their characters will be recognizable for insiders. I aim to make these people non-recognizable to outsiders. Some members are public figures, and I have treated them as such here, with real names since I also reference their texts.

I have the community's consent to publish, and three members were continuously consulted throughout the writing process to gain a deeper understanding of multiple perspectives. I benefitted from the continuance of my relationships so quickly due to social media. After my fieldwork, I also received help from members of communities, to retrieve documents that I wanted to see but had neglected to collect while living there. After submitting the thesis, the community requested a copy, which is a standard procedure for published works about the community.

The research was conducted following anthropological traditions and ethics, and in agreement and under the supervision of the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), under the guidelines of the umbrella organization Council of European Social Science Data Archives (CESSDA), alongside the Norwegian

National Committees for Research Ethics' (NEHS) guiding principles and the guidelines of the European Research Council.

The contribution of the thesis to the study of egalitarianism

In summation, this thesis recognizes the specificity of the contemporary context of ICs and explores their unique expressions of egalitarianism. This is a specific ethnography of the makings of egalitarian social experiments that often center on events that highlight paradoxical tensions the groups must collectively navigate when their primary concern is to produce egalitarianism. Events are presented here to exemplify moments of meaningful negotiations of egalitarian tension and paradoxes, often exemplified in communards' personal and communal development and navigation of utopian potentialities when producing egalitarianism through explicit social modalities in everyday life.

As already reviewed, Utopias present us with commentary, social experimentation, and critique alongside potential blueprints for a new future. In the ethnography of the thesis, I show how egalitarianism is primarily a tool kit to achieve this type of utopian horizon. When egalitarianism is at the foundation of utopianism, egalitarianism requires flexible experimentation that approaches problematics holistically in everyday practical matters. I argue that the ethnography presented here shows expressions of egalitarianism as a set of skills and methods developed to align with such a utopian idea to desire for a better future and that these undertakings are inserted into practical everyday life. Events described in the ethnography will highlight the problematics of such pursuits, of the will for a rupture and a new way of life. With this, egalitarianism can be the event itself, or a potential event that brings about transformation.

I argue for an analysis of egalitarianism that attempts to not take for granted what egalitarianism is, as either an emic or analytical category, but for a deeper anthropological engagement with the everyday processes that shape new modes of living life. This attention to the everyday complexity of formalized egalitarian systems highlights certain issues and processes within the study of egalitarianism that I believe

we have yet to grasp fully. To explore the utopian desire for more egalitarian lifestyles, this thesis will present ethnographic accounts of events, conflicts, and processes that shaped egalitarian experimentation in my time in the field. By situating myself in the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, I aimed to study egalitarianism as an ethnographic object fruitfully explored through comparison. Hence, this is a study on two levels: while it is a concrete ethnographic mapping of social life in American ICs, it identifies the inherent paradoxes and motivations for North American values, highlighting certain historical, socio-cultural, and historical contingencies inherent in these values. These specific social formations, to be described in what follows, may also be understood as expressions of social critique and radical imaginaries of the past and the future (see Hicks 2001).

We might think about ethnographic work in communes as accessing a distilled version, or even a laboratory experiment, of egalitarian relations. In these communities, we can extensively explore the paradoxes, ambiguities, and conflicts stemming from egalitarian ideologies. In my view, the strength of ethnography is its capacity to broaden our understanding of a concept or a social form. To explore, expand, and unpack the concept of egalitarianism, I ask the following questions: How can we understand egalitarianism regarding ICs in the United States? How do conflict and tensions negotiate contemporary versions of egalitarianism, and what does this tell us about egalitarianism as an analytical and paradoxical category and utopian possibility? How is egalitarian experimentation shaped in these cases? What values, pieces of knowledge, skills, and processes emerge through ethnography as expressions of egalitarianism(s)?

Composition of the thesis

This thesis comprises seven chapters. In this chapter, I provided an introduction and set the premise for the rest of the chapters. Here, I explained my approach to the study of egalitarianism in ICs, based on my interlocutors' own understandings and what I will describe here as utopian experimentation with egalitarian social and organizational modes. Chapter 1 further explores how the thesis contributes to the

discussion and unpacking of the concept of egalitarianism. Here, I attempt to expand the anthropologies of egalitarianism, and I suggest approaching egalitarianism as a processual mode in which specific skills and knowledge are negotiated and shaped. In this chapter, I situate my work in the tradition of anthropological contributions to the study of egalitarianism and egalitarians, showing how anthropology has often reduced or imposed egalitarianism or egalitarian aspects of their study object's lives. I argue for the importance of taking egalitarianism seriously as complex grounded lived experience, and for the continuous unpacking of egalitarianisms' many expressions.

In Chapter 2, the reader will get a deeper introduction to the projects' field sites. A description of the early development and history of the self-proclaimed egalitarian Twin Oaks shows the evolution of this little hub of communities and some of their significant transformations and shifts in their egalitarian experimentation that contributed to a shared collective identity with similar utopian experiments. This chapter outlines some of the most critical tensions of egalitarianism in these communities. I will exemplify the architecture and everyday life activities through a descriptive "tour" of the community and describe its current organizational organization.

This informs Chapter 3 that delves deeper into the member initiation process, which bears ritualistic qualities resembling conversions and often evokes romantic language and emotions for communards. Here, the exclusionary processes are also explored to show that it is not only everyday acts that hold utopian potential, but that each member must also be democratically evaluated as someone who can contribute or has the personal qualities of an equal or "egalitarian." With this, I argue that egalitarianism is more than just equality and formal hierarchies but also a practice and skill developing in social life that reconfigures and denaturalizes "oppressive" behaviors and processes through egalitarian governance anti-hegemonic egalitarian experimentation.

This project for communards is pursued through "radical sharing," which I have devoted to Chapter 4. Radical sharing expands on degrowth experiments and shapes collective action and identity that allow for flexibility and new experimentation in

facing changes and developments in society. "Ideas of the small" and "making do" are ideas often invoked throughout and are made more explicit in the next part of the text, which centers around explorations of locally grounded notions and ideologies of sustainability, here often stated as related to degrowth, chosen poverty, frugality, and simple living.

Further, exploring what it means to be a “good egalitarian,” Chapter 5 exemplifies one important egalitarian experiment, namely the implementation of “consent culture,” which is meant to dissolve and reconceive what is understood by communards as “micro-aggressions” and hierarchies in relationships and interactions.

Chapter 6 considers the ambiguities of egalitarian labor organization and exemplifies how communards explore playfulness in work to achieve meaningful and righteous labor while relating to the rigorous labor needs of the community. This is often a source of contention related to what happens to the individuals who cannot contribute to the labor system with equal amounts of labor to the rest or those who contribute more than others. This leads to a discussion on the various forms of egalitarianism and hierarchies that merge or compete, forming the potential for inegalitarian results. The last chapter provides an epilogue describing ethnographically an event that happened upon my return to TO for their 50th anniversary, leading to a discussion of the main findings from this study regarding practical egalitarianism.

CHAPTER 2

FROM TEXT TO EXPERIMENTATION

"Escapist fantasies are bad for community, but dreams are fundamental for their existence"—Kathleen Kinkade (Kinkade 1973:2).

INTRODUCTION—CONTEXTUALIZING AN EGALITARIAN MOVEMENT

This chapter presents the history and current trends of the first established community in the Virginian hub of communities. They all somehow pursue projects that experiment with various forms of "egalitarianism" as an experimental processual and practical mode, and how this has been institutionalized at TO. This chapter will examine the political tensions that influenced these experimentations. I will show how egalitarian movements, such as BLM, also influence these ICs and drive utopian surges to further experimentation with egalitarianism. This chapter will also describe some of the sociopolitical contexts that have shaped the ICs studied in this thesis, beginning with Twin Oaks, where I eventually became a member. The chapter depart from ethnographic description of the first period of fieldwork, before I outline this IC hub's history as a behaviorist experiment founded on the ideas presented in B .F. Skinner's *Walden Two* (Skinner 1969)[4], before describing its current political organization. These communities are simultaneously social experiments that can easily be recognized as "practical" or "real" utopias, or utopias in process.

I will outline the move toward what I have coined "practical egalitarianism" by describing how Twin Oaks has progressed by privileging experimentations with various processes, governance structures, and forms of egalitarianism in their communal life and policy. From this, the reader will get a sense of the major political developments that have geared the community toward radical egalitarian experimentation. I argue that this history demonstrates that Twin Oaks also draws on

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[4] First published in 1948

nostalgic influences from other practical utopian experiments and present a collective social identity with such movements.

This, I argue, shows that utopian experiments often accept the innate paradoxes of egalitarian values and engage with the ambiguities as a result for improvement. These histories are also drawn on when ICs push further experimentation to develop more egalitarian social forms. I argue that the push toward a formal egalitarian policy, nostalgic features of egalitarian utopianism, and governmental system shows that "practical egalitarianism" can appear as a resource and knowledge creating flexible social arrangements. This is essential for the sustainability of the community and the type of anti-hegemonic potential that egalitarianism can perform for them. I will exemplify this with ethnographic descriptions from the two main field sites: LEF and Twin Oaks.

Arrival—searching for egalitarianism(s)

As the cold November winds of 2015 started to make winter's presence felt, I arrived in the state of Virginia to research and live with an IC called Living Energy Farm (LEF), comprising environmentalists that had settled on a clear-cut land on the cusp of what is often referred to as "the South" in the United States. The community had originally been formed to achieve a lifestyle that did not depend on the use of any fossil fuels in the expectancy of "peak oil" and a pending climate crisis. Implementing old and new technologies, such as old manual water pumps connected to new solar panels or the rebuilding of tractor engines into being run off wood gas, was labor-intensive and required skills. The community was still small. The founding members who were still there after the first five years were struggling to get all the work on the farm done. It was hard to get committed interns to live there for longer periods.

Running several businesses, training interns, organizing events, and workshops while maintaining a farm that produced both food for the community and seeds for sale, and while also building the infrastructure using only solar power, proved to be considerably challenging. The days were long, the work gritty and physical. The sleeping quarters were rugged. It required dedication, commitment, and self-sacrifice

to achieve progress. Many had left, feeling that the community was not the right fit. Others claimed that they were not as egalitarian as they had expected them to be and felt they did not have enough of a say for the community development, while a few were asked to leave because they were too disruptive. Those who were committed to the community wanted to see the same kind of commitment they themselves had to the project and had strong visions of what it would mean to live without fossil fuels.

The community's future at this time was uncertain, and yet the people there felt they lived with more purpose than when they lived in what they often called "the mainstream," "the Matrix," or "Babylon," referring to life outside of ICs borders. The members and interns that lived there wished for degrowth in society at large, claiming that living in villages with a focus on cooperation and frugality is the only way forward when expecting more climate disruption and the potential of the out-phasing of fossil fuels and to combat socio-economic inequalities, and equities.

Though they were dedicated to the cause, they were painfully aware that their lifestyle was uneasy. Upon my arrival, the founder explained to me and the interns:

> No one wants to live like this on a community level. We cannot greenwash consumerism as sustainability. The only way we can stop this is to live with less and cooperate. Even though this is the way most people on the planet live already, Americans prefer to have their big houses and two cars…

Oman, one of the interns, exemplified the search for meaning and purpose within the scope of also searching for sustainability.

> I sold new windows and then roofs to usually poor people who did not need it. Nor could they afford it. I did really well for myself, made a lot of money, had it all, you know. But then I started to feel so bad about what I did. After a while, I just decided to take up my Hebrew studies and wanted more time for that, and then I heard about some communities and decided to try it out.

Maintaining "the American dream" as a national and personal ethos is often "in community"[5] depicted as something that has led to sacrificing socio-economic equality. Thus, the community members represent a critique of another egalitarian ideal where they emphasize equal opportunity.

FIGURE 2- SOLAR PANEL ROOF AT LIVING ENERGY FARM

Hopes and dreams of possible upward mobility through hard work stands strong to this day among Americans. However, the ideals of meritocratic individualist egalitarianism have disillusioned many other than in the IC movement. Robert D. Putnam claims that the American Dream is in crisis because essential to this dream is the idea that one's children will have a better future than their own, only limited by talents and efforts (Putnam 2015). The America we see today is one where inequalities are growing, elements of equity politics have failed to create a new future, and liberation movements of the past have not inspired the unravelling of structural injustices. Reverberations of the world's colonial past still shape the everyday lives of peoples. The "millennial" generations growing up now will most likely be financially less affluent than their "boomer" parents (Henderson 2013).

[5] Communards will use the terms like "come to community" or "in community" to mean belonging to the IC movement.

"In community" big politics and the presidential election seemed almost distant to people who had already opted out of mainstream society. When work was done and dinner consumed, the discussions about the tables were mostly about practical matters: community politics, their desires for improvements, what needed cleaning, or members would share old community tales and recent news from other communities. People would also give present progress reports from the day, which is called a "check-in," informing, the others how far they had come with their projects and what was left to do the next day. They would, during this ritual, also describe how they felt in general or if they had concerns to express and discuss with the group.

Only a few of our talks were about the election and the current situation in the world of Big Government. Democrat Bernie Sanders was, at this point, still a bleak hope for the radicals and leftists in the movement and beyond. Clinton was considered by most of them to be a war criminal and not a legitimate candidate; the potential of Donald Trump Jr. becoming the Republican candidate and not Ted Cruz seemed somewhat farfetched that fall. "I can only change the surrounding things, and I think retracting from major political issues is just a better way," one of the interns, S. G, said during one of these talks. He believed that by participating in a broken system, he was tying his energies that could be spent on building community or rehabilitating what he had called "broken land".

The ambivalence toward participation in a system they did not feel represented them, protected them, supported them, or their values is a narrative I encountered often. The question remained as to what they would achieve through renunciation of mainstream institutions and society, and how they should engage with "the outside" in a way that was fruitful. The community even went so far as to make it a norm to create their own music, claiming that electronic escapism as recorded music from "the outside" held people back from creating something together.

The neighborhood

From the clear-cut land that the community owned, we could venture down the long dirt road to the country backroad that eventually led through the forests and into

the closest town Louisa. Other communities are nearby, and from the 1960s and onward, this had become an East Coast hub for ICs. LEF was an offshoot from the bigger neighbor IC, Twin Oaks, and had been developed in hopes of creating a more environmentally focused group while still maintaining a close relationship with their sister community. Now, there are five different communities huddled together in proximity, and there are also sister communities in other states.

The surrounding small towns and neighborhoods to this hub do not imply that this area hosts hundreds of communards in pursuit of new ways to live in harmony with each other and with nature, pursuing social justice and radical sharing, who often adhere to leftist political realms. Instead, the symbolism that dominates this landscape reminds one about the tensions within American society that had led to the current political state of the country, some of which often were the reasons why many “come to IC”. Community members often concern themselves with what they consider the heritage of slavery, the heritage of occupation of indigenous land, bigoted value systems, corporate exploitative capitalism, environmental degradation and consumerism, sexism, patriarchy, poverty and malnutrition, xenophobia, homophobia, and other similar oppressions of either people or behavior.

This hub is conveniently placed between the bigger cities of Richmond and Charlottesville. The legacy of the confederacy of the Civil War in the 1860s and Christian conservatism are contested topics, especially in these areas. The anti-elitist presidential candidates of the Republican party Trump or Cruz posters and confederate flags decorate peoples’ front yards, symbolizing Southern pride and Confederate nostalgia. These prevalent symbolisms, like the confederate flag, that adorn people’s front yards are indicative of what Arlie Hochschild in *Strangers in Their Own Land—Anger and Mourning on the American Right* has coined as a series of *emotional grooves* that shape emotions and identities—the Civil War (1861–1865) being one of these (Hochschild 2018).

On the other side of the political spectrum, during the time I spent there, the “alternative right” gained momentum. Centered on prominent characters who also lived in the State of Virginia, like Richard Spencer, these coalitions between

independents and right-wing groups were increasingly recognized as a movement in the Media. Time passed, tensions changed, and intensified. Trump became the presidential candidate, and eventually he won the election on the premise of "Making America Great Again".

ICs are stereotypically often associated with the radical groups of the 1960s that created "hippie communes" or new religious movements, or more radical social formations often based on ideals of free love, resource sharing, and pacifism. However, ICs also draw on other histories and genealogies of the radical resistance and protest movements of the 1960s and 70s especially. These movements inspire them, but the communards I speak with are acutely aware of the problems these movements failed to solve, such as systemic racism, homophobia, or gendered oppressions. Today, inspired by these reverberations, they attempt to be intersectional in their approach to disentangling hierarchies, focusing on the many intersections of aspects of identity and context that influence their lives.

Looking in from the outside, observing the meadows and forests of the communities, the calmness of movement of animals and people, and the various activities that suggest intimate relationships and friendships can seemingly contrast what the community does reacting to the other events of public political life. This is also a place where you observe people educating themselves on how to use natural remedies to heal after being teargassed, practicing transcendental meditation to tackle arrests better, or where one must cover someone's work shift because they are busy serving their jail sentences.

Charlottesville protests—revealing egalitarian ambiguities

A few months after I had finished my first fieldwork in Virginia, some of my interlocutors from the egalitarian ICs were getting ready to counter-protest a white supremacist— and conservative rally in Charlottesville. Once, the home of President Tomas Jefferson was a contested landscape due to battles over historical narratives grounded in the reverberations of the contested Confederacy. The removal of a statue of Officer and General Robert E. Lee, who became an icon for the conservative whites

in the South during the Civil War, had spurred reactions so strong with the alternative right that they managed to generate the biggest rally for white supremacists that the US has seen in decades (at least that we know of). The world watched as the protesters marched through the local university campus yelling “Blood and Soil” and “Jews will not replace us!”

FIGURE 3- TRUMP SUPPORTER'S HOUSE

The protests lasted for two days, and Charlottesville was declared to be in a state of emergency. When the protesters were spread out by the police, one of the right-wing protestors drove into the crowd of counter-protestors that were there to

support the removal of what they consider to be a symbol of slavery and the inequalities it is still producing generations after it was abolished. Activist Heather Meyers was killed. Then he backed up, and drove into the crowd again, hurting many more of the activists, locals, and community members that had shown up that day to perform their resistance against the growing radical right wing. In a momentous speech, President Trump attributed the consequences of the rally to the action of "both sides," thus sparking new debates about the connections that the new President Elect had with white supremacists in the US and elsewhere.

What was going on regarding politics in the larger scale of American society highlighted the tensions of the contemporary debates of how inequality was generated and preserved throughout centuries of state development, and thus, I would also argue, revitalized the importance of the politics of egalitarian communities. Seeing community members on the news, bloody and beaten, listening to, and reading the stories from Jewish and/or LGBTQIAA2S+ peoples in the movement about their encounters with the people that want them gone from American soil showed a tendency toward a collaborative intersectional global movement emerging.

Interlocutors and counter-protesters I spoke with had started to question if non-violence was the way to go after they had chosen to walk away instead of helping right-wing protesters as they were pushed to the ground during the protests. One of my interlocutors spoke about the fallacies of the non-violent protests of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, questioning if Martin Luther King's influence had in the long run weakened their struggle. These events evoked an impression of moral perplexity that seemed to afflict many of us. The egalitarian politics that the IC movement was practicing within their own enclaves reached moments of higher intensity in times like these, and revitalized importance in answering one of the biggest paradoxical questions of our time: how can humans live like equals when they have been conditioned not to be?

The egalitarian ethos of the community members was greatly pressurized to tackle the tensions arising before, during, and after the fieldwork of this study was conducted. Surges in IC development can often be linked to societal unrest (Sargisson

2007). The heritage of the intellectual influences of the community Twin Oaks shows their flexibility in designing new experiments to answer to new contexts. It was similar patterns that affected the movements that eventually inspired the establishment of the first community in this hub, Twin Oaks. Beginning with outlining some of the importance of the transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau that later inspired B.F. Skinners utopian science fiction book *Walden Two (1948)*, I will unpack some of the larger topics influencing this hub today. Although the members of Twin Oaks today have a somewhat awkward relationship with these two formative texts in their ideological history, you can find copies of these books on shelves around the whole farm and, indeed, also on the shelves in many other communities.

Life in the Woods—The Legacy of Thoreau and Emerson Walden and The Pursuit of New Ways

The transcendentalist movement in America, inspired by Immanuel Kant, Plato, Indian, and Chinese scriptures, although hard to define as *one* movement, was in general a philosophy of harsh critique of society and its institutions, often showing how human life was not necessarily as distinctly separated from nature as many would have it (Walls 2017:4–12). Transcendentalism came to inspire literary, philosophical, religious, and political movement of the early nineteenth century (Goodman 2019). The connection to Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, which B.F. Skinner eloquently feeds from through the title of his book and requires some explanation. Thoreau depicts his life living alone in a small cabin on the shores of Walden Pond, Massachusetts in 1845, one hundred years before Walden Two was to be written. He was allowed to build a small cabin there on Emerson's property to explore transcendentalist ideas in practical life (Thoreau 2008).

Thoreau is well known for his descriptions of his spiritual connection to nature. Nature should be our focus, he claimed, rather than modern inventions. He believed that we should preserve natural ecosystems and engage with nature as part of it, not as the rulers of it or as an external force (Grusin 1993; Walls 2017). This book is accepted as one of the major literary contributions to the construction of American

exceptionalism, and an example of transcendentalist philosophy. It is this willingness to renounce traditions that Skinner drew on as a resource and inspiration for his fictional utopian text.

WALDEN TWO—BEHAVIORAL MODIFICATION FOR A NEW TIME

When B. F Skinner in 1948 published his science fiction novel *Walden Two* loosely playing on the title of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden, or Life in The Woods* (1854), he did so after years of pondering over his own explorations in *Behavior of Organisms* (1938) published seven years earlier (Altus and Morris 2009). He had also been meeting with other philosophers monthly to discuss the topics of controlling or conditioning human behavior and was curious to discover what these theoretical explorations would lead to. In conversations with friends during the Second World War, he began entertaining ideas of what would succeed war, expecting the majority of young people to fall into the old ways of the American dream: getting married, taking jobs, and buying houses. He thought that "they should experiment; they should explore new ways of living" (Skinner 1948/1976: 292, Altus and Morris 2009:319).

Skinner became interested in writing a utopian novel, partly inspired by one of his friend's Alice F. Tyler who published a book called *Freedom's Ferment* (Taylor 1944/1962) about the perfectionist movements in America in the nineteenth century, of which there were many. He believed that the mistakes of perfectionist movements were not necessarily as inescapable as the anti-utopians of his time might have assumed. Instead, he focused on the potential of the sometimes-disastrous failures of these communities and argued that this was perhaps something that could be corrected (Altus and Morris 2009).

Skinner had already received much critique for his methods and the skepticism toward his ideas of free will, and his ideas of conditional engineering of animals and children were becoming quite controversial. Still, he began thinking about how a community of, for instance, one thousand people would solve the problems of an everyday life together, and how behaviorism may occupy such social life to explicitly benefit humankind. He believed that changing the environment in which people grow

up and live could, through experimentation with conditioning humans and animals, induce what could very well resemble utopia.

The period he wrote this piece of science fiction, as he himself called it, was, after all, one of endless promise and progress (Skinner 1976). The Second World War had finally ended, and the economy in the US had an upsurge and showed great promises for the future. Yet, momentums of dissatisfaction with everyday life remained that drove him toward this form of thinking about problematic and deviant behaviors. He considered the importance of pressing desires in the human condition (Skinner 1976). Scientific experimentation and conditioning of animal and human behaviors could potentially, he thought, be the remedy. By conditioning what he considered the individual's will, perhaps humanity could improve upon itself. The general idea in Skinner's writing is that positive reinforcement is more effective than punitive measures. Cultural and social engineering could, he believed, be an opportunity to reinforce good behavior and exclude bad behavior, thus opening up for a new kind of society that challenges individualism, or rather the idea that the individual is autonomous and able to choose right, even in tough conditions (Kuhlman 2010).

The reception of the book was quite hesitant at first when it was published just a few years after the Second World War. The novel actually did not gain much momentum among the public until ten years later. Throughout time it became one of the most controversial and influential pieces of science fiction literature in history, inspiring over 30 lived utopian experiments, some of which still exist, like *Comunidad Los Horcones* in Mexico, which holds Skinner's vision as an important part of their practice still today (Kuhlman 2010:135).

Skinner attributed this rush of interest to the publics' realization that the world was now facing new types of problems after the period of rapid modernization that followed the war; the consequences of the industrial revolution became increasingly apparent. The 1960s and 1970s upsurge of alternative and countercultural politics and social experimentation made the book relevant for the alternative new social movements; everywhere, young people were disengaging with traditional roles and

neoliberal society to join communities and experiment with new ways of living that posed as alternatives or even critiques of the status quo (Kuhlman 2010). Historian Robert Fogarty suggests that "collective settlement grew organically from a utopian tradition that was deeply rooted in American history" (Fogarty 1994:8).

The 1960's IC movement was dominated by especially socio-political purposes, and though some were religious, a big influx of non-religious organizations occurred (Kanter 1972:16-17). Pollution, overpopulation, the threat of nuclear holocaust, crime, and violence were all revitalized as issues of increasing interest to the public. Many began seeking a return to a simpler way of living in better harmony with nature and away from modern amenities (Skinner 1969).

From behaviorism to egalitarianism—The story of Twin Oaks

While the community of Twin Oaks debunked some of their experiments as failures of behaviorism in its first years of existence, it had kept some of its model features of organization. After the first five years, the community also suffered a social upheaval that induced distancing from human behaviorism as a model at Twin Oaks, after new members demanded changes in policy and a cultural shift because they felt that an elite within the community wielded ultimate power, despite the efforts of the founders to hold on to Skinnerism as organizing principles. Still, as I will show throughout the next chapters, the legacy of these philosophies of how to engage with the world remains mediated in some of these communities, traceable to architecture, policy, and social norms. While Thoreau sought solitude and introspection through his renunciation of society, Skinner and the founders of Twin Oaks relied heavily on sharing resources and time with peers to reach human potentials and social justice.

To understand the intention of the original founders of the Twin Oaks community, let me return to the book in question and outline the main storyline of *Walden Two*. The tale begins when a group with interests in utopian communities visit the agricultural utopia.

The book describes in detail their time there and all their ventures and activities, observations, and thoughts, but, most importantly, it is very much based on a

conversation between these visitors and the man named Frazier and other members of the community. They philosophize over human nature, and the reasoning behind their selected choices when organizing their life in this community. The characters in the book represent different critiques and attitudes toward utopias, which allowed Skinner to play around with different arguments. Frazier embraces some of the impossibilities and paradoxes of utopias but also conveys to the reader many possibilities within it. Again, utopia is here not represented as an ideal state but as a process or a specific mode of experimentation. Walden Two is meant to be inherently experimental, which is why no such thing is a specific Walden Two model, but the members of the community are meant to reflect and change continuously throughout their engagement with achieving contentment (Skinner 1969).

In Walden Two, comprising around 1000 members, most people only work four hours a day, and spend their labor on various jobs—some skilled and some unskilled—so that they will not grow weary of the work that they do or hurt their bodies. Material consumption is a shared endeavor, and individualized property is very limited, but each member has their own room to feel probably like they have personal space available if they need it. Each visitor reacts to such an arrangement that anyone might have—some are skeptical while others try to engage while staying critical to the obvious faults of the system in place. Two of them find that the community is a good fit for their interests and choose to stay on after the others leave.

Skinner describes, for example, how seating arrangements are constructed around small tables to stimulate intellectual conversation in smaller groups. The houses are built to utilize the space well and to keep it clean easily. The children have their own designated areas to be kept and, for the most part, in a different dwelling. However, they are allowed to eat with the other members when they turn seven. The community members who are interested work with the children during shifts. Members are divided into four groupings: planners, managers, workers, and scientists. Planners and managers are the administrators of the community, and the “scientists” work considerably with plant experimentation. “Workers” would do practical jobs on the farm.

The 1960s induced many new forms of social organization and political activism, and this shaped the way Skinner's ideas were implemented and experimented with. The communities that tried to recreate the exact system from the book failed for the most part, and those that were more successful managed to change with the times and current political contexts. Indeed, this was Skinner's intention, not to create a blueprint but to develop a model for other experiments with.

The needs of the communards that came to these communities shaped this experimental progression, and over time, members deemed most behaviorism to be inhumane. At Twin Oaks, they have moved away from communal child rearing and very obvious forms of "cultural engineering". However, they have ritual activities that may resemble the engineering of negative emotions and behavior. The community has since been influenced also by the socio-political contexts of development outside of the community's physical and political boundaries. Many changes are also attributed to failed experiments.

From Behaviorism to Experiment

Twin Oaks never became the communal utopia that was imagined for Walden Two. The community quickly evolved into something else entirely besides what was wanted by the founders, moving from behaviorist experimentation to a more egalitarian form of government. The first members officially settled on an old tobacco farm and started forming the community, Twin Oaks in 1967.

Kat Kinkade, the most famous of the founders, authored two memoirs based on her life in the community movement *A Walden Two Experiment: The First Five Years of Twin Oaks Community* (1973) and *Is it Utopia Yet?: An Insider's View of Twin Oaks Community in Its 26th Year* (1994). When the community at large decided to scrap behaviorism, she over time came to believe that Twin Oaks was "really just a nice place for some middle-class people to live," as her daughter described in the obituary the Washington Post published after her death. She and her peers had set out clearly focusing on creating an experimental society that would improve humans and

end loneliness and class oppression. She and others of the founders had interpreted Walden within a Marxist framework.

In her first book, she describes the first few years as a series of trials and errors, and numerous hardships due to the lack of income, labor force, and knowledge about farming. Numerous attempts at behaviorist experiments have been implemented with varied results. They very quickly began experimenting with a labor credit system and different forms of government and feedback practices. The feedback was organized as events where people could voice their concerns and problems. This was meant to create social cathartic moments that would continuously reduce internal conflicts and help people improve their behavior. For some time, the community banned all negative backtalk and gossiping about others to avoid spreading infernal conflicts by over-communicating them (Kinkade 1973).

The struggle with the poor standard of living they had to endure, and the membership in the beginning was volatile; the average member age was very low, and most members left after only a few months. The community began having internal conflicts surrounding leadership and equal access to power, and Kinkade was especially a controversial member at this time. After five years, the first of many bigger changes happened, and the community restructured its policies with the clear intent of moving away from the “in-egalitarian” structures. Kinkade was, at that point, getting burned out with the conflicts and decided to move to the Missouri Ozarks with a few members and some visitors to start a new community. East Wind was established, and in 1977 (Kinkade 1994).

Although Kinkade left and rejected community living after decades of commitment, she nonetheless was an imperative figure in the movement. She eventually returned and stayed at Twin Oaks when she felt ill and was cared for by the members until she died in 2008.

Twin Oaks Today

Twin Oaks is uniquely interesting because of the compromises they have made and their openness to change. Rigid communities tend to fail over time, while Twin

Oaks has not placed itself on any side in the battles between idealism and materialism but has tended to opt for middle grounds and pragmatism while still preserving its egalitarian intentions. Twin Oaks is unique in its openness to change, letting inspirations from "the outside" and new members change their political system and everyday lives. During the now over 50 years of social experiments, they have left behind behaviorist experimentation and have included and experimented with elements of political activism, neo-paganism, anarchism, and mysticism, alongside elements of Buddhist economies (Komar 1986:8).

The community, in short, comprises all the individuals that linger there. Also, those who have passed through have greatly impacted how the community has shifted. Communities like Twin Oaks are often seen as model communities; one informant called it the grandparent or parent of the other communities in the FEC (Federation of Egalitarian Communities). The sister communities greatly differ, but they share many egalitarian ideals and structures that Twin Oaks has developed. Only a few of the communities founded during the roaring 1960s remain today. Twin Oaks therefore is a great example of a community that has endured, maintaining some key characteristics while radically changing others.

Paying Tribute to Utopian Influences—the architecture and goings-on of Twin Oaks

The buildings at Twin Oaks have many functions and are ICs' symbolic past memorials that have influenced people at Twin Oaks. Some of these homages to past utopian experiments also heed as warnings of the problems that they also represent. This collective history of utopian experimentation is still important. The next part of this chapter will give the reader a simple tour of the community. This serves the function of tracing some of the influences of this community and will introduce the reader to the social life on the farm and the types of activities that take place here. I argue that such memorials or symbolic tributes show that egalitarian utopianism draws on the past to explore new ideas for the future. Thus, we see here that nostalgia plays a part in the utopian process toward new egalitarian experimentation.

Twin Oaks is situated outside a small town called Louisa, holding a 450-acre land lot with a small river that runs through it. Walking up the small road to Twin Oaks, you will first pass the dairy barn and cow fields before passing a little chicken shed. The animals of Twin Oaks play an integral part in the social and economic lives here. The road parts at a little parking lot, and one may either take a left to the courtyard or continue right ahead, which takes you to the rest of the buildings that either house the money-making businesses, communal kitchens, and other houses where people have formed what they call "Small Living Groups" or "SLGs". This parking lot is one of the few places on the farm where one can, for instance, use a mobile phone in the open. Using your cell phone actively while in conversation or in public space is considered a norm breach. In most areas of the farm, if you are among other people, you will have to ask for consent from the group to disengage with the social situation and use your cellphone. This is implemented to deter from electronic escapism and allows for more social interaction in the physical space that they are in.

You will pass several barns and small sheds used for storing the big hammock business that long was the biggest income for the community, and further down that road, you will enter the courtyard. The courtyard was the first settlement on the farm and is where Twin Oakers without children live[6]. After deeming the communal child rearing project a failure in the 80s, the community underwent a huge transition. It was decided that, since many were not interested in living with small children or saw that some areas of the farm were unsuited for children, the courtyard would be continued as a space where children would have restricted living rights. Their parents are expected to be mindful of not disturbing others when they bring the children into the various buildings.

[6] Community child rearing is an important focus at TO, and the community practices family planning, as the community is committed to providing the resources to care for children until they are adults. The community prefers for the potential parents to have been members for at least two years before they apply for pregnancy approval, and that the community has enough resources at the time. The potential parents will be interviewed in the pregnancy approval process by the "child board".

FIGURE 4- THE ROAD TO THE COURTYARD

There is also a building named *Harmony* in the Courtyard, where around 4–5 members live in their own space. You will also find a communal clothing resource called “Commie clothes” in *Harmony.* This is a form of clothing library, organized well and kept tidy and clean, where everyone can find whatever clothing they need as it works as a communal clothing pool. This is one of the more radical forms of sharing that happens on the farm and is a popular spot. There is also a shared laundry room for the thirty or more people who live here down in the courtyard, and both areas are organized and run by a “commie clothes manager”. *Harmony* also encompasses the community’s woodshop, where anyone can come and use tools and equipment for carpentry or artistry.

This building is named after the Harmony Society movement that started in Germany, led by George Rapp, which later moved in 1805 to the United States. Rapp founded after a while New Harmony; infamous communard and social reformer Robert Owen also lived there for a period. To prepare for the end of time and the new

millennium, these communities had forsaken private property and sexual relationships to live in harmony with others. It disassembled in 1905 (S. L. Brown 2002:25-29). Members of these communities went on to influence government policy and helped form the State of Indiana, among many things (Pitzer 1997:82).

When continuing to the next house to the right, there is *Oneida*, where the downstairs is a Women's Only Space, where only women assigned as females at birth can live, and men must be invited as guests after 6pm. This is a form of utopian "safe space"[7] that allows women to live free from the tensions that living with men brings about for them. One resident woman described it as "safe from the male gaze that holds us back". The upstairs houses eight more rooms and the popular hot spot "Double Tub," which members can sign off to use. *Oneida* was named after the religious community founded in New York in 1848, which I have already described in the first chapter. The Oneidas are quite famous for the extensive bureaucracy that had plenty of boards and administrative sections within the community (Carden 1998). Twin Oaks has similar "teams" that administer different sections of work or social life on the farm.

Next to O*neida* is a building called *Ta'chai*, where the downstairs is allocated to the weaving of hammocks for sales, one of the bigger communal businesses. Attached is a communal room where there is an immersed pit where many meetings and social events happen. There is also a little dance floor for the more active nights on the farm. Members often describe upstairs *Ta'chai* as the more youthful "party" place where many young new members reside. *Ta'cha*i is named after a socialist village in China that was attributed to be the pacemaker in Chinese agriculture and was promoted by Mao Zedong as a model society in the 1960s. *Ta'chai* residents were saluted for their perseverance: during starvation and crop failures, they still managed to deliver twice their grain quota (Unger 1971).

It should be noted that framing at Twin Oaks is uniquely organized, and their farming methods and expertise are an important and large part of everyday life for many on the farm. After trial and error, the community now has a functional large

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[7] This is a common term used in activist circles, also globally.

farm. Twin Oaks has a flexible labor budget that allows for major shifts from season to season regarding how much and what is grown, depending on the level of interest in the community and labor force available. They also cultivate seeds jointly with other communities and do what could be considered various forms of food and seed activism. Forms of feminism and eco-feminism also influence this focus. Several members are involved in farming and seed cultivation, where they attribute their labors to a form of liberation that perceived the female body's oppression as an extension of the oppression of Mother Earth or natures. Permaculture, farming and seed cultivation is often highlighted as areas where the community has found what is called a "good" or "right" livelihood[8]. The community also partake in this business of viewing heirloom seeds to raise historical awareness surrounding local varieties of fruits and vegetables together with sister-community Acorn. They measure productivity and choose the most efficient plants suited in the Southeastern USA and sell their seeds through a coop, which is doing very well financially.

Agriculture, or rather, sustainable agriculture, is the reason why many come to these communities and why many stay on in the community in the long run. In the US, the USDA claims that in 2017, 11,8% of Americans lived in low food security households, either being unable to attain or afford enough food for everyone in the household (ers.usda.gov: 2019). This is part of the reason why food security is important for communards. They are constantly concerned with how food is produced effectively, organically, sustainably, and economically for large populations, and without big industrial resources. Several members mentioned access to food or healthy food as an important concern for them before finding a community. Developing farming-skills is important for many members. As such, the skillful orientation

[8] Tord Austdal whom have researched similar and sometimes connected[8] social movements in the Appalachian Mountain regions. The primitivist movements presented in his work inhabit spaces in processes of "world-making", and make new material assemblages by for instance rewilding, permaculture, natural farming and land restoration, where for instance "the ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings" by the means of 'the skillful, yet self-conscious application of technique' (Austdal 2016:148; Fukoaka 1992:118-119).

towards communal farming techniques allows for secure food supplies, but also orients the individual towards the good of the community.

Moving on from the fields, the kitchen in the courtyard is a central meeting place for members. While I was there, around 30–36 members used this as their main kitchen. Meals are offered twice a day from the communal kitchen, but this is where any cooking and snacking outside of this happens. The kitchen has a fridge for private foods, and there is one that holds communal food that everyone can help themselves from, visitors, guests, and members alike. A little area is assigned for eating and socializing, and attached to the building, there is also the milk processing room where the cow milk the herd produces is made into cheeses and yoghurt. Communal meals are also seen by some in the community to be a benefit because they do not wish to spend time on cooking. There is a feminist aspect to this as well, for some who feel relieved from what could on "the outside" or the "mainstream" be categorized as female activities.

Compost Cafe is in the left corner of the courtyard, engrossed by the invasive palm trees that grow there, and this building is where many "Oakers" today come to smoke cigarettes or play various drinking games, like "Stump" or "would you rather". This little shack holds many treasures, like a funny quote book where communards have collected statements made by visitors and members, and a box full of various stories. The courtyard also includes the Llano offices, where the community members handle many businesses with "the outside," deliver their requests for the shopping trip, post their mail, and print their various resources. There are a few other shacks in this area, one being the garden shed, with a little construction made to house various materials. Behind the courtyard, some of the food fields are located and a little stage and fire pit where members congregate for parties and concerts. Down the courtyard, one finds a little pond, with its own imported sandy beach. Across it, a little sauna has been built for those who want a peaceful traditional sauna, or to participate in other kinds of rituals, like *The Women's Secret Singing* sauna, massage workshops or Tibetan meditation practice.

FIGURE 5- MAP OF TWIN OAKS FROM VISITOR'S INFORMATION PAMPHLET

THE ROAD TO EMERALD CITY

Departing from the crossroad at the main road, where the road to the left leads to the courtyard and past the chicken coop, one can take a left where one first bumps into *Aurora*, named after a community called Aurora Commons. *Aurora* at Twin Oaks is where all visitors, outside of visitor periods, will stay. Simple arrangements are made inside where there is a communal area, two small bathrooms, and six rooms. This is where visitors will live when they are trialed and tested for membership while practicing how communal living works by creating their own house rules and norms[9].

[9] Aurora Commons is interesting and deserves more insights in its comparison to some of the experimentation that has happened throughout, especially the 1970s and the 1980s at Twin Oaks, but, alas, resources are scarce other than the vast archives that exist, stored at the University of Virginia for safe keeping. No digital ordering has been done in these, and it would take a very different archival project to approach this issue; however, it is important to note that different experiments with psychotherapy methods has trended at Twin oaks as well.

A bit further, the big tofu factory is built. This business venture creates the largest income for the community.

To the right, there is a path up to ZK, which is the biggest communal area. This is a common meeting ground throughout the day, and lunch and dinner are served here. This building has two kitchen areas, one for smaller cooking purposes and a big kitchen where the communal meals are prepared. There is storage for food and a smaller room that is designed for families with children to eat in, and a bigger dining room. The Community Information Board is also kept here. The community grows food, but also gets food from what is called "relay", meaning food that is about to be dumped by stores, or from major dumpster diving hauls.

To the right of ZK, there is little *Degania*, which at this point is symbolic of the history the community has with experiments in communal child rearing. This is where the children of the community are schooled and cared for, but up until the 80s, this was where the communally raised children lived and slept supervised by "metas". *Degania* was named after an Israeli kibbutz that practiced communal child rearing and was part of the first kibbutz and settlements of immigrants in Ottoman Palestine. In Degania, the focus was partly on making public life more accessible to women (Allweil 2016:140). The kibbutz movement in general has inspired many of the members at Twin Oaks and, at least, three members I met had visited Israel to spend time in some of them[10].

Morningstar, one of the residential houses that comes up following the path from *Degania*, is named after a more recent experiment in communal living than the rest, a result of the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s that had created open ICs in California. "Open" means that no one could decide who could stay or go, according to the principle of LATWIDNO (Land Access To Which is Denied to No One) (Tsimpouki 2008).

[10] An additional aspect that is important to mention here is that, compared to other minorities, people of Jewish heritage dominate the membership at Twin Oaks today. Hanukkah is one of the few major traditional religious celebrations that many members celebrate in some form or other. Interestingly, Christmas is not widely celebrated, but thanksgiving is a big community effort.

FIGURE 6- ENTRANCE TO DEGANIA—THE CHILDREN'S HOME-SCHOOLING HOUSE AND PREVIOUS DORM ROOM

Similarly, the residential house *Kaweah* is named after Kaweah Co-operative Commonwealth, a short-lived community in California that also experimented with scientific socialism, partly inspired by Edward Bellamy under the leadership of a Danish socialist, Laurence Gronlund (O'connell 2000). *Kaweah* at Twin Oaks was built with a greater focus on energy efficiency and sustainable solutions than most of the other houses on the farm, but it was the cooperative ownership over the commons and means of production that resonated with Twin Oakers when they named it.

Moving past the living areas, you can follow a little path that brings you through the little forest that is left on the farm. In between the various little side paths, you will find evidence of human activity, where little art pieces, burial sites, shrines, or play areas reveal themselves if you go looking. A famous and frequented place is *The Playground of Death*, which is more of a playground for adults, where various

enormous handmade nets hang from the trees for communards to play or relax in. Members encourage playfulness in many aspects of social life.

Emerald City of *Oz* is the industrial area where the professional woodwork on the farm happens. The curing and treatment of wood for hammocks require much work and space, and there is also a big room where the rope for the hammocks is plaited. The community also runs a sawmill here, and one of the members has a little furniture carpentry building. Beyond this area, there is also a large area that is used for conferences and bigger parties where people can pitch tents.

These named sites and buildings are symbolic of communities that have failed but still influence knowledge creation in the community about past, current, and future experimentation. The members do not often discuss the matter of ideological and communal inspirations, yet the living in spaces that make these communities important relate them to an array of symbolically important sites—drawing on Chinese communism, Israeli communal experiments, Christian settlements, and so on. Many of these communities had disastrous consequences, and some of these represent systems that are almost oppositional to the values on which TO bases their policy on. It also shows that this history is actively studied and compared, their paradoxes informing new ways of thinking about current experimental development. The current organization of the community is one that represents both new horizons for utopian egalitarian experiments and draws on such nostalgic features.

Current Organization

While some of the political structure at TO is directly influenced by the model B.F. Skinner outlines in Walden Two, most of the elements of behaviorism has been left behind and been deemed as failed experiments However, the political structure and community organizational model has also been revised and reshaped throughout the community's history. The policy system is expanded, and the community has moved away from behaviorist experimentation to experiments in egalitarianism. Today, TO has a reputation for being more structured and work-oriented than what is common in the movement elsewhere. The vast bureaucratic system and labor organization make

the community stand out in the IC movement. The community has over 100 work areas (see appendix A), and many roles of leadership. TO members reject permanent hierarchies, and central leadership roles are rotated regularly.

The community has also made commitments to nonviolence, environmentalism, anti-racism, feminism, and equity measures, often related to the issue of sustainability, although various definitions of these concepts are used among the communards. Economic growth at Twin Oaks, as I will show, is about sustaining the community and creating financial security, which is about achieving economic balance and security rather than exponential growth, which many of the communards expressed as undesirable.

People from all over the world come to this area to learn more about the life that utopian egalitarian intentional communitarians live. To make a community like this function, with its hundred or so members, there is a very complex set of structures in place to ensure that self-governing does not lead to exploitation of the system or any major conflicts or failures.

Communards constantly evaluate the history and workings of the community to better understand and improve their inner workings. Sociologist and scholar of communes in the 1960s and 1970s, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, highlights that intentional communities (or communes) are under constant reevaluation through what she calls "micro-cosmos", where the members must confront almost every known problem of social organization, often locating problems that may be improved upon. This reevaluation serves to create innovative community and social relationships and then to establish what I understand to be new social contracts. Everyone involved must confront and evaluate potential difficulties (Kanter 1972). One of the most important social contracts developed by the communards that touch on their intellectual commonalities in approaching egalitarian experimentation is the expansive policy system, which outlines their common ground and how to approach conflict, paradox, and tensions. Policy is a living document that also features the historic development of current policies, often describing past experiments and the reasons for abandoning them.

POLICY AND BYLAWS—NEW EGALITARIAN SOCIAL CONTRACTS

The only shared and explicitly and formally stated value system at Twin Oaks is that of the "bylaws"[11] and policy. This is a document of great value to the community that every new member must adhere to and sign when arriving as a provisional member. The bylaws contain an introduction to beliefs, values, and intentions for the community at large but are often up for discussion.

Under Article One: definition and purpose, the egalitarian framework is outlined and is perhaps the most important part of the policy.

Paragraph Two. Purpose:

- Together, our aim is to perpetuate and expand a society based on cooperation, sharing, and equality:
- Which serves as one example of a cooperative social organization, relevant to the world at large, and promotes the formation and growth of similar communities.
- Which strives to treat all people in a kind, gentle, honest, and fair manner, without violence or competition.
- Which assumes responsibility for maintaining the availability of natural resources for present and future generations through ecologically sound production and consumption.
- Which in the behavior of individuals and of the community strives to eliminate the attitudes and results of sexism, racism, ageism, and competitiveness.
- Which has no special privilege or benefit associated with positions of responsibility and does not permit the power or influence necessitated by efficient government to differentially promote the welfare of the governing group, or of any other subgroup.
- Which assumes responsibility for the material and social needs of its members, according to the principle "from each according to cos ability to each according to cos need".
- Which strives to be self-reliant by producing for itself the goods and services necessary for the maintenance of the community (Twin Oaks Community 2010).

Policies and bylaws are often used as reference points in the community. Throughout the last 50 years, it has grown extensively. It was recently revised for a digital version, which makes it even more available for the members to use in everyday interaction and planning. It contains the membership policies, the property

[11] See appendix B

codes, norms, and rules of conduct and is the result of development over time since it contains comments and names of previous members that have evolved parts of it.

Changes in policy can be a difficult and long process, especially after 50 years when many things have been tried and deemed unsuccessful. So, members that want to start a process of changing policy will be advised to investigate the expansive community archives and ask about their experiences. The changes that go through an extensive process of community input and discussion.

In anthropology, documents and policy came into ethnographic inquiry quite late (Hull 2012). Bruno Latour called bureaucratic records “the most despised of ethnographic objects” (Latour 1990:54). Matthew S. Hull reviewed the extent of such inquiry and concluded that “the fundamental insight of this literature is that documents are not simply instruments of bureaucratic organizations but rather are constitutive of bureaucratic rules, ideologies, knowledge, practices, subjectivities, objects, outcomes, and even the organizations themselves (2012). A central theme in this literature is how bureaucratic documents can “make things come into being”. Hull (2012) holds that documents promote control within organizations and beyond through their links to the entities they document and the coordination of perspectives and activities. Prominent theories have long emphasized that institutions involve an order of life and techniques of management oriented toward specific utopian goals (Weber 1994; Foucault, Davidson, and Burchell 2008). These in turn generate what Weber called *Lebensfuhrungen* or conducts of ethical life (Du Gay 2008).

As we see here, these bylaws set the prerequisites for egalitarian life as an ethical life. In addition to the bylaws, the outlined planner–manager systems in place have become a way to ensure egalitarian political organization that still draws on these things that “do work” and make things, here egalitarian improvements, come into being.

Planners, Managers, and teams

“The Planner–Manager system,” as depicted in Skinner’s novel, is still in place at TO today. Planners are the highest administrators, although they are answerable to

the community's will. Managers handle the day-to-day decisions for their area. For community-wide decisions and larger issues, the planners, which are three rotating members, make decisions by considering the bylaws and policies, and by soliciting community input by posting papers for comment, holding community meetings, organizing surveys, talking with members (especially members closely involved in the issue or have strong feelings), and so on. They make decisions by gathering information and determining the larger will of the community on a given issue (Twinoaks.org).

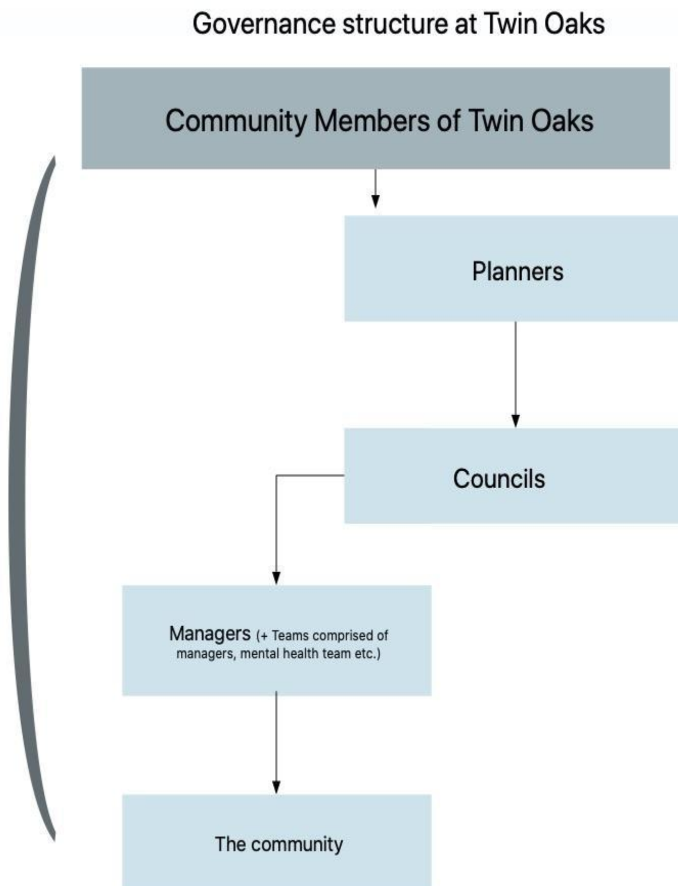

FIGURE 7-GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AT TWIN OAKS

“We are looking for reluctant leaders,” Twin Oaks founder Kat Kinkade and East Wind Founder Deborah were fond of saying, as one of the activist community members and gatekeepers Paxus wrote on his blog (Paxus 2020). Although in *Walden Two*, Skinner claims that the educated elite should be making most of the decisions, the plannership today at Twin Oaks is open to anyone who is interested. It is not always a popular job, and many choose to step down before their period is over. According to Paxus, over half of the planners do this. Power is then rotational, and it often seems problematic and undesirable.

The planners oversee the managers who lead different work areas in the community and ensure that important decisions are based on consensus. If not, they would make decisions contrary to the many varying opinions among the members. The decisions planners make can be overridden by members. Due to the transparency around the political process, members can give their opinions to the planners by putting a little written note in what is called the “input box”. The idea is that this allows for direct democracy to influence the highest political organ while remaining flexible for the individual to choose their levels of engagement with this. The planners rotate, while the manager system is more flexible. The managers often stay on for several years but can choose to leave their posts when they feel it is timely to do so.

FIGURE 8-INPUT BOX SET ON THE “GRABS TABLE”

Description: Communards leave nick-nacks they do not want anymore so that others can repurpose it. Here, we see speakers, a home-knit beanie and Mardi Gras beads leftover from a visitors' party

The managers control various labor or social areas which can be anything from small work areas that require a few hours a month from the manager to almost full-time management of bigger labor areas. The manager organizes the team that is interested in that area and will handle meetings and budgets' arrangements. There are over 100 labor areas on the farm, which means that one member can be the manager of several teams, for instance, the mental health team and the dairy team. Finally, councils comprise managers within certain areas that must be organized across work teams for planning purposes.

The planners will have overarching responsibilities within the communities and handle major issues or conflicts. They rotate every 18 months to ensure that power does not stay with a small group of people. They are elected by the membership, which will often try to vote for candidates that will give the widest possible representation. The potential planners show up for meetings where they discuss their visions for what they want to achieve by joining the plannership before the members vote. Plannership is also seen as a way for egalitarian organization to be improved upon, and therefore, members seek to have a diversified plannership. During my fieldwork, it was time to elect a new plannership, and I will illustrate some of the discussions over what is to be considered "egalitarian" when implementing such direct democratic leadership by giving a brief ethnographic snapshot of a conversation I had with a new member in that period.

Election time

When it was election time at Twin Oaks in the fall of 2016, the previous planners had stepped down after a period of turmoil. Some members had signed their names up on the card that is put up on the "3 × 5," which is the community information board. There were seven names when I first checked it. Some of the names on the list were new members, or members that seemingly did not participate

much in the more open social life in the community. I met one of the candidates with whom I worked closely, Kami, and I had not heard of his plans to sign up for the job and therefore asked him about it over lunch:

"I figured why not. It's a good way to learn and get more involved," he said. "Did you see the letter Brojo put out about it? I was really surprised that he supported me for the plannership, because of that other thing," he said, referring to a conflict involving two opposing sides in a very heated debate that had happened during a community feedback. "He thinks it's more representative of the community, or the minorities of it, you know. If it turns out to be me, Carrie and Byron…we'll have a person of color, one trans person and one woman as planners. But I really don't think I'm going to get it." "Why not?" I asked him. Kami was a new member during my visitor period but had only recently started getting more involved in community politics after a long period of being sick and confined to his room mostly. "Because I'm so new," he answered. "There are some good things about that, of course, but I think most people would want someone with more experience from the community," he pondered. I answered him, "I don't necessarily think so, and I think out of the group that it will be you, Carrie and Byron that get it. And new people always bring something fresh to the table, and you would have the other two to support you and learn from, yeah?" He smiled and continued; "Yeah, I guess. I was surprised Brojo wrote that though" I laughed and jokingly leaned in and said "well, cause Black Lives Matter," referencing a previous joke we had shared about the ways in which white people often tried to overcompensate in trying to reverse oppression on the farm. He laughed and said, "he does want those minority boxes checked—one female, one trans person, and one 'Person of Color' (POC) in plannership, not bad at all!"

He then told me that he wanted to join as a planner mostly because he wanted to work on getting the community to stop buying factory farmed meat. His family had run chicken farms in the South, a common exploitative line of work that many poor people of color especially do there, and he felt like the community could not be egalitarian unless it removed itself from such industries, showing that egalitarianism to him also included human and non-human entanglements.

Members like Kami often take on roles to learn new skills and put forth some of their own personal political agenda. The membership at large is always open to new people gaining experience with whatever work is available. Though new members do not often take on as much responsibility as Kami, new members are often encouraged to show humility and a willingness to learn from the past when engaging with political life in the beginning.

To conclude, the governing system, alongside the plannership, is a result of an egalitarian process and anti-hierarchical consensus-based policy development. From this case of Kami trying for membership, we see the anti-hierarchical intentions of assuming this leadership role. Members want wide representation and commitment to the cause. What exactly the "cause" should be is often discussed, but most of the discussion happens in writing on what is popularly called the Opinions and Information Board.

THE O&I

The Opinions and Information Board (the O&I) is another interesting product of direct democracy and sharing at Twin Oaks. Here, discussions and information are posted on a clipboard and hung on a big room separator in the communal eating hall. Since the community does not have that many collective meetings, it has resolved this issue by producing texts that can be drawn on to make evaluations and progress.

The O&I has other benefits as well. As mentioned, meetings can be a difficult format for egalitarian form. Some need to think about their feelings and intentions behind different processes to allow those who do not communicate well, either in groups or orally, to express themselves with less anxiety. However, both forms of communication require some ability levels for proper opinion formulation alongside emotions and ideas' articulation. This can be difficult for some but works very well for most of the community. The O&I is therefore the center of many social interactions and frustrations.

The O&I was, for instance, a source of contention believed by some to reproduce class inequalities. The ability to use text fruitfully was something that could

be inhibited by "cultural baggage" of poverty, lack of education, reading, writing disabilities, or similar problems. Keisha, one of the newer members that came from a poor background, assessed the situation as "not very egalitarian," explaining to me how she felt stupid when she wrote comments or read other people's comments, not only because of the content, which at times can become almost academic in its language, but also because she felt her writing looked child-like. She felt excluded from the process and wished for more meetings.

The value the communities place on text production, and how they archive these texts, is a source of information on how egalitarian utopia has evolved over time. It is also in itself the very tool that allows egalitarian utopia to develop and is today and archive different opinions and genealogies to be discovered and rediscovered and used repeatedly to "think with" for the communards. While meetings happen among teams regularly, larger communal meetings are special events that often evoke an intensification of conflicts. Meetings at Twin Oaks, where all members are called in, are very special because few of them exist. Text is also produced in meetings so that communards can retrace steps and analyze in-depth discussions and conflicts, and those that could not attend will get access to the information made available at the meeting. Let me delve into some of the meeting forms that are prevalent at Twin Oaks.

Community Meetings

The community structure at TO also stands out compared to many others in that most of the community discussions are written, and meetings where the whole community can attend are limited. Out-phasing of big and frequent communal meetings was seen by members as a more effective way to conduct politics as meetings take a lot of time[12]. It also allows for other egalitarian modes to be affected since it allows those who, for different reasons, do not feel like they are suited to that form of decision-making; for instance, some might not be comfortable speaking in public. This is an egalitarian issue; when communards feel that communal meetings

[12] If communal decisions cannot be made on an issue, the decision can be left to smaller sub-groups.

are uncomfortable or oppressive, they as members cannot contribute similarly or equally. The same can be said for the written discussions that require certain levels of ability to communicate well in writing, but it is, nonetheless, deemed a more productive way of communicating. Thus, collective politics can often be seen as classist or problematic for those who feel excluded.

Community meetings are important to assure self-governance. Different communities have different meeting rituals, with varying degrees of mandatory or non-mandatory attendance of members. Some meetings are open to anyone, while others may be closed for visitors. At Twin Oaks, members usually have the right to sit in on any meeting unless other arrangements are agreed upon, or if, for instance, the health teams are discussing something sensitive. Many meetings are regular meetings about the practicalities of labor, for example. Here, you can express yourself, or even just learn and take in the information from the meeting, think about it for some time, and then, if you want to, write an opinion piece for the O&I. Learning by listening is important in the community; it simply does not work if there is no room for one to be heard, and that you are met with initial goodwill and understanding is important. This is especially important for new members who are getting used to a whole set of new rules and norms they must relate to. Mistakes and conflicts will inevitably happen, and community gossip and turmoil can quickly become bigger issues and are often the reason people leave or ICs dissolve.

When important communal meetings do happen, they are sometimes recorded, or someone will make substantial notes, so that those unable to attend or perhaps do not do well in crowds have insight into the meeting all the same. Some members at Twin Oaks find the meetings tedious and repetitive, without seeing much result from them and choose not to attend. When looking through the archives for the last 20 years or so, this is not a critique without some bearing. The community does seem to fight the same verbal battles over and over, with members presenting the same form of arguments year after year, and change happens very slowly at Twin Oaks. Some egalitarian issues will never be permanently solved.

Community meetings often happen after members talk to the current planners because they have concerns, and if the problem gets bigger or lasts a long time, a community meeting is called for. All members will then be notified by messages on the bulletin board, and the labor assigner will put a little duck stamp on your work schedule for the week if it were a general meeting that would interest all to attend.

Some meetings are less formal. Some meetings are also held in the hammock weaving shop so that people can work and collect labor credits for the time spent. Sometimes the process team will allocate hours of the budget to enable members to take labor credit for being present. If the meeting is highly sensitive, there may be other variations in what happens.

"Feedbacks" are a meeting form where a member receives critique but also support communally and is a highlighted event often summoning great interest among the members. They can happen after conflict, if a member is not fulfilling their obligations to the community, or if members show problematic behavior. Members can also request feedback for themselves, but this is rare. In many respects, it is a ritual that allows for opinions to be vented and mediated in a regulated and formal form and is commonly facilitated by a member with conflict resolution training. The member receiving feedback can choose a representative, or even not to attend. They will have this support person stepping in their place and trying to figure out what should be done about the problematic behavior. This rarely happens but is a solution for those that have, for example, social anxiety, performance anxiety, or just have issues talking about their personal problem in front of the community. At most feedbacks, where a single member is the focus of the discussion, it is common that another member is there as extra support for the member in question. This usually entails that the supportive member person makes a statement, usually at the beginning of the meeting, and typically tries to clear up the issues. The supportive member also has a crucial role in intervening when people take it too far during the feedback. The supportive member can also give a statement. The feedback is perceived as necessary and cathartic but often very painful. In the period I was there, all the members who received feedback have since then left the community, with one exception: a man who has few other

options because he was getting old. He told me he would have left if he had other prospects.

Some communities frequently have meetings and feedback compared with Twin Oaks. Some even have big mandatory community meetings every day. At Living Energy Farm, they were experimenting with having what is in community and movement “lingo” called a “check-in,” where all members and visitors tell the others about how they are doing, any issues they might have or problems that have occurred during the day. When they are finished, they will say “check” and the next person goes on. Members would seldom address what the other members had said before but would focus mainly on their own experience, or sometimes it would spur discussion after the “check-in” was finished.

Some communities have a very open and confrontational meeting culture, which demands much energy from the members present. These are often the ones who have shared ideological intentions of self-improvement and have more therapeutic content on the agendas. One of the communities I stayed with would have a “rowdier” sense of meeting culture, and one member said that they were usually “not as PC as other communities” during these meetings. Learning how to navigate the egalitarian framework requires flexibility in structure of these meetings, as they are meant to socialize the individual into the group. The flexibility and mix of meeting-structures and written discussion attests to the experimental nature of the community, as it attempts to encompass a variety of how to be egalitarian.

Conclusions—Utopian influences and New Egalitarian Experiments

In this chapter, I have reviewed some of the ideological and historical entanglements of the practical utopian experiments affecting the present organization of ICs, using the example of Twin Oaks to highlight the current organizational principles, which provide the egalitarian prism shaping social life in my case studies. Egalitarianism is infusing here every day practical lives and local vernacular. This I argued shows that there is a collective social identity to utopian experiments that are drawn on in pursuits of new experimentation. I have also shown how practical utopias

can organize themselves around the egalitarianism concept through their bureaucratic organization and that elements of nostalgic heritage, which inspire reflection over egalitarian paradoxes of power, success, and failure in managing new ways of approaching better lives. We see here that hierarchies have produced new egalitarian experiments in action, and egalitarian experiments have driven new hierarchies or inegalitarianism into the discussion of how to organize around exclusions, thus again producing new hierarchies. This dyadic relationship is accepted as inherently paradoxical, and failures are opportunities for new processes to merge with obtaining a good life once it does not threaten the sustainability of the community.

The key to improving egalitarianism is to develop socialization processes that merge the individual with the communal where value-mastering becomes an essential element of the egalitarian process. In this project, communards produce tacit and formal dynamic knowledges that manage and exclude experiments and peoples that pose a threat against a sustainable egalitarian form that honors the common desire for a better world. I have presented some of the activities that happen in different spaces on the farm to show how these spur experiments day-to-day lives. In terms of meetings and written text it takes time to learn how to navigate and integrate local meanings of egalitarianism, its values and social form. As such, practical egalitarianism on an analytical level can then be argued to be more than a value system but also a system of continuous knowledge-creation where skills are developed to allow for mastering more egalitarian behaviorisms, paradoxes, and contradictions. I shall therefore direct attention especially to the integration of new members in the following chapter to give the reader a deeper sense of what the skills of a good egalitarian novice may be in this context.

Chapter 3

Searching for Community: Motivations, Initiations, Exclusions, and Departures—The comings and goings of IC members

I concluded the last chapter by suggesting that there is a collective social identity derived from utopian experimentation that my interlocutors draw on through nostalgic representations of such past experiments with finding a better life, "the good life", or creating a better world. This chapter accounts for the various motivations, processes, and rituals that are important in initiating new members into the community.

I will, in this chapter, first exemplify some of the common patterns of motivations behind visitors' decision to apply for membership, paying particular attention to the efforts toward meaningful lifestyles, gendered problematics, and what I have called "moral shocks" that lead to such choices. I then show how the visitor period is a liminal period and argue that the novicehood of the visitor period is a trial in egalitarian potential, considered necessary to live in an egalitarian community. During this rite of passage, the individual's "egalitarian potential" is assessed by both the visitor and the community; can they participate as full members, and will they fit in socially and perform within their egalitarian values? The rite of passage into the community as a member becomes a resocialization into an egalitarian processual mode and value system, which functions within the set egalitarian structure given by policy and infrastructure. I argue here that initiation, membership, and exclusionary processes are intrinsic to the reorientation of the subject toward egalitarian values and organization.

Developing skills to master the values and institutions and play emerge as an important feature of the liminal experience in such pursuits. This process reveals and illuminates a deeper understanding of what committing to a community might mean, and the type of practicalities, problems, and conflicts that often occur in such processes. Why visitors come and what they want to achieve also emerge as important for establishing clear social contracts, getting to know one another, and forming new

relationships within a mode of practical engagement with leading more egalitarian lives.

WHY DO THEY "COME TO COMMUNITY"?

The average Twin Oaker stays for around eight years, and in that time, they will have visitor groups 11 months out of the year, so it affects the membership greatly to have new groups present so often. It becomes a normal part of everyday life to socialize and be involved with the visitor process. The transformation into members of an IC, or rites of passage into community, is for them a way of acting on their desire for community, but also their search for what is often by them referred to as "the good life" or "good livelihood". In local vernacular, this process is often called "coming to community" or "finding community". The most important aspect of "community" for them is some form of horizontal organization, deeply connected to the ideas about egalitarianism. As Cohen explains:

> Community is just a boundary-expressing symbol. As a symbol, it is held in common by its members, but its meaning varies with its member's unique orientations to it… the reality and efficacy of the community's boundary- and therefore the community itself, depends upon its symbolic construction and embellishment" (Cohen 1985:15).

This symbolic construction and embellishment point to the intention and desire for a better world in these communities, and thus shows that boundary creation is an important utopian process that helps define what is to be intentional about and egalitarian with. Boundaries define what constitutes the community, what constitutes egalitarianism, and who and what should be excluded.

Motivations to leave "the mainstream" are many and complex for communards in the FEC. It is easy to talk about and find those in the community that are there because they, for example, are anti-capitalist, perhaps socialist, spiritual, or committed to greener sustainable lifestyles, feminism, or queer liberation. However, digging

deeper, the patterns that emerge in the stories I have collected are those of trauma and desires for social connectedness.

Often, but not always, people would note that they did not come to a community for specific spiritual, political, or religious reasons, but many claimed that it was by word of mouth that their interest had initially been intrigued. Some had friends or family who had visited or stayed in the community[13]. Many hop from community to community, or "community date," as it is sometimes called by people in the movement. They often engage with a network of communities rather than belonging to one specific one. This, I was told, was more common now than before because access to transport and inter-community networking is more common now than in the movement up until the 1960s. Some members have dual memberships in two communities, spending half of their time in each.

The accounts some members leave histories of personal traumas behind them or have felt that the systems and work they were involved in were traumatic. Dolorian, a visitor, said, "I got out of the rat race because I did not want to enslave and exploit other people at work. That is the American system, and that made me sick". His experiences with exploiting other humans had contributed to his depression, he argued. The ecological destruction of lands and such oppressive work structures around them motivated many to search for ways in which they could live more aligned with nature and take care of their and other peoples' needs at the same time.

Other motivations merge into a certain dominant pattern; many have the hope of engaging with capitalism in a different way or disengaging with it totally. Many highlight the focus on agriculture and want to learn how to work on land and with animals. Some look for meaningful work, or work that they feel is more motivating, or even just to have fun at work. Others also see it as a skill development tool if they have certain interests, like carpentry. Others wished to live as frugally as they could so that their carbon footprint was as low as possible, claiming that sharing resources to

[13] Although I was not able to make this a major focus, I suspect a network analysis could explain why people come to various communities, but this is not yet covered in the IC literature.

achieve this can only be effectively done if we live communally. A few new older members said that they wished for community now that their kids had grown up. A few members I met also never made a conscious choice to come but were born into the movement and never left. Some members came specifically because they wanted to raise their children in the community using alternative homeschooling. Two men who were particularly interested in coming to the community to raise their children recently developed a podcast series discussing what it would entail to raise children in ICs, where they discussed the history of experiments of communal child rearing and current developments.

Though the community held on to too many of Skinner's visions, like the communal child rearing where children would be raised separate from their parents in Degania, only two people I spoke with said that they had read *Walden Two* and came there being inspired by the book in their search for community.

During a longer interview, Lisa, one of the community's established artists, corrected me when I asked her why she "came to community" and said, "that's not what is actually interesting—you should be asking people why on God's earth they stay here when it is so hard to live here!" I asked her: "That's a fair point, well, why do you?" She laughed and said: "Sometimes I don't even know, and I think I'm nuts for staying. I guess, because I can regulate my own days, and I can work a lot on my art." Reflecting on these motivations we see some common patterns of dissatisfaction with their past lives that are lived in the mainstream where over-consumption or the pressures of capitalist society has created stress for the interlocutors.

More time for leisure and relief from stress is a high motivator. About 14–15 members mentioned to me various issues of poverty or lack of resources in the past, and that they felt like having their basic needs met through communal life that provided security they never had before. Lodus who had been at Twin Oaks for five years said that his family had always depended on food stamps, and that, in the community, there was an abundance of food he could not have even imagined before. In the community, Lodus found some safety and was excited about being there.

LIVES IN DISTRESS

An important point that is not afforded enough attention in the IC literature, but that I draw on here from research on other feminist social movements (see Reger 2004), is the importance that “moral shocks” and trauma have on people in the process of beginning the search for utopian experiments. “Moral shocks” can be events that trigger deeper reflection and needs for renunciation. Jo Reger (2004), in explaining how emotional work is facilitated through organizational processes in a women’s liberation movement in New York, looks at how moral shocks of alienation and anger can be transformed and overcome through collective action. Moral shocks, often treated as “cultural baggage,” explained in Reger’s ethnography, are comparative to the motivations many of my interlocutors have when joining. Reger draws on Hochschild’s concept of “emotional work,” which is generally used to describe how women perform extra emotional work, adding to their paid work to meet emotional and performative expectations (Hochschild 1979). Emotional work is sometimes, at Twin Oaks, acknowledged differently, especially in cases where it is considered a way of handling the cultural baggage of visitors. These tasks can seem tedious for some. For instance, explaining the principles of feminism or issues of white privilege can be repetitive, but some consider it a significant part of the labor that is done. Moral shocks were revealed to me through deeper conversations with some of the members. They had felt alienated or lost, some even considering suicide. Others had no family or had been estranged from their families. A few female members said that they had been in traumatic romantic relationships with great amounts of abuse. Several members told me in a private setting or in group settings that they had been raped and exploited and were looking for social connections that made them feel safe rather than scared. I have listed many motivational factors for joining and remaining in community, though communards often emphasize that life in ICs is not easy either, and that they engage with a radical self-transformation, out of their comfort-zones to manage life there.

One highlighted example was the search for safety for marginalized groups. I will return to the topic of creating “safe spaces” in the coming chapters, but it should be mentioned that quite a few noted that the feminist agenda of the community was the

main reason for engaging, often referencing histories of sexual abuse and violence. Related to such issues of insecurity and uncertainty, three members mentioned to me that their LGBTQIAA2S+ identity made them targets for homophobia and discrimination on "the outside," while they received acceptance and felt safe inside of the community. A common pattern was also found among those attracted to the relationship aspect of the community, arguing that they felt like they had more genuine and closer connections to people there. The fact that the movement is quite open to non-heteronormative people who, for instance, wish to live openly in polyamorous relationships is a drawing factor for some. However, some interlocutors said this was more uncommon now that polyamory is becoming more accepted "in the mainstream". Polyamory represented also for some to opportunity to collectively raise children with multiple parents.

Let me illustrate with an example what work is done in ICs to create value orderings that liberate women, as an example of how they relieve communards of certain oppressions.

Gender Equality as Motivation and Egalitarian Tension

> As a feminist culture, at Twin Oaks, we tend to disregard traditional gender roles and behavior. Women and men choose their roles in the community based on their interests, strengths, and passions, not on anyone else's preconceived notions. (Twinoaks.org 2017)

The feminist values of TO were already set from the legacy of B. F Skinner's acute awareness of the issue of gender and the lack of freedom for women. Skinner wrote in the introduction to the second printing of Walden Two: "the dissatisfaction that led me to write Walden Two were personal. I had seen my wife and her friends struggling to save themselves from domesticity, wincing as they printed "housewife" in those blanks asking for occupation…" (Skinner 1969:v).

In general, feminism is informed by a world that should be otherwise. For many feminists, feminism itself is intrinsically utopian and paradoxical (Greenhill, Kenter, and Dannevig 2020). As a women's study, Professor Angelika Bammer (1991) argues that feminism depends on the recognition of patriarchy as an unnatural state, which in turn drives a belief in or pursuit of an alternative. Feminism is therefore driven by anticipation, and from understanding utopia as a journey, and not a goal in itself. Ruth Levitas argues that Bammer's contribution to an understanding of feminism as processual also contributes to an understanding of utopia as a method, not as an antithesis, but as a "series of utopian moments within the shifting configurations of the possible" (Bammer 1991:47; Levitas 2013:95).

Twin Oaks community has since the very beginning had a strong focus on relieving women of the burdens of inequality through different means in different times. First, it was the relief of the burden of confinement to what was understood as stereotypically women's work, like child rearing, cleaning, and cooking. These undertakings would be shared in community. Second, it relieved the women of the stigma of not wanting children, or the inability to have their own children. When women or a couple chose to have a child, they would receive communal support and as much help with child rearing as she would need. The community also supports single-parent adoptions of any gendered parent, and other family structures, like polyamorous relationships as well, but they do, however, practice pregnancy approval in the community. The third was relieving women of the burden of sexism and introducing safe spaces for them. This also developed into an issue that encompassed LGBTQIAA2S+ issues as well, just as feminism developed into third and fourth waves in "the mainstream". "Unconditioning" or "reconditioning" is a processual concept that some of the communards use when they describe their efforts to take on new roles, learn new skills and try to let go of some of the behaviors conditioned within an oppressive structure, and introduce new ways of handling such behaviors in the new form of social life they find within the movement.

Anthropologist Jon Wagner observed that Twin Oaks already early on had the potential to exemplify how the fight for equality could work within the movement,

claiming that the egalitarian claims of communes were incorrect, and that only the Twin Oaks community's efforts had resulted in what he believed to "may be the most non-sexist social system in human history (Wagner 1982:37-38). Some of the feminists currently living in Twin Oaks might not fully agree with that[14].

Wagner makes some strides to understand the complexity the study of gender offers at Twin Oaks and East Wind. He writes,

> Sex differences are not recognized as an appropriate basis for allocating jobs… Both men and women perform even such commonly sex-allocated jobs as heavy equipment operation and kitchen work. Equality in management roles is apparent not only from Kinkade's own general comments, but also from the current list of managerships at East Wind, which she has kindly provided. Thirty men and twenty-six women occupied managerships at the time of her communication, but the composition naturally fluctuates in such a way that the managerial structure has been at times perceived by outsiders as a "matriarchy". Differences in male and female clothing are also breaking down, and some men have adopted the long skirt as everyday apparel. Women and men are held equal in matters of sexual relations. Extraordinary measures, including the use of "co" as sex-neutral pronouns and the replacement of "man" by "person" in such words as "workpersonship" have been taken to eliminate sex-biased usages from written and spoken language (1982: 37–38).

A dissertation defended at the University of Virginia that compared East Wind and Twin Oaks, written by Dr. Robert Charles Hayhart in 1982, was the first work that took the issue of equality in the Walden Two communities as a primary concern. He concluded that although these two sister communities had achieved "equality of opportunity in the division of labor and "distribution-consumption spheres of

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[14] The issue of "patri-Oakers" was pointed out to me as I learned about tensions between individuals on the farm on feminist issues and the evaluation of what and where the problem of patriarchy emerged.

community life, less equality was achieved in the political and social sphere. This was found to be especially true in the sexual and emotional networks within the two communities" (unpublished text; copied from Twin Oaks archives).

When understanding gendered topics, it should be approached with sensitivity toward the complexity of gender, for instance, statistics of how many women work in this and that area that are "traditionally" related to masculine or feminine spheres if not enough data for fruitful analysis. For example, men wearing skirts are not so much about gender bending but about an anti-hegemonic stance to the conceptualization of a skirt as gendered at all. Gendered categories can be fluid and not accepted at Twin Oaks as defining the people there. To understand gender equality in work and social life complexity, micro-behaviorisms and interactions significantly matter. Although genders can be balanced in numbers, this does not mean that equality is "achieved," as some have argued (see Rothschild and Tomchin 2005).

Opportunities for women to take on "masculine work" and men to take on "feminine" work are ample in the community, but this has not resolved gendered tensions. Adding non-binary or trans-issues, this topic is further complicated. What the communards attempt to do, I argue, is to show ways in which to organize around gendered issues the community that are non-oppressive in everyday life situations, but this is still contentious as I will show in the fifth chapter in this thesis.

However, as visitors often see this as an opportunity for them to be relived of traditional gender roles and a chance to be in a space where feminist ideals stand strong, this becomes a common motivational factor for new members to join. Conflicts related to gender norms, chauvinism, harassment, and so on. are treated with care, and the community spends many resources on these issues. Reflecting on this, I would also like to note that the time before the inauguration of Donald Trump Jr. as president produced much fear and insecurity at Twin Oaks and across the nation when it became clear that women's reproductive rights and trans-rights were under pressure from conservatives to be restricted. People would potentially face enormous struggles. Women on the farm began discussing various issues: if Plan B becomes illegal again, how much Plan B should we buy for the community? How long was the expiration

date? What would it mean if Planned Parenthood did not receive any State funding? What would happen to the LGBTQIAA2S+ peoples that were now finally serving in the military openly? Could members get abortions without long travels? What would happen to the women's college movement that had fought so hard to make the enormous problem of sexual assaults on campuses all over the States visible?

FIGURE 9- SOCIAL ACTIVITY POSTER FOR FEMINIST THINK TANK

Description—One of the many social activities that happens at the farm is the feminist think tank. This poster features Hello Kitty stickers: jokingly, communards at Twin Oaks say that this poster includes pictures of kittens, which more people will pay attention to.

Would they struggle even more now to be heard? These were all issues that, in many ways, were met with the worst possible outcomes for women non-binary, gay, and trans people, especially under Trump, as he was creating insecurity and new

policy and norms through his incessant use of social media. The even graver concern was the new volatile popularity the extreme or alternative right wing seemed to be gaining. In this time, finding the right members became even more of a highlighted topic, as the community felt the strains of an insecure future. What was considered patriarchal behavior, misogyny or oppressive language was thus highly policed in this period.

I believe these elements ties into how the IC movement can expand on the concept of grounded utopianism. They are not the same as the forms of utopianism that Price, Nonini and Foxtree explain are connected to worlds prior to colonial rule or tumultuous periods of state formations and raises questions about "Westophilain" state models (Price, Nonini, and Tree 2008). However, unraveling and unpacking the hierarchies that were created in these periods are essential for the ICs in this study. As Price, Nonini and Foxtree write "Grounded Utopian Movements (GUMs) seek that ideal place, as defined by the actors, that alternative to a current or past oppressive condition" (Price, Nonini, and Tree 2008:134). The expression of practical egalitarianism presented here attempts to disentangle for instance structures of white supremacy, misogyny and colonization, by also embedding this polycentric struggle as a decolonization of the person- as believed to be engrained as both tacit and more apparent forms of knowledge and behavior that must be examined, understood and then unraveled. What separates the ICs in this study from the movements described by them, the Rastafari movement, the Mayan ghost dance and in the Zapatista movement that are mostly centered in religious or non-Western cultural perspectives, is that they target such western cultural perspectives and ground their utopianism in disheveling and anti- hegemonizing these. Let me delve into this issue further by exploring what it entails to find the right members to create such renunciating ruptures with outside oppressions.

Finding the right members

The ideal member in egalitarian ICs is someone who navigates the community easily, contributes equally, and is committed to the work the community does while

also becoming socially integrated. However, different members emphasize different ideal qualities. Pika, one of the long-term members, reflected on this with me one day and told me that it was most important to live with people he could have fun with and did their share of the work. He also emphasized that he saw the membership as an outreach where they could give individuals opportunities to “work on themselves” with help from the community. Dana, one of the members that left not long after our conversation about membership processes, said that she wanted people that were dedicated to the lifestyle: “people that want change in the world!”, she said.

Kaisa, one of the women that had come to TO after reading Walden Two, told me that her priorities had changed with time, and that she had become more skeptical when new visitors wanted to join, feeling that the community at large was too naive, and that the screening should be stronger. Her partner agreed and said:

> I would just let Kaisa decide, honestly, if we were to ever have a leader, I would trust her to do that job, so I trust her every time she says something about a visitor; her bullshit detector is on point. She knew Damaskus would be a problem just reading his first letter.

Kaisa was known to have an extra eye on the visitors and would discuss her thoughts about them openly. I often thought of these conversations about visitors, often happening on garden shifts, to be discussions about the qualities of the visitors but also as processes where “the ideal” or “good member” were being collectively created to also co-produce knowledge between the members about what their needs and wants were in community. People will openly discuss and evaluate the visitors in the community openly during social and work activities. The potential members are put under hard scrutiny.

The large influx of people in and out of the community shows how dependent the communities are on reproducing their own labor mass, but also that a part of these communities is always unsettled, always moving toward becoming something else

within the confines of the more static parts of the egalitarian system. Around a little less than one-third of Twin Oaks' membership is shifted out each year with transient members. A large part of the community's resources is used on the visitors and finding the right individuals to live with.

The balances that must be kept are often fragile; if the membership is volatile, it makes for great uncertainty and vulnerability, especially in the communities where they have a more precarious financial status. Accepting the wrong kind of member can also quickly become a resource drain. Conflict can start mass exodus movements out of the community. So, a lack of members or accepting the wrong members can be detrimental. Communities throughout history have therefore experimented with the ethics and workings of screening people before they join for such purposes, often struggling with ambivalence and ambiguity related to their own exclusionary or initiation processes.

Searching for Egalitarians

At Twin Oaks in the summer of 2016, the community was experiencing a slump in memberships. The tofu business was hurting because of it, making the job of filling the shift slots heavier, and the burden on the remaining members big. People were in danger of suffering from what is commonly known there as "tofu burn-out".

While we were discussing the low membership turnout in the common area over lunch one day, Daisy, one of the members who had been around for a few years, said:

> I think we get a little desperate when we notice that we can't get around to all the work. But this is when we need to be really careful about whom we let in. I think we need to screen people better, make sure that the people we let in will not be a drain on our resources as much, and we need people that are willing to get involved.

Some other people around the table responded that it was hard to assess the commitment levels of new members, making it difficult to plan the future. It was not uncommon for new members to come and take on many responsibilities and then leave soon after, or even become a problematic member that would be too draining on their resources. The relationship between the community and new members can often be fragile. The visitor period was an initial screening, but visiting the community for a few weeks often only gives a small taste of what life in community entails. Many novices leave within their first year of membership, or even during the visitor period.

Eventually, the community cut some production shifts to not overwork the people who were doing their fair share in the tofu hut and taking a financial hit due to this. This flexibility allows for the egalitarian process to remain fruitful, without producing what is sometimes referred to as the "lower Twin Oaks class" or even "tofu-slaves".

This was still a problem upon my return for a week at Twin Oaks the summer of 2017. I was trying to catch up with everyone, and although I was not making the rounds fast enough, I stopped by the barn to see if I could help with cleaning and new calves for a bit while. Tristan, one of the cow milkers with whom I had worked on the dairy team, was milking the mommas. One of them had developed a limp, and we were trying to help her walk slowly up the ramp and into the barn when he told me how much of a commitment he had taken on with dairy since I had left. He was frustrated that it seemed like people were willing to support them by encouraging their good work, showing great appreciation but would not actually come and do the dirty work with him. He was waking up at night, worrying about the cows, and I said, "So, little has changed in that regard then?", whereby he answered using an example that shows this common tension in community: "Yeah, like Lisa, was she here when you were here?" he asked. "Yeah, but like as a visitor, I think, I can't remember if she became a member perhaps right before I left? Is she doing a lot of dairy?" I asked. "Nah, that's my point. Tourist!" I laughed a bit at the term and felt like probing for him to clarify. "Tourist?" He stopped for a moment, drying his forehead clean from sweat and dirt.

> Yeah, it’s like people get excited, and when they see how much work it is, just kinda take their shifts, but I can’t rely on them to take on stuff. I don’t know. I thought that when Ilsa (the former dairy manager) left out of the blue, well, not exactly, but you know how it is, kind of, after making a bunch of changes and stuff that people had become more excited about dairy.

He told me that he had been told Lisa was going to help them with fences but had the feeling she would leave soon, calling her a tourist again. To me, it seemed that Lisa had perhaps jammed herself into one of the most common new member mistakes of taking on too much, which often resulted in the new member limiting their work areas after a little while. Being excited about work is sometimes socially expected. Visitors would often be critiqued if they seemed unenthused by the assignments they get. Obviously, she had been recognized as a resource, but now, her commitment to various work had begun to show some cracks. It was not uncommon, taking on too much at first and then realizing that the work week needs to be balanced; 42 hours of demanding physical labor can prove to be too much, or new members find work areas they want to specialize in and see the need to limit them. Some new members never find a good work situation, and they end up leaving because of it. Figuring out how a new member will fit into the work scene is a critical aspect of the initiation process.

However, while others had been excluded from the visitor process, she had made it through. So, what made her an eligible member compared to the ones that did not, despite her being now considered a tourist? Had her commitments changed? Or was it that she just did not fit in? To understand the initiation into community within the egalitarian framework, we need to consider the tensions between the individual and the collective, and the issues of commitment to both “a mission of egalitarianism” and for personal improvement. She too would have gone through the various stages that seemed to color the initiation period; first, the enamored initial stage where she would go through the excitements of her new life, then the process of discovering the downsides to committing to a communitarian project like this, and she would then

either emerge as a constructive member long-term, or she would leave. Lisa eventually left. Eventually, a tofu internship was established so that someone could come and relieve some of this stress of a lack of tofu laborers in this time, and they, in return, would work and gain experience from the production and administration. But some still felt like relying on what members often call "new member energy," and interns would not be sustainable.

"People don't come here to work in a tofu hut, for God's sake, that's not what *I* came for, OF COURSE people don't want to stand in that shitty hut, ruining their bodies while getting sprayed with gunk," the member Silva relayed after we were discussing various jobs that needed to be filled in the tofu hut. This was a continuous tension.

Pulau, another member, said that, to stay long-term, he was about finding his soul mate, so his prime concern was finding love among the new members. He did not care so much about being good workers before, he said, but expressed that with time, he had become increasingly concerned with this issue. Further, member Demeter wanted to find people committed to activism who worked to improve the community and the world outside in politics and social movements. "Work is important, but it should not be our end-all and be-all," she explained to me after we had worked together on a tofu shift once. The conflicts that were emerging around the lack of worker motivation in certain work areas pointed to a mismatch in the community members' motivations to come there, and the commitment that was needed to work.

Commitment is tested through the initiation process. The initiation rituals like these, where individuals will be tested and the community explored and pursued by the novice, have many functions. Ritual is in anthropology extensively researched and analyzed. Rappaport argued that they are essential to human behavior: a "social act basic to humanity" (Rappaport 1999:26). Rituals "solving the adaptive problems associated with group living requires psychological mechanisms for identifying group members, ensuring their commitment to the group, facilitating cooperation with coalitions, and maintaining group cohesion" (Watson-Jones and Legare 2016:42). Watson-Jones and Legare suggest that ritual solves adaptive problems associated with

group living by (a) identifying group members, (b) demonstrating commitment to in-group values, (c) facilitating cooperation with social coalitions, and (d) increasing social group cohesion. The capacity to engage in cooperation is a necessary but insufficient prerequisite for participation in goal-directed coalitional alliances (Cosmides and Tooby 2013; Watson-Jones and Legare 2016).

The summer I returned to Twin Oaks, I discovered there have been many changes in membership since I left the field. Big conflicts have emerged within the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, and people seemed distressed over the recent events that had created much movement between the different communities of members, leaving one for another, and many leaving for good. Some of the people I had come to know as essential for the movement and people who had essential skills had chosen to leave. The sister community East Wind had recently caused disruption within the Federation, being accused of allowing for racial discrimination between members, causing a bigger shift in membership. A previous interlocutor, Argon, left; he was a member I was certain must have been sorely missed due to his high-energy commitment to farming and vast skillset. He claimed that he did not receive the support he expected during a conflict, spurred, to my knowledge, over another member's Confederate Flag Tattoo. Other members did not want to see such symbolism in their living space and community, but digging deeper, it seemed the community had other issues with racism.

The confederate flag is a contested remnant of Civil War nostalgia, and people were upset about the conflict, even at Twin Oaks, though they remained confused about how the conflict had been handled. While hanging out with the smokers on the smoker's porch outside the music room one day, multiple members told me that they had just visited their sister community and that the mood had not been good. One of the members said that they never wanted to go there again. Argan has become one of the transient members that left East Wind to go to Twin Oaks. He was clearly upset, using Facebook and discussion to implore the others to take stock of their internal issues with the structural racism that influenced these spaces. He claimed that the community had also not acted when an older community member had "used the n-

word". He later left Twin Oaks as well, feeling the strain of not having resolved some underlying tensions of discrimination there as well.

White supremacy emerged as a highly problematic issue in the community, as hidden structures made some feel as if the communities had been structured around white normativity, and the well-meaning anti-discrimination policies and actions were still shaped within white paradigms. Whiteness as such was a topic of debate. My little group of close interlocutors often spoke with me on this topic, and a few of them wanted this to be an opportunity to be more exclusionary so that they would create safer spaces for people of color. Demeter hoped Twin Oaks could pave the way for solidarity movements that would support the establishment of ICs that would be "safe spaces" for people of color. As Twin Oaks had done much to create safer spaces for LGBTQIAA2S+ peoples, this seemed to be the next frontier, or rather, a reverberation of egalitarian problematics whose experiments had not resulted in solutions viable for the current context. Some members became more involved with outside activism and brought their discussion to the O&I or Facebook. Was TO, East Wind, and LEF unintentionally spaces accommodating mostly white middle class folks? How could this be changed? However, with many people leaving or being discontented, the sustainability of the community was threatened in other ways; most importantly, the community now needed to focus their attention on keeping afloat with the work. Having enough members must be balanced with finding the right members who can navigate their social norms and contribute to the community.

The important topic of finding the right members is often related to finding those willing to get engaged in tofu or other "money-making" areas. The element of finding good workers and whether this was an ethical thing to look for when people came there were a heated debate. The discussions flowed; perhaps they should focus more on other things, like what peoples' personal belief were?

The exclusionary process of finding the right members for group cohesion thus requires psychological mechanisms for solving problems of commitment (see Chudek and Henrich 2011). When these problems are oriented toward the common aspects that the community shares in approaching practical egalitarianism, which I would argue,

these exclusions are further complicated by the vast ways in which egalitarianism can be realized. Some fail in their commitments for various reasons. Why people join the visitation period is thus the first aspect of this ritual process that explores the potential problems of commitment, which I have already shown is a stressed focus for members.

Joining the movement

If you want to join Twin Oaks, and most other ICs, you will have to pursue the community. Communards often use romantic language when describing this process, they say they are "courting" or "dating" the community. To join Twin Oaks, you will first write an e-mail introducing yourself and explain your situation. The community membership liaison will respond whether you are eligible and when you might be invited for a visitor period. Other communities lack a structured process on this and solve this issue by other means or on a case-to-case basis. At TO, there are 10–11 visitor periods a year, and they last for three weeks.

Motives are often balanced with insight into the personal issues that a visitor may have; the new potential member must also display a willingness and ability to function within the framework of the community. "Cultural baggage" or other issues can come in the way of such participation. "Everything we face out there happens here too," one of the female communards told me, implying that social life in the "mainstream" is not completely left behind. "It's not perfect, but it's better than the mainstream," the communard continued, and then quoted a common saying, "It is "not utopia yet". The problems that occur in the community often relate to resource management, unequal efforts put into labor, clashes between personalities, differences in opinions and ideology, financial difficulties, and so on. Managing tensions and ensuring that equal participation happens become an important task. Ensuring that potential new members can participate in the community, are trained properly and finding out if they are committed are often time-consuming issues that require a lot of resources for the community at large.

Upon arrival, visitors receive the Visitor's pamphlet. The pamphlet is an introduction to the practicalities of living communally and to the norms and demands specific for Twin Oaks. In it, you are also warned about the more common problems that might present themselves while living there, such as exhaustion from performing activities that your body is not used to yet, the probability of contracting some form of illness there due to the unfamiliar bacteria that you are exposed to or some advice about how it can feel intense to live with so many people if you are not used to it. It also introduces the visitor to the common community lingo and abbreviations that everyone uses actively there.

During the visitor period, the membership and the visitor will essentially go through a trial ritual that will determine the egalitarian potential of the visitor and whether the community fits with the wants and needs of the individual and vice versa. Not all visitors apply for membership, or even arrive as a visitor intending to do so, which is part of the mentioned community hopping people sometimes do. Some come because they want to experience something different during their holiday breaks or even visit other communities, hoping to learn more about community building from the experience. Some come to join but change their minds about the community being a right fit. As I will explain, some visitors who want to join as members are requested not to apply for various reasons or are asked to revisit the community at a better time.

Initiation thus is a long liminal process, one that tests eligibility, legitimacy of intent, and commitment based on social learning of egalitarian process. These processes can appear ambiguous because they reinforce exclusionary processes creating or restructuring hierarchies of who is belonging and not. The visitor period extends this process, as I will show by further tests of egalitarian potential and intent.

As mentioned, Kapferer holds that inegalitarianism is a potential within egalitarianism. Kapferer does not position egalitarianism above hierarchy or vice versa; he understands hierarchy as a potentiality of egalitarianism and not a transformation of it; in this way, egalitarianism and hierarchy thus define and produce each other (Kapferer 2012, Gold and Zagato 2020 10–12). André Iteanu argues that values, as social norms shared among people, should "always be associated with

hierarchical ordering" (Iteanu 2013:155). This, he argues, is unproblematic in societies where hierarchy is not "demonized" should also be accepted as valid for Western societies (Iteanu 2013[15]). This ordering of hierarchy is often related to how society treats difference and sameness. "Change or transformation through encompassment is critical to hierarchy…" Kapferer argues (Kapferer 2011a:15). Expanding on this we see here examples of social settings where change is dependent on value-mastering- where some versions of sameness and difference is sometimes deemed threatening, while others are not.

ARRIVAL

The visitor period lasts for three weeks. In that time, you are expected to participate equally in the labor and work a full quota as the other members, though you will be allowed to take labor credits for attending the information meetings, also called "oreos," which are mandatory for new visitors. Visitors stay in the visitor's house, *Aurora*, with the other visitors and will most often have to share rooms, create common house rules, and participate in social events. At *Aurora*, the visitors will try to live communally while establishing house norms and rules, but they will also be partly excluded from the other members of the community. Visitors are treated with some skepticism; the community will want to ensure that they trust the individual before they let them live with them and their children.

Visitors are a big part of the labor system and the social scene while they are there. The visitors, because it varies how many there are on the farm, are not accounted for in the labor budgets and are, therefore, also seen as a strong resource to the community, especially in times where the membership is smaller than usual. The visitors will participate in mostly unskilled labor. Since the labor that the visitors contribute to is not budgeted for, they are also seen as beneficial hands in especially areas that might be stretched thin in their budgets or areas that might struggle to find willing members to take on the jobs. Most visitors' first job is to weigh and cut tofu in

the factory, for example. This relieves the tofu team to free up skilled labor to take on the more complex jobs in the process. Also, any kind of unskilled labor that might require many hands, such as weeding or food prepping, is usually filled by the visitors. The visitors are also often asked if they can or are willing to contribute with any skilled labor that they have experience with.

Because unskilled novices may be very helpful for work and potentially become new members, there is much effort and resource put into the training and care of the visitors. Some members are more patient with this form of work and will spend much time with visitors, helping them in what is inevitably a swift and steep learning curve. Training visitors and managing shifts with new people can be quite taskful but is part of the process of assessing the skillset and ambitions of the visitors. They are, for example, recommended not to show up late or to miss shifts, and often members will notice the level of commitment to the work when trying to figure out if the visitor is a good fit for the community.

Information meetings, or Oreos, are important as well. They prepare visitors for what kind of commitment they are taking on and give them initial insights into how things are organized. What is often emphasized in this time is that the community has a long history of experimentation, which is a resource in trying new things or even to establish proper critique. The visitors are urged to educate themselves before making quick judgments about the inner workings of the organization and processes to probably contribute their suggestions and critique with an understanding of the past. Members often express annoyance at the tendency of new visitors to express opinions or make suggestions to restructure activities on the farm, often fearing that they do not truly understand the process. For instance, a true mystery to me at first, after my first strenuous shifts weighing tofu, was why they lacked better mold to make the tofu pieces uniform enough so that each piece did not need to be weighed before being packed. After working with tofu and taking on more jobs, I discovered that the artisanal aspect of handmade tofu made uniformity of the tofu difficult. The weight depends on the quality and temperature of the soy used.

This exploration is further emphasized by urging the visitors to read the policy, the various discussions on the O&I, and consult with the archives before acting on what they feel is problematic or making suggestions to change processes. During my own process orientation, the liaison told us:

> Usually, we know that whatever you have to suggest or whatever you feel is stupid has usually gone through a process before, and you have not been the first one to notice these things. Sometimes we just have to tell, especially new people, that, yeah, we already tried that. Or, yeah, that thing turned into a huge conflict because of the other thing. The smart thing is to tread a bit carefully until you understand how things work. But then again, new members come in, make huge changes, and great suggestions, so don't hesitate either!

Being a community novice can be demanding, and the visitors often expressed to me that they were tired and overwhelmed; some found this exhilarating in a way, while others grew increasingly disillusioned with their own future in the community.

Visitor periods and liminal explorations of egalitarianism

Visitors often experience going through different stages during their visitor period, which are explained accurately and humorously in the visitor handbook. The initial infatuation with utopia is described; the visitor will experience excitement and extreme affection for their new friends and often feel inspired by the various skills they can acquire.

Some visitor groups develop extreme group cohesion quickly and feel that they develop strong relationships within the group, while other groups experience enormous internal turmoil. For example, right before I arrived, a visitor had been asked to leave after he had been accused of presenting various forms of what was phrased as "toxic masculinity," which had culminated in a conflict in which he had used sexist language at a party and was asked to leave quickly after. One of the

members that had been asked to tell him to leave was distraught about the situation, feeling that it was this type of behavior that being in community could change. The visitor had been in the army, and could use a second chance, he explained. Another visitor left on his own at night, without telling anyone after a conflict with another visitor. Conflict resolution strategies are often implemented in this process. The initial shock of community bugs and viruses is also often part of this first period, and the visitor may contract various flues or stomach bugs. The initial stages of this period can thus be an intense experience.

The second part of this ritual processual experience is for many more testing period. They might become frustrated with some of the lack of and apparent failures of the community. The novice visitor might find that they might have conflict of interests or even with the members after being there for a week or so. They may feel a lack of energy or frustration with keeping up with the work requirements or finding enough work to do to.

The second part is also dominated by being interviewed by the membership team. This process can be intense for visitors; some grow disillusioned with the community through the process, while some might find that they are more interested in pursuing the lifestyle than they expected. Some leave before the visitor period is over, being asked to leave after conflict or discrepancies, while others might decide to leave because they have already concluded that the community is not for them.

Before entering and leaving, visitors will write to the community, presenting themselves and their motivations for committing to the community. In the final letter, the visitor may be asked to account for certain issues; they may address issues of their debts and present a plan to handle those debts; or other issues that they feel can be managed, easing sometimes the worries some might have about their pending membership. The last period, as a visitor, is usually a more reflexive period where the visitor will usually experience sadness over leaving soon but will also most likely go through a period of reflection on whether they want to pursue membership, or perhaps continue looking for other communities or go back to “the mainstream”. The last week on the farm can prove to be testing for visitors; some might not want to leave, or they

are worried about their voting process. Many express sadness over the period, with the other visitors being over having experienced a form of *communitas* in this liminal phase (Turner 1969). Some may not want to stay on or apply for membership, but find the process educational and useful, nonetheless[16]. People's needs differ, and though their communities might not be the right fit, there might be possibilities elsewhere. Some search for years before they settle in one community. In the community, members often reference this phenomenon by saying, "different strokes for different folks". To delve into this issue of whether the novice will fit into the community, the interview is worth describing in greater detail.

THE INTERVIEW

One of the most important and intricate parts of the visitor period is the interview process for those visitors who are there to apply for membership. The interview is a chance for the Community Membership Team (CMT) to assess the potential of membership in a more systematized manner than just social interaction and in the work scene. Two members of the CMT, representatives of two different genders, will interview the potential new member with 94 essential short questions over an hour or two. The interview is mandatory for everyone applying for membership but is often not held if someone is trying to reinstate their membership after leaving for a while, for example. The questions are meant to help the interviewers understand the individual and spot problematic features in their stories. Some of the questions are light and simple, while others are meant to open the visitor up to be transparent about their personal problems to see if they are problems that the community can manage with potential new members.

The interview usually starts with the visitor being asked to tell the interviewers their life histories. The CMT practices a form of transparency with the community but will protect visitors from unnecessary detailed information being shared with the

[16] The characters in Skinner's book that visit Walden Two are meant to pick up the most typical reactions to community. Skinner anticipated that there would indeed be matters of conflict and tension in this process.

community at large. If the visitor has some form of issue that must be resolved in more depth, they are sent to the right teams that handle typical issues, such as the mental health, health, legal, or economic teams, that will further assess the situation and give recommendations to the community and visitor accordingly. A visitor who, for example, has had a suicide attempt, especially if it is within the last 12 months, is referenced to the mental health team, and the mental health team may recommend that the visitor come back for a new visitor period if their issues seem unresolved or too recent. People with high personal debt will often be recommended not to apply. These are seen as a necessary exclusionary praxis because the community at large is not equipped to handle bigger issues or, for example, a new member's debts, and so on. Chronic health problems and dependency on different medicines or treatments were questioned during the interview as well.

The other part of the interview process is to assess the values and personality of the visitor to ensure that they are seemingly "on the same page" as the rest of the community regarding elements of policy and bylaws, and to find out more about the individuals' ambitions and incentives to be in community, such as "what brings you here?" "Do you consider yourself a feminist?" "If you could change something about TO, what would it be?" "What do you think your labor scene will be like, and what would you like to explore and learn more about here?"

The interview usually ends with a chat about what the CMT recommends, and if they see any bigger problems with any of the statements the visitor has made, or what they think would be good for the visitor to work on in the community.

If the visitor is recommended to apply for membership, they still have other aspects of the processes of membership to which they must relate, such as waiting time to be able to move in. The community also tries to maintain a balance between genders and ages in the community, although there is a preference for younger people. If a visitor is over 55, they must receive a special waiver to apply. This is because older members are a bigger strain on the community most of the time, and often have higher health expenditures and will also receive "pension hours," one hour less labor per week for each year after 55, so they will not contribute much work as a younger

member. Many communities fail to maintain an age balance and will suffer labor shortages because of this. One older member who was denied the waiver said, “Well, I guess I’m too old, and my health is not the best. One member was very concerned about my teeth, in fact, that it would cost the community too much to care for it”. TO’s general memberships are concerned about the increase in elderly members, and often discuss different scenarios of having to care for many elderly members if the trend continues. Some older members were already very isolated because they were not as mobile as they were, and their care teams were often struggling to balance that type of work in-between their other work. These members must have someone to bring them meals, some on restrictive diets, socialize with them, and to other chores for them, and there would be a natural limitation to how much work like this could be allocated for in the labor budgets.

The most common grounds for denial of application for membership seemed to not be age, but mental health issues or financial predetermined factors, such as loans. Several visitors were told to wait and return for another visitor period because of mental health issues they had revealed to members or during the interview process.

The interviews seemed to vary much in form; some would spend much time telling stories, while others quickly answered all the questions and finished. If, however, the CMT or other members feel that the visitor has been withholding information or is lying about something, they might be confronted with these accusations.

Sometimes there would be interpersonal conflicts, which made it hard for the visitors to gain popularity, either with members or with other visitors. Lola, a member that worked on CMT, often felt that the community was too judgmental and said that comments made about rejecting visitors could be rudimentary; for instance, written rejection votes included “tries too hard” or “has an uncomfortable stare,” or “just don’t like her”. CMT will try to navigate the social tensions derived from this process and see it as part of their job to give fruitful feedback to rejected visitors. Egalitarianism becomes highly exclusionary at this stage, something that is reacted to with

ambivalence by members, but nonetheless is seen as intrinsic to keep the community "egalitarian".

Introductions—Socializing with Visitors

Let me delve a bit deeper into the activities that are important in the visitor period for both the visitors and members of the community to assess the possibilities for their relationships. "The visitor social" is usually the first official collective meeting between the members and the visitors, and the visitor group is also encouraged to arrange social events to know the members better. The "social" is led by a CMT member who directs the people present through a series of games.

These games are often referred to as transparency games or transparency tools and are often played in other social gatherings in the community as "ice-breakers"; however, the Visitor Social is a more fun and "light" way of connecting than the transparency tool games usually played. It typically starts with a round of names, and the people present telling the others one interesting thing about themselves. Or they play the game "if you really knew me," where the person says, "if you really knew me, you would know that I used to work as a church servant," for example. The most common game is usually "step into the circle," where everyone stands around the pit in front of the fireplace. Those that feel the impulse urge anyone to step into the pit, such as "step into the circle if you like to cook," "step into the circle if you have traveled the world for more than two years," "step into the circle if you have lived in community before," "step into the circle if you prefer to be polyamorous," "step into the circle if you have ever been arrested for activism," etc. When the game slows down, the people will sit back down on the floor, and people ask each other about the things they have just revealed. They could ask, "Would you care to share where you have traveled?" or "what kind of activism were you arrested for?" "Do you have any fun stories from working as a church servant?" People usually ended up chatting for a while, and many said that they felt like it was a good way to relieve some of the tensions of being new there, although many visitors were not used to adults playing games like this. Events and parties encourage play that generates egalitarian

movement between the participants, but there is an element of seriousness in the play, where the element of elevated communitas and liminality can reveal societal tensions and tension between the individual and the community. Consent norms or improper use of language, for example, can be tested for community members when they engage in this play.

Visitors are further encouraged to participate actively in other social activities. One often says that the social realm may change dramatically with the introduction of new members and visitors, and that some groups are livelier than others. Usually there will be a Women's Tea gathering for the female-identified members and visitors to meet and know each other. The visitors will also, by the end of their time at Twin Oaks, arrange a party for everyone, very often with some form of theme. The group I was in decided on a Mardi Gras theme and had a little parade with great success. Other groups did, for example, "Brides of March" and "Pajama party" themes. Other visitors initiate gatherings of different sorts and put up a card or poster about it. Visitors arranged reiki sessions, social meditation sessions, scrabble games, or similar activities, depending on their interests, and many members made a point out of supporting this form of engagement.

This type of liminoid setting, eventually leading to a liminal rite of passage into membership can be understood as a playful performance, exploring each other, getting to know one another, and testing the social boundaries. The intermingling of precarious new relationships, sometimes flirtations and excitement about meeting new people, is balanced with a careful eye to detail in social interactions.

In comparison, at Living Energy Farm, the membership process is more complex, as there are no formal structures in place to fill this function. The membership will be a process of mutual agreement over time with the founding members, and they prove to be more exclusionary. Lisa, one of the founders, said, "We will not be egalitarian now; we will be with the right people, I guess". When the visitors and members start forming bonds and getting to know each other, corrections and encouragements are used to inform them and shift their behavior toward egalitarian intent, while, at Living Energy Farm, which is a much smaller community,

they might be more fragile to resource draining problematic members, so they require deeper commitment over time to share political decision-making power.

VOTING

Membership requests are voted over at TO, and many other similar communities. All full members can, if they choose, vote in the period of 10 days after the visitor group has left. It is key that the visitors leave. This gives the community time to settle and discuss. The members will receive little notes in their personal posts with the names of the applying visitors. Three options are available: “yes,” “no,” and “visit again”. The member can add information regarding whether they have accepted the member or why they think they should come for another visit, giving the community and the visitor more time to decide. They can choose to be anonymous or not. If the comments on these slips are problematic, the membership team may request additional information.

The CMT will have the final call if the vote is indecisive, meaning that, for example, if a visitor gets 15 accepts, 4 rejects, and 10 visits again votes, they will discuss among themselves and decide the next step in the process for the visitor, but most likely they get a “visit again”. Some visitors get many accepts and perhaps a few rejects, and if there is a comment on the card on why they have been rejected by some, they may be asked to think about the comment and work on the problematic behavior but will still be accepted as a member. Comments will often be short and seemingly brutal sometimes: “I think he drinks too much, and I don’t like his humor,” “seems unwilling to do manual labor and was a jerk on a tofu shift” are some examples of this form of critique. Sometimes the comments are very positive as well, such as “is super awesome, would love to work with her” or “I think our community needs someone like this”.

Some cases of visitors being rejected are more intricate than others. A few cases stood out as particularly significant in this process and highlighted what the community expects from a potential member. Other than mental and physical health, another important aspect is how people function socially. Males would often be

evaluated based on, for instance, how well they navigate within a set of feminist practices. If, for instance, a male seemed unable to avoid “mansplaining,” the act of over-explaining to women assuming they needed the knowledge, these performances were often perceived as condescending and chauvinistic. One young male visitor, Judd, was critiqued because he had tried to explain to me and a few others that deer cross onto the land, looking for food because humans have appropriated their food lands. Maja, one of the members present, seemed annoyed immediately and said, “I think this is common knowledge. Why are you explaining this to me? I live here, I know why deer come here to graze”. When Judd applied for membership, this was one of the events that led to his rejection. To be recognized as someone who can be their equal, they must also display the ability to view other members as equals. Paradoxically, if you do and manage to navigate the social terrain, your status rises, and thus new hierarchies emerge between those who can and cannot become equals or see others as equals. Mastering specific values that are sometimes yet-to-be agreed upon can be challenging.

Using derogatory phrases about women, such as “bitch,” or objectifying them regarding looks, could be judged harshly in the process as well. Not picking up on social cues was another harshly evaluated mistake where people can become excluded. One visitor received feedback that she, for instance, seemed “too excited”. Another guest and visitor received much attention due to co’s statements and stories that many in the community believed to be compulsive lies. Co told magnificent stories of Co’s abilities and personal history that, to many, seemed like they did not make sense. One person blamed the visitor for approaching a trans-identity for attention and claimed that the gender transition from male to female was not believable and was just another trick for the visitor to gain sympathy and popularity.

In most cases, when harsh feedback is given, the CMT still allows for return visits, and some return for another visitor period but still get rejected. The community does not take these rejections lightly; often some members fret over the treatment of them, wanting the community to be more inclusive or able to tackle these issues and help the individual overcome their obstacles. Others opted for a stronger rejecting

tactic, as the communard Laura said once during a garden shift where the new visitors were being discussed and assessed collectively:

> If you don't want these kinds of rules, there are plenty of other places to go to; why would you insist on coming here knowing that you can't do what we do here, or if you think what we do is stupid or whatever. Like you can't come here and expect to not work quota, or like, you can't come here and not be interested in any of the work areas. This is not a rehabilitation center for the lost.

Another member responded,

> If you have problems, this is not the place to escape them. Your problems get kind of highlighted here, and you must deal with them, or someone will force you to face yourself. The mental health team is not trained professionals, we don't have the capacity to take on too much, and we are not some B&B either. If you have issues that you need to manage… Take the meds!

Mental health was at the time an important subject not only in community, but also in society at large. Many social movements in general in the US and elsewhere were focusing their attention on alleviating some of the social stigmas around mental health. Mental health is important to maintain for the safety of the members, but there is activism in their transparency about this issue. Other events also highlighted the problems and importance of focusing on mental health. The neighboring community Acorn had suffered greatly after a guest on the farm had set fire to their main building. He was trialed for attempted murder of the nine people that were sleeping in the house, and for arson. The membership process is exclusionary, but events like these make members search for improvements in their social screening process. The members initiated into the community will still be treated as novices until they achieve "full membership".

Membership process

When accepted as a member of Twin Oaks, new members are notified, and the CMT will let you know if there will be an open room for you to move into. All members have their own rooms, and the membership cap is defined by this: no new members are accepted if there are no available rooms on the farm. There might also be a waiting list, so the visitor will have to wait. The visitor is nonetheless expected to be away from the farm at least 10 days before the visitor period, and for at least one month after the period. This is meant to be a time for reflection for the visitor to think about the commitment of moving in to TO. Some visitors who are accepted eventually decide not to join or return for another visit to make sure they want to live there. The idea of leaving their old lives behind can sometimes prove difficult, and some will not decide to move in after all.

When the new members arrive on the farm, members have made a room ready for them, and the community will ensure that they have the essentials of what they need. If furniture is lacking, one can ask the "trusterty manager" for some financial support to buy new stuff, but all members usually get what they need right away. The new member will then be invited to several new member orientations and will also have the option of going weekly to new member dinners, where members of the CMT will eat with them, talk about their time there, and help them with any relevant issues. They must then sign a paper saying that they are being truthful about their background, their amount of personal assets, and so on, and that they will adhere to the bylaws and policies. Members are not allowed to bring their car or spend any of their outside resources, such as money or inheritance (houses and so on), while they are a member at Twin Oaks. This is when they become part of the egalitarian economy, and radical sharing becomes a way of life and a primary commitment.

The first six months of membership at TO is provisional. It is a form of a stronger trial period than the visitor period and will mean that they will not have full rights in the community. For instance, some of their elections are only for full members, and newcomers will not have full health coverage, like full members do. If

one needs help to pay for healthcare, they may be granted a membership loan to be repaid with their allowance over time.

After six months, another input and vote over the new members' potential full membership is organized, which usually goes through if the new members have not shown any major problematic behavior. They cannot apply for full membership if they have not met the labor quota or if they have spent too much money. They will then have to rebalance their shortage "holes" and usually get an extension with new member status and may reapply for full membership later on. Some new members struggle to keep up with the labor quota and leave right before their full membership vote is up.

These ritual activities of trials and errors that eventually induce inclusions and exclusions based on the egalitarian merits of the communard show that egalitarianism is seen partly as the ability to participate on equal terms, such as managing to maintain the labor quota. This thus becomes a key feature of the liminal process, where the novice develops certain skills and is judged based on their ability to absorb and navigate this form of egalitarianism in practical day-to-day life.

To sum up, gaining access to equal amounts of resources is only one part of the process; egalitarianism in ICs is ultimately refined *skills* creating a specific mode of governance. Seeing egalitarianism as a skillset comprising egalitarian governance, intent, and behavior that shapes hierarchies and processes of inclusion and exclusion opens for understanding of egalitarianism as expressed based on its performative dimensions. The communards that manage these egalitarian skills gain higher status than those that do not. If communards express a willingness to work on themselves and egalitarian skillsets, they are also afforded some leniency in cases of breaches of egalitarian norms, values, and requirements. Those who do not are either excluded over time, put into various new social contracts to change behavior, or choose to leave on their own accord. These social contracts can be seen as a form of egalitarian governance securing the management of conflicts and resources. Many leave after tumultuous periods or conflict. Let me illustrate the comings and goings of one

individual, Sparkles, to give the reader a deeper understanding of what a membership period may look like.

The coming and going of Sparkles

Sparkles grew up in a very religious home on a farm with his sister, father, and mother. His mother was a member of a small "eccentric congregation" in his very early childhood. The experience was traumatizing, and Sparkles, even though he did not remember much or mention it that often, had told me how frightening the church was to him as a young child. He recollected many people speaking in tongues, going into trances, and performing snake handling during the sermons. His father raised hunting dogs, and so Sparkles knew how to hunt, farm, and train dogs. His mother also encouraged him to explore music.

Sparkles had an artistic streak from a young age and would not fit in with the other kids in the rural southern hometown. Homophobia was so rampant here that he decided to move away from his community when he came "out of the closet". The same year Sparkles "came out," there was a shooting in the underground gay club in his town, which, it seemed to me, formed Sparkles' fear of violence against gay men. The murderer was a marine that had walked into the bar and, according to himself, was not aware of the club being an underground hub for the LGBTQIAA2S+ community and was provoked enough to open fire when he saw two men kissing at the bar. Sparkles said that he realized that being a gay man meant that he would not feel safe in most spaces, and it scared him much to see members of his community being targeted by random people. Although he did not ever officially "come out" to his family, it seemed like an unsaid truth that they all worked around, and Sparkles would only openly discuss being gay with his sister.

Sparkles moved to a more liberal urban area in Virginia, where he found his personal style and developed his creative skills, like designing clothes and hats, painting, and music. He had taken piano lessons ever since he was a child and could play different instruments. He would make a point out of buying strange instruments on the Internet and learn how to play them. He was eventually included in a drag

family, got himself a drag mama, and from then on developed his own horror-like drag style, and started lip syncing on stage during shows.

Sparkles would wear everyday items, such as packets of Splenda in his hair, "I would just wear trash, trashy!" he told me one day when we were reminiscing about the fashion fads of our pasts. I eventually learned that this was part of his play with suburban styles and sub-cultures but also as a symbolic display of his political engagement. Making something out of nothing, a display of a form of beautified poverty, is a strong tradition in the drag community, which also resonates with community life in ICs, as I will show in a later chapter. But still, Sparkles felt a lack of social connectedness and the strains of fearing homophobic attacks.

Sparkles eventually came to visit TO with a couple of friends and decided to apply for membership. Sparkles was controversial from the start and had a few tiffs with other members. He was young and sometimes reckless and was considered a "partyer" by other members. Many thought he was rude and did things his own way without working very well with others. He would tell me about quitting different work areas on the farm because he disagreed with the way things were done; for example, he thought the garden shift were managed inefficiently and quit after being told to cut down weeds in a way he thought was ridiculously unproductive, and he did not feel like arguing about, as he said: "stuff like that with people who have gardened for two minutes, when I've been doing it all my life." I interpreted that as meaning that he felt he understood well enough how to garden without instructions.

He eventually became manager of milk processing, which is where the milk that is not put out for people to drink will be processed into yoghurt, cheese, kvarg, and so on. He managed the milk processing for almost six years while he was enjoying his life and the social life on the farm. When I met him, he had been at TO for nine years. During my membership, we became close friends, and we spent many nights in the smoking shack discussing social life at Twin Oaks or telling each other stories. We shared similar interests and would watch TV shows together in his little room in upstairs *Ta'Chai,* which was so full that it was hard to find a spot to sit down. Sparkles had for periods of time been one of few or the only members that was living in upstairs

Ta'Chai and had quite literally made the whole building his own. Sparkles had been shopping at the local Goodwill for years and picked up curiosities wherever he went, which eventually ended up on the walls of the living room area. For a period, he would go on regular excursions with Herbavora, the herb gardener at TO, to go to yard sales and antique stores in the surrounding areas. Some of the stuff on the walls were also art projects, and he had a big jar in the living room with curious and dried dead things that he liked to show to new visitors.

Sparkles was, if anything, a creature of habit, and it was easy to find him when one needed to, depending on the time of the day. He only smoked cigarettes after dark, so when nightfall came, he would do regular rounds to the smoking shack, often carrying a glass of cheap white wine in his hand. What was very difficult for him was the lack of other gay men, not only for romantic company, but he said, "I miss community, the gay community. It's just different". Sparkles went through a bout of depression, did not manage to fulfill his work obligations, and decided to leave the community rather than make up for the lost work or finding other solutions. He quickly met a romantic interest. Looking back, Sparkles is glad of his time in community. He told me that he was grateful for having learned so many skills and that the community had provided him with support in many times of need. But he had come to realize that his time there had also been very difficult and lonely, and that he had desired more freedom.

From the story of Sparkles certain patterns emerge; we see that meaningful relationships and work and a desire to develop skills and methods of livability are important. Also, that safe social connectedness is a drive for many. The reasons for joining are many, and so the community develops a resilient and flexible egalitarian form to accommodate needs, but the individual must still be "a good fit," an individual that holds the potential to be and act within the boundaries set by the community. Rather than seeking reintegration or receiving feedback, Sparkles opted to leave, while others went through deeper processes to find ways of overcoming obstacles of living at Twin Oaks. Feedbacks are high tension events in the community, as they can be quite draining on resources and emotions.

FEEDBACKS—REINTEGRATION OR EXCLUSION AND EXPULSION PROCESSES

In the ICs, inner tensions are common, and in the tensest situations, rituals are in place to navigate these tensions and resolve them. These rituals, whether "mediations" or "feedbacks," serve as moments of introspection, where the values of the community and their expectancies to "the egalitarian" can be collectively reevaluated and sometimes strengthened. The rituals of exclusion or expulsion, usually tedious and resource draining, are often aimed at avoiding this exclusion by imposing or mediating behavioral change, which, in turn, if and when the exclusion still happens, is seen as both the failure and the success of the system in place. The ambiguity that members feel when they exclude other members illustrates the uncertainty and vulnerability of the ritual. Often these rituals, when ending in exclusions, create conflict long after the exclusion happens. In short, one can claim that the community organizes conflict resolution processes, "feedback" rituals, "check-ins," and community expulsion processes to tackle the obstacles to egalitarian behavior.

The "feedback," addressed in the previous chapter, is the most prominent of these rituals, where members of the community can address a problematic individual and tell them how it has affected them, how they might see the future with the individual in the future in the community, and what types of behavior one will need to address or change. These rituals are, when successful, rituals of reintegration, healing, and transformation. The members can express their viewpoints and address issues they might have, and often receive great support by other members after opening up to them. In those cases, what is excluded is the "inegalitarian" and too problematic socially, but not the member. While, at other times, it can result in problems not being solved, and it results in the exclusion or self-exclusion of individuals.

Sometimes members can be uninterested in continuing the relationship with the member receiving the "feedback," while others may offer support in various ways. During feedback, while I was present, the problematic member created some divisions within the group; while some wanted to help him and offered to help with conversations or childcare, others wanted him to leave. Another feedback conflict

arose about the treatment of the person, and eventually some decided to walk out of the room because they felt that the other members were mistreating him and that he did not deserve the kind of critique he was receiving. Feedbacks are not always effective. Most often, it will result in a "behavioral contract" that is to be followed up and signed. If the problematic behavior continues, the community can start an expulsion process. High intensity problematic behavior can lead to a quick expulsion without process. This also happened once while I was a member. The member in question received some financial support for the travel and was asked to leave.

Though these rituals are rare at Twin Oaks, there are other communities where feedback is a normal part of everyday life, some even offer them as birthday gifts, with the intent to give positive enforcement to good behavior while negative behavior should be addressed and worked on.

At Twin Oaks, a visitor heard about the feedback during an oreo-meeting and said:

> Oh wow, that's so intense, I think this is where free will becomes problematic in the community. I want to be able to be myself, I'm from New York, we yell at each other all the time there, we are used to it, but here I will probably end up in feedback because of it.

This distinction of the problematic relationship to free will is complex, and often the community will have to answer to critiques, often relating these to Skinner's vision of free will just being conditioned behavior. Free will is important to highlight for the members because they are often compared to social experiments where the free will of the individual can be quite constrained, such as in "cults" or "sects" where worship, coercion and mind control can be present. The IC movement is often accused of this totalitarian-like behavior, so voluntary associations and freedom become important. When there is no sovereign other than the co-produced policies and communal norms, freedom is legitimized through voluntary association and

willingness toward "the good" in community[17]. As policy is expanded and changed, the members are part of a sovereign body that is a representation of what they commit to when moving there and a result of all the experiments of communards that have been involved before them. We see her examples of egalitarianisms inegalitarian potential outcomes when proper sociality is not mastered.

CONCLUSIONS—FINDING THE RIGHT EGALITARIANS FOR PRACTICAL EGALITARIAN EXPERIMENTS

The ethnography showed that egalitarianism is a form of governance that requires the individual to develop a set of skills to navigate the values and norms that the community holds as important. Commitment and intentionality toward practical egalitarian experimentation are important in the process. Some of the aspects I have explored here are the motivations and ability of the individual to make their commitments to the community and its policies. Another important issue related to this topic is consent, free will, and voluntary association. While issues of commitment and value-breeches are common, they are treated through mediation, "feedbacks," and various social conflict-resolution rituals.

In view of this lengthy and intricate process of becoming a member, I suggest that we can think of it as a liminal stage in the ritual of initiation into the community. It is a liminal stage for the new members—who often change their names and part with their possessions and engage with new norms of conduct—but we can also see that this liminal quality is important for the community as a whole. It creates new members but also allows for the community to go through tensions and sometimes even crises that allow for reevaluations and recommitments to practical egalitarianism, which is also connected to a processual utopian mode. Thus, the institution of transient visitors and the introduction of new members has the character of liminality, where

[17] The problematic relationships ICs or similar social groups, like cults, have had with their neighbors and the State highlight this topic of contention So, there is a clear distinction between these two forms of community: intentional and coerced communities. Membership through coercion is a contention point for ICs, and they often refer to the "no-cult clause," which is established to ensure that individuals are fully aware they may leave at any point if they so wish to. Mind control or coercive social groupings create much contention in mainstream media, so the ICs I work with can be vulnerable to such labels.

egalitarianism is explored, discovered, formulated and reformulated—exposing individuals to a resocialization process and skills that master certain values. The socialization and initiation into egalitarian processes thus become about how individuals learn to prioritize the contextual egalitarian value system over the meritocratic egalitarianism that they might be used to managing on the outside. Once the visitor has become a member, their intention and commitment toward the common project is expected to be further developed, but it also exposes cracks in the egalitarian value-system. Building on these points, here the ethnography illuminates the learning of the social dynamics of egalitarianism lies not only in access to resources and equal distribution, but it is also a process of handling "cultural baggage" as a novice, and that this requires the ability to view the other communards as equals and to act on this. This process relates to the individual's potential to navigate the new norms to which they are expected to adhere to as a form of "value-mastering" (see also Bruun, Jakobsen, and Krøijer 2011). I have primarily explored here initiations and membership processes in the community of Twin Oaks, and I have argued that the engagement of liminal aspects of this extensive rite of passage shows that egalitarianism is both a mode of governance and a skillset that the individual and community develop. In the next chapter, I will explore one of the greater motivations for joining the movement: committing to various forms of sharing for a better future.

Chapter 4

Sharing and degrowth

Introduction—Learning how to share is about learning how to be egalitarian

One evening, I was invited over to Cambia. After dinner, a discussion erupted in the kitchen when one of the interns had taken some paper scraps that the kids were drawing on to reuse for different purposes. "You're hoarding all this paper, and we have limited space, and I just don't like having scraps of paper lying around everywhere. I think we need to discuss your tendencies to collect things," the founding member told the intern that had collected the paper. The intern was open to discuss the issue and admitted to not liking to throw things away. "I think I train myself to think about how I can reuse everything, and those scraps of paper are so delightful to me to write on, on top of the art that the kids make, so it makes me happy," he explained. Gil said, "well, can we find a solution where you can have some, but not a ton of it, I feel like I find paper everywhere, but I still feel like there must be some deeper issue here, because you really like collecting things." The intern answered:

> Actually, like, sometimes I think that I would like us all to live with the trash that we produce. That we would have to make do with reusing it, that it would force us to think differently, or other times I guess I have a hard time letting go, I try to think of ways to use it, or I save it so I can use it later, and it makes me happy to use like things that kids have drawn on and stuff…

To Gil, this was a problem because their living spaces were small, and they lacked much room to save many things. "People have this amazing way of behaving like there is scarcity all the time, and so we collect things, even when we don't need them, but this is interesting, I think, and that I should listen more to you regarding this." Gil continued, and a longer conversation ensued where others tried to intervene, offering conflict resolution strategies, but they kept discussing without the interference

of others for a while longer. Some of us were sitting around in various places in the kitchen sanding down little wooden utensils they had made while listening in.

After the already-long discussion started to develop into a more intense discussion on how to treat the commons in the community, some lost their interest and walked to their sleeping spaces or did work outside. Conflicts over shared space and how to share resources often come up in ICs. It is a type of boundary work that needs to happen for the community to reflect on their shared intentions.

While in the previous chapter I established how a significant preoccupation with egalitarianism is a wish to detach and renunciate certain forms of living that create moral shocks, and that this also requires the ability to navigate certain forms of knowledges and values and norm-systems., I will here explore an important asoect of living in ICs, which is sharing. Sharing is one of the most important culminations of practical egalitarianism in the ICs presented in this thesis. How people share and what they share, as part of an egalitarian potential of acting toward and being intentional toward "the good," shape trajectories of experiments and flexibility.

"Sharing," "sharing economy," "income sharing," and "radical sharing[18]" are also often framed within 'degrowth' imaginaries and ideals in ICs. There is a clear influence on the IC movement from the interlinked and sometimes colloquially synonymous movements that are referred to as "chosen frugality," "chosen poverty," "intentional poverty," "reuse," "voluntary simplicity," "simple living," "degrowth," and "easy living". Interlocutors would refer to these concepts and movements and the ways communards engage with sharing become infused with vocabularies related to these similar movements. Although I interpreted these movements as similar to the utopian movements described as inspirational in the second chapter, these cannot be reduced to being the exact same as these but attests to the polyphonal mode of practical egalitarianism. Ideas of anti-consumerism and cultural critique are prevalent and represented in many forms in the communities and social movements. However, in egalitarian communities, they have made great strides in their experimentation with

[18] Radical sharing can also reference radical transparency in social activities or therapeutic activities, which is interrelated, but not a main concern in this chapter.

formalizing such commitments. Conflicts over sharing illuminates the paradoxes and fuzziness over what practical egalitarianism should express, and how it challenges individuals in their relationships to the communal whole.

These ideals of sharing reveal and highlight some of the tensions that communities face in implementing social experiments that bridge egalitarianism with ecological and social sustainability. ICs are particularly interesting because they allow for participatory democracy to decide how they should share and what growth or degrowth should mean here, what aspects of income areas they should grow and how much before the pursuit for the "the good life" is derailed. Sharing as such offers a prism to organize daily life and morality toward egalitarian intent and engage subjects to reorientation toward the communal project. To share in this way requires dedication and knowledge on how to share and what.

Though I have already touched on sharing, this chapter will delve into how sharing economies and their influences shape egalitarianism as a practical endeavor. This chapter will first consider why and how communards share things and resources, meaning how they direct their intention toward collective action and balance their limited resources with righteous livelihood. The chapter will delve into some variations of how communards link tensions of sharing to practical egalitarianism and show how this orients the individual toward new ways of relating to consumerism, resources, property, and sharing.

Sharing as an egalitarian process

In a recent call for deeper anthropological engagement with consumerism, anthropologist Richard Wilk noted:

> …there is a surprising lack of anthropological research on what motivates people in their movement through daily life in consumer society. Knowledge is needed in order to reframe ideas of what constitutes wealth and poverty in more effective terms and that are not based on types of consumption that uses large amounts of energy and physical resources (Wilk 2016:308-309).

Sharing has heavily influenced anthropology and sharing practices have been recorded in considerable detail around the world and in various social and political contexts. We can look to sharing to gain insights into social orders and social change (Widlok 2016:xvii). Sharing has often become the focus of anthropologists who write about egalitarian social organization and is often seen regarding paradigms on reciprocity and gift-giving (Widlok 2016:xvi). Anthropologist Thomas Widlok stated that:

> Sharing, defined as enabling others to access what is valued, provides a conceptual and practical alternative to market-exchange and to gift-exchange. The social practice of sharing is therefore a fundamental part of the human repertoire of making a living. Sharing continues to have important repercussions for what humans are and what they can become (ibid).

In a sense, communards urge us to question what human potential can become when highlighting sharing as an intentional and emphasized act for social life. Co-founder of Twin Oaks, Kat Kinkade, spoke about the aims of the social experimentation of radical sharing at Twin Oaks in an old video-recorded interview shown on a show about utopias on the BBC in 2017*:*

> The idea of equality, we define it as no member envying or having cause to envy another member. Twin Oaks is one big experiment... Basically, Twin Oaks is setting out to do two things. One is to create a society fit for humans to live in, the other one is to create humans fit to live in that society (BBC.co.uk 2017).

Creating new humans and a fit society meant for them to control emotions, behaviors, and structures that produce greater inequities and inequalities and to tackle other emotions. Envy and jealousy conceptualized as negative emotions are in

community juxtaposed with the sharing of resources and property. This was on the minds of the founders of TO from the beginning and remains at the heart of how many of the members think and behave. Today, they share the income brought in by the businesses, which I will explore in greater detail in the next chapter, and most communal resources. Letting go of private property is not without its contentions. By committing to sharing, you will be granted access to resources that the collective owns while relinquishing your accumulation of material goods and savings while in the community. What remains prevalent in the hub is the desire to model an alternative for sharing more equally what is available while ensuring that this type of sharing does not interfere with the sustainability of the community, and the surrounding nature. The ideology of egalitarianism then in relation to addressing sharing as a way to find a practical and sustainable balance so that the community and nature will thrive. Practical egalitarianism becomes then directed towards equitable and effective resource use.

Issues and crises related to property, housing, and resources are key factors to people's need and desire to search for alternative lifestyles and economies. In the introduction to *Walden Two* that inspired the founding of this hub, B.F. Skinner pays special attention to envy, greed, overpopulation, pollution, and ecological destruction as sources of insecurity and uncertainty that cause the need for alternative social experimentation. Skinner writes:

> To induce people to adapt to new ways of living which are less consuming and hence less polluting, we do not need to speak of frugality or austerity as if we meant sacrifice. There are contingencies of reinforcement in which people continue to pursue (and even overtake) happiness while consuming far less than they now consume. The experimental analysis of behavior has clearly shown that it is not the quantity of goods that counts (as the law of supply and demand suggests) but the contingent relation between goods and behavior (Skinner 1969:x).

Communards must have enough, but not too much. Concurrently, they will do this as a practice of trying to unpack what life in capitalist economies has taught them about how to act regarding resources and sharing. The paradox of still having to earn money and engage with outside economies is difficult for some members, while others accept it and wish to produce non-exploitative green capitalism.

I argue that the communards engage in a type of mediation on sustainability that shifts priorities of the egalitarian continuously so that it is supportive of the well-being of the community. These meditations often show an orientation toward global tensions of climate change, the oil crisis, and other social justice issues that they see as interrelated to their mission. Engaging with these tensions on a practical level to improve their lives is important to most of the members.

Helen Jarvis suggests that "degrowth" in ICs can show us the potential and workings of joint action in groups where subjectivities are collectively negated (Jarvis 2019). These dynamics, I believe, are important to understand regarding how global collective change is often preceded by social movements. Collective negation as egalitarians relies on mastering norms and rules of sharing, and the navigation of conflict when norms and rules are unclear.

Sharing economies has regained influence within the individualized scopes of green neoliberalism. The increased number of co-housing communities, especially in the US, has been understood to be a response to the insecurity of financial distress and housing depravities in big cities (Jarvis 2019). Other forms of sharing through pool resourcing or private lending have gained much influence in some countries.

In ICs, sharing so many aspects of life and resources marks a major shift from the lifestyle of consumerism on the outside to immersion in a new way of living with material objects and money. Learning how to share is an important aspect and can be experienced as quite limiting, and sharing can be both a source of conflict and a source

of solidarity, but it is, the way I came to see it, most importantly, a way to nurture a common purpose[19].

Creating alternative forms of energy consumption and resistance against economic growth creates a tension between the corporate state and people engaged in "off-the-grid-living" due to pressures on legislation all over the country[20].

Another aspect is the issue of social movement's efforts to decolonize their lifeworlds through pushing efforts toward understanding the issues of land and unequal distribution and unlocking solutions to the conflicts that still influence society through the reverberations of colonialism.

One of my interlocutors, Kellyanne, expressed her dedication to feminism and communal living to a personal project of decolonizing and thinking about ownership in new ways. Kellyanne had come to the community after a period of struggling with severe insomnia that had forced her to reexamine the way she lived. She was getting deeper into her Wiccan faith, and eventually came to community with a partner and had children there. She believed the project of living communally with scarce resources was part of what she could do to de-colonize lands and peoples and connect her more deeply to the spirits of the land we all share. Those in the community that phrase this process of sharing and egalitarianism as having interlinkages with ideas of decolonization and spirituality are often concerned with ownership of land or traditional ownership.

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[19] In some communities, such as Dancing Rabbit and Auroville, they go so far as to introduce their own currencies, and as in the case of Auroville, refrain from having money visible in the community to remove people from experiencing the physical presence and thus symbolism of it.

[20] Forcing communities to be on the grid or to control the way they live on their land is seen often by communards a form of state sanctioned control that most communities must adhere to, especially urban communities are restricted in their development by Land Use regulations, urban planning, and subdivision regulations. These control mechanisms create neighborhood infrastructure that can be at odds with communal living. Often, these regulations are believed by people in the movement as a way for the state to criminalize especially marginalized peoples that, for instance, develop ICs as tent settlements for the homeless. While it is legal to produce your own food and energy in most states, zoning regulations and restrictions can sometimes make it difficult. For many communities that start out with limited resources, such regulations can be a big challenge. Like in LEF, they had to camp on the property to build the necessary buildings but needed permits to camp on the land for longer than two weeks.

Building the economy of a colonizing settler state, where black labor and First Nation peoples' land has been exploited, reverberates into the tensions between new social movements today. As a white woman, Kellyanne, described to a visitor why she lived in the movement with this tension, feeling she could learn how to not be "a colonizer". She told her, "I feel here, I can decolonize. I can stop being a colonizer". Though some communities wish to return land to their original inhabitants, this is not what Kellyanne is referencing here.

From further interviews, I realized that Kellyanne had a strong spiritual connection to the project of decolonization through a framework of eco-feminism that is often in this community also connected to witchcraft or Wiccan worship that influences her ideals about sustainability, close relationship with nature, and through sharing land.

Let me explore some of these issues, but before I delve into why communards are so motivated to share and to live more frugally, I will first explore how degrowth discourse can function to give communards a prism to explore more just and equitable lifestyles, and more environmentally sustainable ones.

DEGROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

Connected to ideals of frugal consumption are discourses of degrowth in ICs. Degrowth has evolved from an activist movement into an accepted part of multidisciplinary academic fields (Weiss and Cattaneo 2017:221). It drew early on experiences of voluntary simplicity in co-housings and squats, alongside what is sometimes called "neo-ruralism" (Lietaert 2010). Degrowth theories should be looking for viable solutions that show flexibility in achieving sustainable, even prosperous communities while aiming to solve issues of equity and justice and quality of life. As such, it can be "an equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions" (Schneider, Martinez-Alier, and Kallis 2011). Also, degrowth can be a key word that can facilitate a "space of questioning where diverse ideal types: democracy, justice, agroecology, bioeconomic, conviviality, simple living, well-being, and equality are brought together

in something of a theoretic utopia" (ibid). It should be mentioned that while degrowth might not always entail a critical view on population numbers, the most avid degrowth theorists among the population believe that communal sharing and population control is the only way we can adapt to the future, which is for them often a promise of pending disaster, climate crisis or oppression or anguish. Sharing things is not the only way to go about this in the movement.

Degrowth paradigms, though contested, can prove important in producing new solutions for a livable future, and when globally, we will, most likely, see more problems relating to anthropogenic climate change. Economic growth still holds a dominating footing in development discourse, and what the ethnography shows here is that, though degrowth can be an important key in transitioning into a more equitable future globally, for my interlocutors, it remains a question about which growth to privilege over others. While ecological modernization offers solutions to the climate crisis through technology, it also allows for economic growth to be open ended. Alexis, the founder of LEF, claims these efforts are "green washing" and that true sustainability will only be achieved with co-operative use and production and a village level, where energy is produced where people live, and not exported. Greenwashing can be understood as the aggravation of environmental problems that has led companies to seek the development and commercialization of green products, where some companies mislead their stakeholders (de Freitas Netto et al. 2020).

This sentiment can be seen in social movements all over the world, especially in energy-producing countries, where the conflict of energy and oil production, export, and sales has long been contested. The LEF community would often spend massive resources doing work without fossil fuels, such as clearing land without tractors, often wearing workers out. The Cambia community takes a different approach; it will experiment with different capitals to see if sustainability can be a process that allows for leniencies in, for instance, energy use for assuring the "good life" and prioritize the importance of contentment among members.

Sustainability has long been a problem that has concerned anthropologists, especially those concerned with issues of “development”. Anthropologist Henrietta Moore writes:

> The challenge of sustainability demands much more than the protection or preservation of communities or nature reserves, and more than technical fixes for CO2 production or resource limitations: it requires re-imagining and reworking communities, societies and landscapes, especially those dominated by industrial capitalism, to help us build a productive symbiosis with each other and the many nonhumans on whom we depend.” (ibid)

What is commonly known as the “Brundtland Rapport” from 1987 called “Our Common Future,” which is commonly cited when researchers point to the tension between growth and sustainability; the rapport claimed that economic growth cannot be infinite while trading off environmental sustainability for future generations (Holden, Linnerud, and Banister 2014). Yet, “sustainable development” must be recontextualized continuously. The problem with the rapport is that it does not address livability, as in the “good life,” but is rather centered on survivability, or finding a balance of how much the Earth can carry under the weight of human activity. ICs address this issue quite openly. Arguably, such ICs reflect on the interlinkages between “good life” and sustainability.

Twin Oaks vs US in 2015 (per capita)

	Twin Oaks	US Average	TO/US Ratio
Miles Driven	2835	15,010	17%
Electricity	2637 kwh	10,812 kwh	24%
Propane	92 gal	541 gal	17%
Landfill Trash	300 lbs	1570 lbs	19%
Taxable Income	$7043	$30,240 median	23%

FIGURE 10- TWIN OAKS' SUSTAINABILITY STATISTICS- SOURCE PAXUS.WORDPRESS.COM

Ecological modernity is often seen as in opposition to degrowth experiments, yet what the ICs show is that ecological modernization can happen as a layering with degrowth. For instance, Twin Oaks modernizing its tofu factory is meant to upscale production, yet downscale work hours and stress so that the communards can have a healthier work environment. When the community faces problems in recruiting enough staff for production, they will, in contrast to many other communities, not implement “industrial quotas” or pressure to assure production, but rather focus on cutting down on production for a time, making do with less income. In many ways, this can be said for many communities, scales, institutions, economies, etc., yet these examples show us the potential of considering even the micro-behaviors that play into a wide and holistic approach to sustainability through forms of degrowth. What they do, then, is to rethink what “needs” must be met for the good life. With this, they choose not to privilege economic growth over the “good life” and develop skills, like “making do,” to achieve this.

Overall, at Twin Oaks, Cambia, Acorn, East Wind, and LEF, voluntary simplicity or frugality happens when the ways of consuming and desiring for material accumulation are rejected to live a different way that is more sustainable or perceived of as more meaningful than other ways of living. This aligns them with grounded utopian practices that seek to illuminate and imagine ways of live that leads them away from oppressive states.

Redefining needs and Scarcity

Gil, to whom the reader has been introduced several times, touched on the issue of need and scarcity as a tension when he said, “human beings have a way of behaving like there is always scarcity”. When seen as an intrinsic part of human nature that creates problems, these aspects of behavior must be handled with care in a community. Scarcity must be redefined for someone who enters, and thus frugality becomes an intrinsic way of this utopian mode to be realized. It is also important in the process of forming a new subjectivity oriented toward the good and commitment to the community at large, so as to become efficient as egalitarians.

Returning to the example where Gil at Cambia had a discussion with a visitor that he felt was hoarding unnecessary paper scraps, we saw how their concern with values and sustainability challenged the way they thought about trash, needs, wants, and arts. Let me illustrate with another example here of how communards at Cambia engage with frugality politics. At Cambia everyone practiced a form of deeper intentionality around the practice of eating food. For instance, by performing a gratitude ritual before eating while holding hands and going around the circle to express each individual's daily gratitude affirmations, before closing their eyes in a little moment of meditation. The dishes were usually not very dirty after people had finished their meals in this community. Every bowl was cleansed out thoroughly for food scraps, the people around the table paying close attention to eat every bit of it. Then the bowl is filled with a little hot water that is consumed to utilize any liquids left from the food. This is so that the people engaging cultivate respect and understanding of what they are doing, when eating food, and when eating food together. The meals often consisted of either food they had salvaged before they were put in dumpsters, or food they had found in the few dumpsters around the little town that were not locked. Salvaging food before it had gone bad was also a way for the community to save money, but most importantly it was a way of engaging in food waste politics.

The careful ritual of cleaning the pots, eating every scrap of food, performing gratitude ritual, and engaging with permaculture, food waste politics, but a form of care that requires frugality and care for every living being, every material object, every spoken word, and change.

The different opinions on what scarcity is, what trash is, etc. is a type of reorientation. In this case, the visitor wanted to share the experience of art using the child's old paper scraps, while the others felt that this art was meant for the trash bin. Through their discussion, they both came to terms with each other's needs and wants for the community and understood better their intentions. As such, sharing, togetherness, and degrowth conceptualized through intentionality can be drawn on to understand the transformative potentials of groups (Jarvis 2019). Through the process

of relinquishing most of your possessions or, at least, disagree with using them to move to the community, marks this commitment.

It is arguably problematic for communards to commit to such radicalities; for instance, many admitted to me that they kept some of their outside resources or would receive money as gifts regularly. This is allowed, but it is to be registered as gifts. However, some admitted that, to keep up impressions that they are living within their means, some will not register these donations. Again, the ambiguities of egalitarian commitments become clear, where social justice and equity clash with the needs and desires of material accumulation.

However, these spaces where sharing is instrumental to social design are social models where pending potential crisis or decreased livability is counter-acted. As mentioned, life in ICs is often influenced by dystopic echoes of the current, past, and future social reality of society. Sharing anti-hegemonizes subjective material competitiveness and the need for exponential economic growth or high energy consumption. Let me illustrate with examples from Living Energy Farm how members believe sharing energy is an important aspect of sustainable community life.

FIGURE 11- SHARED BIKES AT TWIN OAKS

Solar Energy and Cooperative Living At Living Energy Farm

During a tour of Living Energy Farm, an intern, dressed in dirty jeans and a beige shirt with a straw hat with holes in it walked around with a small group of visitors said, "…it's amazing what you can do with some sunlight and some foil," when pointing to the big rounded-off plate that we referred to as the Death Ray. The Death Ray is a disk that is slightly bent and covered with foil so that it can direct a beam of sunlight onto a big cast iron pot hanging in front of it. The ray can set fire to a piece of wood in a matter of moments and could heat the pot. The Death Ray requires minimal resources to be made and can successfully cook a stew or a pot of soup to feed the whole community and its visitors very quickly, but only works if it is sunny. These were simple and cheap ways to avoid using fossil fuels, and it was a neat show case for visitors.

At LEF, the core members see climate disruption and the expectancy of the peak moment of oil extraction, often called "peak oil," as deeply connected to other social justice issues and have thus chosen to try to disentangle from "the grid" so that they can create a laboratory for experiments and education on sustainable energy use. Making simple technologies that can be used by anyone anywhere is part of their project, and they aim to teach others about them as a way of expecting the dystopian future, not only being prepared, but also knowledgeable about various ways to stay off the grid and being self-sustained. The members believed that it could relieve many who have a hard time when, for instance, collecting wood to cook their food. Solar batteries could also be cheaply made, and they have since produced battery kits that they have driven around to give to marginalized communities that suffer from energy insecurity.

However, one of the founders of LEF, Alexis, was already disillusioned, knowing very well that most people did not want to give up their privileges for such a lifestyle. Not all the technologies they use here are as convenient as the Death Ray. For instance, he believes that most people will not want to wash their clothes using a washing machine converted to being run by a bike, nor will they want to use an old water pump to pump limited amounts of water for a shower, often resulting in a lot of

running back and forth from the shower and the pump if you want to get clean. At LEF, a common understanding is that sophisticated technologies that have arrived with environmental modernist discourses are either only available for the financial elite and will not induce a sustainable future; they are a part of “greenwashing” destructive capitalism.

Alexis writes in one of his books on what he calls “integrated activism” and connects this to a deeper engagement with understanding what he refers to as “human cultural evolution.”

> Most of our efforts to address the modern crisis of polarization and human ecological collapse are shortcuts. The real solutions lie with addressing human cultural evolution in a more systematic manner. If we can do it, it would represent a second Great Leap, a fundamental change in how human adapt to the environments in which they live. Our current problems are sufficiently difficult that they cannot be solved by new “renewable” energy sources, by reclaiming the “American Dream,” or by the other solutions currently pursued by most progressive organizations (Zeigler 2013:188).

Zeigler wants education, especially on human cultural evolution, so that we may question the taken-for-granted natural states of, for instance, patriarchy, human exceptionalism, and trace how the cultural evolution of humans is “heavily manipulated by powerful special interests”. In his books, he often refers to what can be interpreted as the absurdities of American politics in facing climate disruption, poverty, and crime, claiming that “we have a cultural problem, not an energy problem” (Zeigler 2013:60). For Zeigler, his partner, and the other founders of LEF, returning to or creating village community cooperation and local co-owned energy production are essential methods for assuring livability on the planet in the future.

Other communards share the same disillusionment. They are already disheartened with the new focus on sharing economies, such as car-sharing Uber-like

companies or home-sharing like AirBnB, claiming that they often induce new forms of "green washing" capitalism, and not the post-capitalist egalitarian mission some have claimed they represent. These ways of sharing are indeed not really sharing at all, and are not adjacent to the radical sharing that needs to occur to restructure not only property relations but also any oppressive relations we have. Let me illustrate this point with the opinions of interlocutor Dingbar.

Dingbar has been in the IC movement since he was a teenager, moving first from a rural farm in Alabama. He was knowledgeable about the practicalities of farming but had problematic family relations, and he, therefore, ended up seeking the community movement. Coming from a poor background where hard labor was expected and necessary, he seemed comfortable and skilled in most practical matters while also comfortable living a rough lifestyle with not many amenities available. He was, like many others in the movement, concerned with the future of the planet if consumerism and industrialization kept on being allowed to take its toll on people and nature. Dingbar told me:

> We are fooling ourselves into thinking that energy can travel and still be effective in producing change. All these solar panels and green cars don't matter unless we stop consuming so much. We can't all have a big house and two big cars, even if they are green. We have to reduce the scale of communities and society and live like most people on the planet already does, they are poor, but we have all these resources that we can use which creates an illusion that we are doing something good when we drive a bio-fueled car. Really, we should not own private vehicles or stuff like that, the only way we can prepare for peak oil is to reduce our imprint and create viable solutions for people that don't have all the resource to transport sun energy from, like, the desert…

Dingbar believes that we have to "return to" living and organizing on a village level, through cooperation and renewable energy but not only that; this energy must be

able to be produced at a low cost, and not travel great distances. Producing the energy, and storing that energy where you live, and then using it collectively are the only ways he perceives of us managing the potential future. He is drawing on ideas of a more natural state that can inform the present in preparation for some form of unknown disruptive future, where oil most likely will not be as available, at least not to the lower classes. Cooperative use of simple technologies that allow for post-fossil fuel life to happen thus shows potential for new ways of living.

At LEF, they have built on what was clear-cut land without using much fossil fuels, except in instances when no other options were available, or when they were lacking the manual labor resources to do some of the harder work clearing the field of tree roots. They aim is to remove themselves completely from the use of fossil fuels and to develop into not only a community but also an educational “center” that will spread the movement’s technologies through affordable workshops and cooperation with other communities.

They had experimented with oxen training to do some of the heavy lifting on the farm and had converted numerous electric appliances into running off of manual or sun energy. Alexis likes to show his over 100-year-old nickel-iron battery originally developed by Thomas Edison around the turn of the 20th century. The battery is known to be extremely durable, and the battery Alexis had still worked. He hopes to show how we can use old technologies, and perhaps draw inspirations from how people stored energy in the past. Layering old technology with simple, affordable newer technologies has proven to be difficult for the members but not impossible. Battery power is one of the most difficult issues in the use of solar energy, and it can be quite expensive to produce good ethical solutions. LEF, therefore, connects the energy struggle to class struggles and social energy justice. Some of the solar energy used is not stored but used directly, making the community’s activities dependent on active sunlight.

During my fieldwork, there were almost daily comments about the wrong direction of US energy politics. As oil and gas has promised to restore honor to many Americans, it has also marginalized communities while creating considerable

environmental degradation, climate disruption, ecological insecurity, and led to the disentrancement of local communities' rights to self-determination. The Southern States and North and South Dakota are strongly contested areas in current energy politics. Many in the movement were distressed about the Dakota Access Pipeline, which was to cross the whole nation[21]. These distressing socio-political situations often contribute to dystopic imaginaries of the future in which utopianism seems like more than anti-dote, but also as a coping mechanism in insecure times. Developing the skills to master dystopic futures is essential to many I met along the way.

"When shit hits the fan…"—Awaiting Dystopic Crisis

Topics like the expectance of peak oil, climate change crisis, or other dystopic imaginaries are also reflected in motivations to turn to radical sharing economies and fossil fuel-free or low consumption lifestyles. Like utopias, dystopias can be "immanent in action" (Krøijer 2020:63).

Climate disruption and depletion of resources at a quicker pace than the previous generations have faced in centuries, if ever, threaten the pursuit of happiness and the good life. Nations and communities face a housing crisis that creates surges of interest in alternative living arrangements. Property as a right is not even feasible for many of my interlocutors who arrive in the community with lower middle-class backgrounds and for some who come from extreme poverty. Members of the ICs often have backgrounds that make them yearn for safe places to live and work, many of them having faced struggles in the past and not having health insurance or ways of gaining financial security.

[21] Major protests at the frontlines took a toll on the communards as well, as we often reflected on the happenings and some regularly prayed or meditated for the activists that led their peaceful water protection efforts further North. Environmental activism has been increasingly criminalized, even peaceful protest is met with militarized security forces and police during protest action. The protests initiated by the youth council of the Sioux Nation in North Dakota lasted for almost a year. Around 15 000 people joined the protests that winter. When security forces used water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets to deter the protests, veterans all over America joined a massive ritual of forgiveness and reconciliation between the protestors. Idle No More, Black Lives Matter, Rainbow Movements, and people from ICs joined.

Some countries force collective living due to financial pressure and limited space, like Singapore or Hong Kong. The housing crisis in America is of a different yet interrelated kind; there are plenty of houses left empty while the issue of debt increases economic tensions. The financial crisis of 2008 showed that the American Dream had led to many living beyond their means in an ever-growing economy that created highly volatile economies, generating surges of dystopic imaginaries for the communards, who often reflect on what they should do regarding societal or economic collapse.

Dart, a young new member of the movement, told me after he had settled in his new dwellings.

> I feel like most likely shit will hit the fan at some point, right? And, for people like me, like half Iranian, half whatever, will be better off here. When shit hits the fan, Community is probably the best solution…

Twin Oaks, for example, had extensive plans prepared and food stored when they expected the potential of collapse at the turn of this century, when Y2K threatened to produce catastrophic glitches in computer systems globally. These dystopic imaginaries inspire sharing as a remedy and as egalitarian lifestyle options, where they will be safer than on the outside. The thorny relationship with outside forces also complicates how sharing and lowered consumption happens in communities.

Here, I have shortly exemplified dystopic imaginaries as a reason for radical sharing. However, this is just one of the many ways in which communards approach frugality and degrowth; some believe that their intention toward a more intentional and frugal lifestyle may present them with new opportunities and personal development. As such, it is a skill and choice developed to explore more fruitfully sustainable lifestyles, as I will show. However, we can also see that frugality has often been connected to spiritual righteousness.

Frugality as a response to pending disparity or crisis

Terrence Witkowski has shown that frugality often appears in the literature concerning US or Southern history; it is often colloquially compared to that virtue politics or subversive values. In many cases, it was presented as a strong force in Christian conservative circles in the US. Frugality is part of a constellation of different terms, such as brand avoidance and boycotts, resistance against consumerism and anti-capitalism, chosen simplicity, easy living, minimalism, and similar movements. Frugality while considering it on a more amplified scale can be understood as a method of rebalancing material lives with spiritual values and strongly connects and connotes religious formations and beliefs, especially in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity (Witkowski 2010).

> We can define frugality as art de vivre, which implies low material consumption and a simple lifestyle to open the mind for spiritual goods, such as inner freedom, social peace, justice, or the quest for "ultimate reality" (Bouckaert, Opdebeeck, and Zsolnai 2008:269).

The reluctance to gain private possession as a way to achieve divine states has been a way to remediate the current state to a purer, more morally sound way of living while consuming goods responsibly (Bouckaert, Opdebeeck, and Zsolnai 2008). In these perspectives, being able to choose when one has enough is an honorable status of choosing spiritual capital over material accumulation through financial capital while often donating money or donating time to charitable causes. Chosen poverty, or other forms of austere frugal ascetic lifestyles, has not only shaped many religious ICs but also holds a strongly rooted history of egalitarian experiments. It has been the demise of many utopian millennial religious communities in the US, and some drove their populations into despair driven by hunger, starvation, and overwork (Jennings 2016).

Frugality is, in the cases of the ICs explored here, connected to egalitarianism in different ways, mainly through the belief that frugality is something that we all must

learn to achieve; thus, frugality becomes a skillset that also contributes to egalitarian potential. Frugality is then often related to modesty and humble relationships to material accumulation. Frugality and paradoxes of growth, thus, touch on national and universal problems, of which the egalitarian experiments in the ICs are responses. However, again, this issue is not without its contentions. Quite a few times, I heard comments being made about the irony or even "political incorrectness" of chosen poverty, that some of them had access to more resources than they had ever feared to dream of in the community, and by having a roof over their heads, food served, job security, and health coverage, and social security thorough friendships.

S. G. had been "traveler kid" since his late teens and had gotten himself used to being comfortable having very little possessions on him, mostly so that he would be more easily transient. But he also stressed to me that he cared little for material goods, finding them as a source of irritation rather than contentment. He told me of a little game of creative co-drawing between me and him (see page 1) that his life of chosen poverty had shown him that what had been considered necessities of life was no longer useful to him. Progressing was more important, and he emphasized the need to try to make the things he would need. He did appreciate having a car, but had made do with what was around, hitch-hiking or traveling in groups.

"What if we would actually have to handle the consequences of everything we accumulate personally?" he asked during a discussion about the massive amounts of trash Americans on average produce when he was describing how he would try to make the things he actually needed. He said,

> If I need a spoon, I can make one, now, after we learned the other day! It would be easier to go to The Salvation Army, but I don't really need to. I have the skills now, and I can acquire other skills that can sort of, in collaboration, be good. What I want to do is to focus on how I can help where I am. Like here. Like (stopping the drawing to look at me) Like, how can I mend the earth I am on? The clear-cut here, around this cabin, how can I fix *that,* you know?

Redefinition of needs is often by communards connected to a skill development that allows them to anti-hegemonize the ways they have been used to relating to resources. Let me illustrate with ethnographic examples of something related to what S.G. is speaking of, which I have chosen to refer to as the practice of "making do."

"I find the things I need"— "Making Do" and Magical Thinking

"Making do" with limited resources is a big part of the socialization into sustainable degrowth discourses, as we have seen in the case of LEF, where they repurpose old materials to build their low-energy technologies. Redefining "needs" is a big part of the socialization efforts of ICs, and such circular economics is just one of many example of such activity. Communards often believe that adaptations to the problems facing them are about redefining needs and wants, in hopes of achieving "the good life." "Making do" is therefore a skill and value fitted for egalitarian lifestyles. "Making do" in ICs has similar connotations to frugality and sharing, but I also found that for some, it was related to more spiritual or magical ways of thinking about needs[22].

Molly had been in a community where she had experienced not having much money to spend on personal items. The community had struggled, and so it did not afford some of her essentials. Often communities must cut in communal spending on goods in periods when economic issues are being faced. She stressed the importance of need. She described how she needed sanitary napkins but lacked money for it, and described how she had been offered to go through some leftover donations and trash somewhere and found something that could be used as napkins instead. "I mean, what we really need is very little, and Mother Earth provides what we really *really* need." By sustainable frugal use, or using and sharing of secondhand clothing, sharing of used goods or what has been previously considered "matters out-of-place" or trash,

[22] I had written before about how, in post-Katrina New Orleans, burlesque dancers build status, self-worth, and pride based on skills and mastery of "making do" with what they have around them; to create costumes, or solve costume problems, or to make their art and performances with very little resources, so it seemed familiar to me when I discovered that communards would engage with a similar skill development (Korsbrekke 2013).

they also engage with egalitarian relationships with not only the community and peers but also with planet Earth. It is a way to act more righteously according to the limits provided for us on a shared planet.

Molly said, “I think that like, it makes you see possibilities to choose to not like have a regular job with a salary, but also I feel that when I do the right thing, things will come to me.” She eventually expressed that she felt like even if she chose to live completely moneyless that she would still manage with what she could find and through scavengery and community, and that if she led the right lifestyle, she would somehow be cared for. “Poverty to me is like having to walk an hour and a half to work because you cannot afford a car, even though you work,” Molly stated.

This somewhat “karma-like” understanding of necessity and reciprocity forces an estrangement with property to open up for needs’ reconsideration. What she needed was not pads but something that could be used as one. This way, she did not have to contribute to demands of capitalism, and an increasingly expensive economic sphere that women are often imposed to contribute to. The introduction of reusable Diva Cups was therefore also important in community[23].

FIGURE 12- "MAKING DO"— IMPROVISED FOOTWEAR OF DUCT TAPE FOR RAINY DAYS IN THE FIEL

[23] Using a Diva Cup not only produces less trash and in the long run saves money but also it seems to invoke a closer relationship with one’s cycle and period blood. Many women in some of the communities, for instance, celebrate the birthdays of their Diva Cups.

I was consistently curious about the aspect of poverty since poverty as intensification of political life was often expressed as one of the biggest transformative qualities of living communally, but it also caused much strife and insecurity. This tension was often stressed by my interlocutor to be important; they felt poor because they had little money to spend on things of their personal choosing, they felt poor because they shared almost all their clothes, and their inability to accumulate capital. Less money, but access to more resources, is perhaps how the interlocutors would point to the same tension but see themselves as richer because they had access to all of these things.

The comforts of the "outside" where capitalism and neoliberalism are "accepted" and pursued in forms of conveniences and material goods are often unavailable in communities, and either one makes do with what is there or one tries to find ways to improve, often having to handle limited resources, both in a matter of time, labor, knowledge, and materials. Becoming experts of various old and new technologies that require less effort and less capital investment is often key to making the communities work.

Connections between degrowth theory and the various social experiments that tackle this issue have not yet been thoroughly investigated, as these have perhaps been seen as "fuzzy" and incoherent ideas, though some attempts have been made to grasp individualism in degrowth dynamics, as with Helen Jarvis (2019), who argues that these relationships show a form of empowerment in the social phenomenology of being a "we" rather than an "I," and what it means being and doing this "we" in choosing movements which are increasing rapidly in urban areas, not just in the US. In ICs we see that this aspect is important, but also that individual boundaries, limitations, and efforts matter a lot when engaging in radical sharing.

This form of empowerment to "make do" and to be more collectively aware, becoming a "we" rather than and "I," is at its most complex and important when it comes to relinquishing most personal possessions and a materialistic lifestyle to engage with income sharing and more frugal lifestyles.

Sharing Income- trade-offs and gains

Income sharing happens in many ICs and is either the result of communal efforts, or individuals will have income coming in from other sources that they put into the communal pool. How much varies a lot from community to community; however, the co-housing models of ICs seem to support more of the latter than rural communities. When a community shares income or is "income sharing," it means most often that they have communal businesses and endeavors that make a profit that goes back into running the community.

An allowance is most regularly afforded to members, and the amount is often dependent on how much the community can afford. At Twin Oaks, the allowance was a little below $100 for the time of my fieldwork, while at East Wind, members received $135. At LEF, interns received $80 if the community could afford it, while in Cambia, they were still trying to figure out how they would organize over income and sharing. Other communities may have solutions where members work regular jobs and share either all or parts of their income with the community, though I was told that this was more common in urban co-housing communities.

Income sharing allows for the members to have equal access to the surplus of their labor while still maintaining a frugal lifestyle. It is seen as both a sacrifice and a benefit for members to change their behavior as consumers. Puna, one of the members of the Economic Team at Twin Oaks, told me:

> I have access to like 16 cars, a sauna, a homemade beach and pond, a huge tub, a private room, food in the fridge and in the fields… I have food served to me twice a day. I feel very lucky. At the same time, when I leave, I have nothing, and sometimes that can be scary. But the community, I hope, will become more affluent in the future, and we are financially stable, that's what's important.

Two members told me that finances' topic was a common question to receive from their families and friends on the outside of the community, raising the issue of

stereotypes and cultural connotations to cults; as we saw it, it is a great tension in the third chapter. They said their families and friends would be concerned with their personal finances, asking if they had to pay to convert members, or give the community their money and cars. Or they questioned their lack of resources that are common in the mainstream, such as access to airconditioned rooms, or the freedom that financial independence gives them, such as travels and hobbies. One of the members who had such acquired into her membership mentioned in a conversation about these kinds of questions:

> And yet, I don't feel like I'm giving up much, except a lot of the stuff that is, yeah, like nice! But is also really bad for me or the planet or create habits that makes me dependent on some stuff I don't need. Well, ok, so sometimes I miss spending money on stuff. The freedom to just get what I want if I could. Like, I really miss going out. I miss going to get whatever food I want and going out to eat. I miss access to meat a lot of the time.

Income-sharing models often either limit how much you can use or spend from resources that you may have from life before community, but also for many, their material conditions improve when coming to community. For example, Twin Oaks expect you not to touch those outside resources while you are a member. If you have a personal car, you are not asked to sell it, but you cannot use it while being a member. If you have money, it can be lent to the community as what is called a "membership loan," which would allow the community to make new investments. The loan is, however, temporary, and the money will be repaid when the member leaves of they so wish. However, some members have never had health insurance, access to a car, or lived hand-to mouth, and the security and welfare the community offers are seen as an improvement of material circumstances. However, many share these concerns about their status when leaving. some members are worried about the security of their financial situation if they will leave. An older member explained to me that he was

unhappy but had nowhere else to go because he felt he had few financial opportunities on the outside, and also struggled to save money while at Twin Oaks because he had other important expenditures. Loans or resources are sometimes offered to members who are leaving to set them up for life on the outside but are not usually a huge amount of money.

Anthropological analysis has found that reforms are ineffective in changing patterns of oppression because they only last since the pressure does, and that more incremental change functions best when these are internal structural changes (Durrenberger 2007). For instance, with the Taft Hartley Act, where restrictions on the power and activities of labor unions were implemented, unions started providing member services such as welfare. Sociologist Rick Fantasia argues that in the case of such bureaucratic routines, movements may channel the conflicts so that solidarity only actually emerges when workers have to rely on cohesion outside of these formal bureaucratic channels (Fantasia 1988). Cohesion through sharing and co-ownership can be seen in such a solidarity formation. Michael Denning (2010) suggests that his foundation of exploitative capitalism is not the wage contract itself but the imperative to "earn a living." Therefore, "moments of wagelessness" has also been the onset of analysis for solidarity or decentering of wage contracts, but in most cases, such efforts are made to understand the dispossession of land, tools, and means of production that produces precarious life, or precarious ways of earning a living outside of state formalized channels.

In "Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution" (2015), James Ferguson compels us to reexamine the relationship between production and distribution and to ask new questions about livelihoods, labor, markets, and progressive politics' forms. Based on his examination of welfare programs in southern Africa, he showed how direct income payments alleviate poverty, and he argued for basic income. Within the confines of the community, what is happening at Twin Oaks and other shared-income communities is similar to basic income models. Drawing from this, one could argue that similar politics of distribution (sometimes redistribution) shape new relationships to production—relationships that center on

intentions toward egalitarian relationships that foster solidarity, co-ownership, co-stewardship, equality, and non-exploitative leadership.

Degrowth here comes from frugality or "poverty" as to an extent chosen for most of the members, as the basic income they receive individually is so low. This form of individual wagelessness also shows examples where the surplus is not allocated to the workers, although it is "worker-owned," but remains communal, so that each individual may not accumulate any significant amounts of money or resources. When and if they leave, they will not leave with these resources, creating precarity through an act of voluntary dispossession. This highlights egalitarianism's potential to unravel ideas of material or capital accumulation and success as being paradigmatic and universal. Radical income sharing thus produces alternatives to meritocratic egalitarian capitalism by impelling other measuring success ways. Communards measure their success either by how well the community is doing financially, or how well their direct democratic systems function. One of the great successes of Twin Oaks is, for instance, their playful organization of budgets, which allows for great flexibility and solutions to communal tensions.

The Budget Game and financial transparency

Twin Oaks makes the most money from tofu, seed sales, and hammock sales. Cambia sells wooden utensils and works for other communities to make extra money, often helping Acorn with their seeds business. Also, LEF cultivates seeds and makes money from workshops. Whatever is done with the money is either a communal decision or there is an assigned team that will do the prioritized grunt work and consult with the community only if they have problems. This can be a source of conflict in the community when members disagree with what economic priorities should be.

The Economy Team at Twin Oaks offers a great example of how direct democracy works. The money and labor that is left to be decided upon after spending and budgeting for the basic needs is managed and opened up for the total membership through what is called "The Budget Game." The game is digital and is a festive questionnaire that allows members to prioritize their preferred work areas in the

community, either voting for it to get more money or more labor hours in the budget. To get people to partake in the game, members are given some extra hours to write on their labor sheets, and information and praise of the game is put up on the O & I a good time in advance so that people can read about it and how the programing of the game is built up to create statistical analysis of the desires of the participants.

Transparency concerning economics is important for various reasons. To ensure democratic accessibility, anyone who wishes can pursue being the Econ Team. Still, the Econ Team is sometimes accused of being “the elite of Twin Oaks” that can make decisions about finances that could go undetected by the community at large. Some economic exploitation has happened when members have trusted individuals with vast amounts of money without doing its due diligence to perform checks and balances. Such an event had occurred upon my return to the field in 2018, and I was surprised to hear that a long-term member had embezzled money from a sister community he was helping, without much consequence. The member had left before most of the rest of the members had even heard about the events. Some members could not wait to tell me the latest news, while others had seemed to forget it already. When I asked Demeter about it, she said:

> Oh shit, yeah, that actually happened too. There’s just so much happening all the time and I just try to focus on the cows and like, and there’s just conflicts everywhere, that I had almost forgotten about that. Yeah, that was fucked up. I don’t understand what happened. I guess the econ people are going through the records to see how much damage was done.

Others were horrified: “I can believe he made us invest in him and his family, and then he did this.” Crimes of theft often go unreported to traditional police and are handled communally through conflict resolution rituals or expulsion. Theft seldom happens of money, and one found that the theft that happens is of either personal food or personal clothing items.

The community is also an economic unit that must handle such a crisis; the economy can quickly be subjected to unexpected changes and disasters. Twin Oaks had to change its biggest income area after it lost a major hammock contract and showed that during crisis, the community could be adaptable without sacrificing the egalitarian intent of the community. The community quickly rallied around one of their startup businesses, tofu, and has now made it into a multi-million-dollar business. The contrast of making good money combined with chosen frugality within the community in itself allows the community to save and invest in their future; thus, the community becomes financially resilient, but not affluent.

This experience of the previous financial crisis made members seek balance and security. But some believed that something “egalitarian” gets lost in the meeting with developing market-exchange strategies and pushes to artisan crafts such as this, and that disagrees with the commitment to be intentional and to share resources in the most sustainable way. Also, surplus from businesses is often saved and put into accounts or funds that are there as insurance and new investments. Through the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, the members have extra insurance, which allows for a great deal of solidarity economics with other communities that might struggle for different reasons. There have, for instance, been fires that have caused major cross-community solidarity work and resource sharing, or members have needed surgeries or healthcare which the funds have covered.

How communards share shows much about the way they perceived norms of egalitarianism in practical matters concerning living together, and what other ideological projects they attached their values to and how they act on those. Let me illustrate with another ethnographic excerpt, again from the life of Sparkles, who has a surplus of material objects, and experiences conflict when the boundary of sharing turns out to be problematic for him.

WHAT IS SHARED—WHAT IS VALUED?

Sparkles had several favorite spots around the farm. The first was the smoking shack, where he would sit on his shabby corner chair under a painting of a little

smoking lady every evening after 5pm, while either entertaining the other smokers or sitting there by himself immersed in his drawings of the new clothing or hat designs that he was imagining in his mind's eye. His own personal rule was that he would not smoke before after dark because his health and his wallet could not take the strain, but he would generously offer cigarettes to those asking to bum one, saying that he could easily pop in and put in another "tor". A "tor" is an order for the communal car-pool and "errand run" into the surrounding towns for more cigarettes the following day.

His personal style and commitment to using secondhand clothing and random objects such as garbage as part of his stylish attire made the second favorite spot in the community an obvious choice: the community clothing pool, or as it is colloquially called "commie clothes." While some communards live with limited personal possessions by choice but is also due to the limited space in their personal rooms, Sparkles had managed to shove as much as he possibly could into his room. He had filled it with different trinkets and records, old preserves he had made, stuff from the local Goodwill store, or clothes from commie clothes that he had treasured. The only floor space left was a little trail that made it possible to get from the door to the bed, and from the bed to a little chair where Sparkles would sit to play his various instruments.

The overflow of objects had spilled into the communal living room, and he was starting to bug his other Small Living Group mates. But he seemed not to care much that he was accumulating so much stuff and was gradually occupying more and more space and was reluctant to listen to the critique. "What does it matter, anyway?" he said. Norms of personal space, how to share communal ones, and borders of such are important in community, and the community has developed different sets of norms for different areas and buildings over time.

Sparkles is not the only communard who loves commie clothes. The favorite spot of many communards is the communal clothing closet, and it is frequented by many regularly. Three out of the five communities I visited had a room, building, or other dedicated space to clothes that the community members took if they want or need to. At Twin Oaks, almost the entire floor is earmarked for this purpose, and they

have a “commie clothes” manager who keeps stock, organizes the clothes, and does the communal laundry. But not owning anything and only using commie clothes and the communal laundry system is something only a few people do. Most will find favorite objects to hold onto, or to keep for a while, and they will wash these themselves. However, the rotation of clothes is quite rapid, and the popular “commie clothes” are especially visited before community events and parties. The long rows of size and type organized clothing offer different choices, from luxury brand clothing to shabby clothes that have been worn down for decades. There is always something fun for the more fashion-oriented communards to use once they wish. Commie clothes both accept and donate, and there is therefore a rotation of items, but some of the assortment is kept if they are considered special or high quality, and fun costumes are usually kept.

Commie clothes are a distribution system that creates a form of familiarity among members. For instance, the rotation of clothes is often noticed, and genealogy is often offered, especially at events. A dress that has been passed around the community for years often evokes memories and stories of other members who have come and gone. Clothes can also be passed along outside of commie clothes, and I have seen people give clothes as both spontaneous and planned gift exchanges, though not often. However, stealing clothes can be an issue, and many communards reported missing laundry out of their private laundry load. In that context, it is often mentioned that stealing rarely happens for other things besides food and clothing.

Sharing clothing like this expands on the egalitarian mode because it creates connections between members and equal access to resources, such as clothing. If you have an uncommon size, you will receive extra help finding clothing that fits.

FIGURE 13- COMMIE CLOTHES— AN EXAMPLE OF RADICAL SHARING

Commie clothes are, of course, not the only way sharing is facilitated at Twin Oaks. Similar egalitarian intentions can be observed in many other aspects of life on the farm. They share cars, kitchen equipment, tools, computers, etc., and all of these material things that are shared show that the sharing is without obligation of return but participation.

To access the resources, you contribute with your labor. Yet, it is not a market relationship since everyone who is on the farm shares almost everything and is thus also owners of almost everything—the hierarchies between those with access and those that do not are almost eliminated. However, there are those who wish the communards would share even more or would take even bigger risks and radical choices for the improvement of the community in facing especially issues of climate disruption and environmental insecurity.

Egalitarianism is performed through the musings over sharing and the deep discussions on them—sharing clothing and the flow of the clothing items could be an

example of finding egalitarian connectedness with peers over materiality without competition or jealousy or unsustainable accumulation of things and resources while forcing a reflection on scarcity, need, and want. Yet, how one accumulates, and shares can also become problematic. A contrasting example of his behavior of letting his personal possessions spill over to communal areas, was Sparkles' rigorous attention to communal kitchen norms concerning how to handle personal items regarding communal space and equipment.

Once, when we were all in the kitchen, a somewhat clumsy member had a piece of Sparkles' bacon. Sparkles was quick to react. "This is my personal pan, my personal bacon, so it was not up for grabs, the fucking moron," he said, before he continued his elevated speech of how norms applied to space and property in the community, even claiming it could be backed up in policy as he showed his great annoyance over the trespassing of his fellow communard. The other member believed it was up for grabs because the pan was left unattended on the stove. These norms of what was private or shared and where spaces always seemed to attract some discussion, but it showed that, though sharing everything is important, members like Sparkles still had specific norms, settling how private space and property were to be treated, and that keeping some things private remains vital.

There were several people in the kitchen, some walking around the table in the middle, arranging their food in plates, and cutting up the fresh mozzarella that had been put out that morning. Sparkles noticed I was there and said, "Oh my god, MARI! Jessie just took my bacon right out of the pan! Fuck! I was sitting right there, trying to enjoy my bacon when he came in and took the rest hat I had left for the next sandwich."

Sparkles had recently abandoned vegetarianism and was perhaps a little consumed with his first tastes of meat; he had been eating bacon and chicken fingers nonstop over the last weeks. The conflict was obviously about what norms to follow in the public room where what was considered private property was involved. "I'm so fucking pissed— he owes me bacon… This is my personal pan, my personal bacon, so it was not up for grabs, the fucking moron." "He probably just thought it was up for

grabs since the heat was off the pan, and it was just sitting there. You know people will eat anything not labeled here!" one of the other members in the kitchen said. "I don't care, he should have asked if it belonged to someone in the kitchen—like it was not up for grabs, I would have put it there if it was," pointing to the kitchen eyelid in the middle of the room. "Up for grabs" was meant as an area on the table where people put the things that others could eat if they wanted to, putting your food there only for a minute could result in it being eaten. Consent is symbolically given through the indication of the placement of the food objects.

Sharing the commons often becomes a source of conflict when many people will have to cooperate in shared spaces; also, sharing other resources, such as food and space alongside boundaries of public and private space in shared spaces had turned into a sour meeting over bacon. The conflict did not end there. Sparkles was upset, going over the episode severally with the people around, showing them that he had used his own personal cast iron pan as well to make the bacon. The bacon, a luxury on a limited budget, would never be restored, so the conflict had no resolution. The bacon stealer did not care, and this ambivalence was never resolved for either party. How to share the commons would be covered in policy, but the minor everyday conflicts that emerged showed that there was yet work to be done in establishing consent when sharing was to happen, as well as problems with stealing or conflicts over material over-accumulation.

Sparkles' story is just a little insight into the ways in which he shares, and what he shares and not, and in which ways he shares regarding the commons. These little segments of conflict reveal much about the rigidity of sharing derived from the need to perform checks and balances of how sharing contributes to the egalitarian communal project. Egalitarianism thus emerges as a type of boundary work that mitigates check and balances between private and communal, but it should be noted that sharing all income is the primary focus rather than sharing all materials. This boundary work requires norm meditations that depend on certain skills and abilities to mitigate conflict over personal space and resources.

SHARING THE COMMONS—WHAT CAN A CONTESTED PIECE OF BACON SHOW US ABOUT EGALITARIANISM?

So, we have seen here how communards direct emphasis in social life on ways of being more intentional about sharing, and frugal lifestyles as a main principle for social organization, and how important this is for developing a practical egalitarian and utopian mode in response to a potential devastating future, especially. I therefore argue that we see here a development of various understandings of a mode of intentional egalitarian sharing as part of this form of practical egalitarianism. Learning how to share is intrinsic to learning how to be egalitarians. This egalitarian expression is more like a worker-owned co-operative, and as such differs from other forms of sharing such as reciprocal gift giving. Boundaries of commons and what is private is opened, but as such, we see that in the issue of sharing private things, this can be a highly touchy subject. Mitigating tensions become incredibly important for further experimentation with practical forms of egalitarianism.

This form of sharing is a type that puts weight on accessibility, which holds values of sustainability, frugality, class relations, human–nature connections, and the creation for livability for the community and sharing as “good” livelihood as a great part of the practice. Thus, sharing is a social contract that is temporary, returns from efforts are not negotiated, but what you receive is what you share, with few exceptions. When one leaves the community, nothing is rewarded, and sharing therefore is not about accumulation of status, wealth, nor debts. Sharing space, materials, and income is problematic. Sharing everything in everyday life generally proves difficult, the contested bacon piece also touches on the issue of consent, and this is a highlighted egalitarian value that offers many complexities, as I will show in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONSENT AND SOCIAL NORMS OF EGALITARIANS

"Behind every woke man are 50 burned-out feminists"
-Informant 34

While my host Aura was walking with me to my temporary room in Tupelo, when I visited for my first overnight stay at TO, we met a woman on the pathway in between the buildings on the big farm. Wearing simple clothing, a flannel shirt, and a brown Carhart jacket, it looked like she was going to work outside for the day. She said, "Hi," smiled, and welcomed Aura back to the farm. Then, she asked Aura if she could give her a hug. Aura said yes and stopped for a moment to embrace the woman. It seemed like they were hugging for a long time, both smiling and closing their eyes, showing extra affection by stroking each other's backs as well, and finally, Aura introduced me.

I withheld my instinct to reach out for a handshake, waiting to see whether she would initiate, but the woman did not. I had heard that some were weary of shaking hands in the community. Finally, I learned to say "hi" by often gesturing a little wave with my hand at new people in case they preferred not to be touched by strangers, unless they put out their hands themselves. I was, perhaps, overly cautious; however, I found that it was good to be prepared for other bodily and symbolic boundaries different from mine.

Aura and I finally parted ways with the woman, the two of them taking time to make eye contact for a few moments while still smiling, before the woman continued in the opposite direction down the path, "We practice a strong consent culture here." Aura explained: "Like, it's usually not only with touching; most people here that you'll meet will like, ask if it's a good time for you to talk, or 'can I ask you a question?" She explained that they had started doing this, because when people live and work together it can be hard to keep any kind of boundaries, but this is their home, so they might not be in the mood to talk about work just because they are in some public space, or they might not be in the mood to meet new people, or to be hugged.

She further explained that consent before touching was important until I had "blanket consent." When people have achieved trust and comfortability, they may offer blanket consent to people so that they can avoid seeking consent severally on many occasions, unless they ask to be given space or retract it. Sharing so many aspects of social life with many people, some of them, strangers, can be a complicated issue.

I asked her what would be appropriate for a new person to do if I was unsure on how to act, and she told me to try to "read the situations," but that most people are really friendly and know that guests might not know all the norms yet. "But it is kind of your hosts' responsibility to make sure that you know the norms and it falls on them if you fuck up. But you'll be fine, you've been in the community before…." Later, when I prodded for more information, she said, "We have a lot of issues on consent in the mainstream, and it happens here too, but it's like called out often when it does, you know, so we at least try to train ourselves to think a lot about it."

Aura and the other members at Twin Oaks go to great lengths and spend a lot of resources and effort to "create," "establish," "build," or "develop" what the community and many other social movements call "consent culture." In the movement, this concept is often used for processes that also go beyond touch and sexual contact, which is the most highlighted aspect of the concept in "the mainstream" and shows how consent can create space to explore one's boundaries necessary for egalitarian practice.

This chapter outlines how the utopian egalitarian mode of practice of "building consent culture" is essential to the egalitarian and utopian aspects of the movement. This not only concerns the momentum gained through feminism but also from BDSM subcultures, martial arts, and political activism, among many sources of inspiration for the communards. Consent, as a utopian practice, offers a discussion on desire and control within the tension of freedom and the communal when the communards share their space, property, income, and lives with one another. Consent practices often tackle ambivalent emotions that show not only issues of power and hierarchies that

communities live with but also symbolic performances that include perspectives on sharing life in utopian egalitarian “safe” spaces. Learning how to feel consent is just as important as learning how to follow the norms. I argue that consent norms in egalitarian communities should be used as an example of how-to upscale understanding of consent and coercion as essential to developing the abilities to perform as equals.

The larger concern in this chapter is how consent in these ICs has developed beyond affirmative consent, which has dominated, in particular, efforts made in sexual violence prevention across the US. Affirmative consent in the US judicial system is still being developed and is based on the verbal communication surrounding consent (Rosman 2018). Twin Oaks, as I will show, is moving toward including organizational aspects of “felt consent”, and that this can be considered an important step toward understanding the problems of relying on affirmative consent models. This relates not only to the way egalitarianism assures that oppression does not happen but also to the way gender shapes social interactions.

Norms of social conduct generate new modes of interaction in community, and the norms have developed over decades of egalitarian experimentations in Twin Oaks. Let me first begin by contextualizing the debate on consent and unpacking some of its current reverberations outside of the IC movement. Hence, what consent culture does at Twin Oaks and the other communities in this hub, tell us more generally about how willed change (especially in intimate relations and hierarchies) has become the main organizing principle of egalitarian politics here. I show here how the negotiation of intimacy has developed into a necessary tool for boundary making in the act of reversing oppression, most importantly between different genders, or rather the social behavior that induces oppression, in community it is highlighted by the proximity of people and strong feminist value basis.

Why Consent Matters

“Consent culture” has been practiced at Twin Oaks for decades and has developed into a practice that engulfs all types of social interactions, as consent is as

much about learning where your own boundaries are, as about how to respect other people's boundaries. At the time of my fieldwork and in the time after, "consent culture" has gained massive momentum in the media, after the global social media activist movement, #MeToo, revealed the extent of power abuses and sexual harassment in various industries globally, especially highlighting the efforts of the community in this area of overcoming such oppressions.

Consent is an extensive study in the academe; hence, I will limit the discussion to consent drawing from the discussion that happens within feminist frameworks, by especially drawing on the work on "consent culture." Kitty Stryker—queer and consent culture activist, and co-editor of the book "Ask: *Building Consent Culture"*—argued that even though "consent culture" departs from life interactions regarding sex, consent becomes an issue in every social interaction (Stryker, Queen, and Penny 2017). Consent, when overridden, not only functions as a social norm but also as a mode of governance (Stryker, Queen, and Penny 2017:vii). Consent culture is often classified as not being "sex-positive" or "sex-negative," which are common approaches to ending sexual oppression in feminist social movements but pertains to being "sex-critical" (Stryker, Queen, and Penny 2017:ix). In these ICs understanding how consent governs by giving people the space to reclaim power by giving consent is thus an important part of egalitarian relationships.

Consent is a way to denaturalize the assumptions made in even the simplest social interactions, even challenging the power dynamic of the assumption that one has the right to ask, or to take up someone's time. Building a consent culture is a way to teach agency and egalitarian social interaction. In its own way, "consent culture" at Twin Oaks is a willed change in behavior that allows individuals to stay autonomous, for conflicts over boundaries to be lessened, and it shapes a new way of speaking and acting in social relationships that is meant to target micro-aggression and oppressive behavior in social relationships. Practicing a consent culture and protecting individuals from oppressive behavior in a community is equivalent to practicing egalitarian politics and engaging with a transformation of the kinds of norms and behavior that people hold on to when they come to the community. The issue as I have shown

through the example of their boundary work separating themselves from similar experiments such as cults or sects, indicated that consent also touches on voluntary association and free will within the intentional.

Consent for community members and beyond is a way to establish more safety in social relationships, in any situation. It decreases the chances of miscommunication over feelings and actions, as well as more serious offenses or power plays based on hierarchies that are seen as the cultural baggage they wish to move away from. It also assures voluntary association and free will regarding the community at large. Consent culture, at its most intense, generates what activists often refer to as "safe spaces," which can be seen as experimental utopian special practices that help us see what types of equalities matter, and which do not. As I have already shown, everyday utopias like these perform everyday life in a radically different fashion (see also Cooper 2014). According to Lefebvre (1991) space is a social product; production of space, is related to processes of appropriate spaces for the social reproduction. Space is simultaneously a spatial practice, a representation of space, a space of representation. Space can connect the physical environment with the mental maps with which people negotiate space and with the physical body— and thus space is more than a geometrical measurement or unit (Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith 1991; Gottdiener 1993).

As many come from the "mainstream" to find this kind of security and to feel safe in their surroundings the production of safe space is important for egalitarian pursuits. Many of the members have experienced having their consent breeched especially through sexual violence, or the LGBTQIAA2S++ peoples suffered from discrimination and violence due to their gender or sexuality. Feeling safe is therefore considered an egalitarian project that involves skill development to engage with safer social norms.

The neighboring communities, such as Acorn, work considerably on the same issues. The example above shows us various important aspects of the communication skills that are required to act and perform an egalitarian identity; this becomes a performative symbolic interaction where one is not only engaging in the building of

consent culture but also educating others in how to practice the same norms. This is part of a major resistance against oppression, and a survival strategy for those who live in these communities. As in the example above, asking for a hug is quite common, and usually not declined. However, approaching someone about work-related issues is often denied. Visitors were, for instance, asked not to engage people in answering their questions when they were serving themselves food from the big communal steam table. This is a normalized behavior at Twin Oaks, and communards intentionally practice boundary-making and detection through workshops and play in everyday life. "Practice saying NO!" Billy, one of the advocates for consent culture at Twin Oaks, used to say.

The case of "consent culture" may give the impression that communards like to establish great boundaries to their bodies and rarely share the experience of touch with their peers, but that is far from the truth. Setting boundaries and intentions of touching are especially needed where touch happens frequently. The physical relationships between people in the community often seem more intimate than what outsiders are often accustomed to. "Cuddling," hugging, and otherwise touching to show affection is quite normal in most spheres in the community among peers when they are "hanging out," and it was not uncommon to be touched or when other events were happening, such as meetings or discussions. The parties also become a physical way of willing change in the intimate spheres of human interaction, but because of the issues of breaches of consent these issues can by communards be seen as part of a bigger power struggle. The community puts efforts into exploring physical attraction or their bodies and will, for instance, arrange kissing parties or "Get to know your breast" parties, etc.

Many experience touch differently when initiated into the community, feeling existed about the openness around sharing their bodies. A young visitor who had been raised in an orthodox religious community experienced it as being particularly liberating. I asked him how he was doing with the experience in IC, and he answered, "It's all very new to me. I have never even hugged anyone really, and here people come and hug me all the time. It's nice!"

According to political scientist David Johnston, consent has been mainly seen in Western thought in two ways. First, the ways in which consent is involved with interactions and relations between individuals, where obligations and entitlements can be transferred through acts of consent. Second, the consent that happens between the governed and the government. The latter is a relationship that has shaped many modern political theories (Johnston 2010:25-26).

What can be highly problematic in matters regarding consent is establishing whether a person or a group is mature enough or can make such a distinction of giving consent. In its most radical form, communards question their senses of consent, questioning how their feelings align with actions and boundary making that is comfortable or even liberating to them— being governed or part of a collaborative egalitarian government is a fuzzy process.

Having established that consent is a major focus point in the federation of Egalitarian Communities, let me continue by outlining how important control over interaction and social relationships has been in processes of utopian experiments in the US, especially.

Consent Revitalized

From other utopian social experiments, such as the IC movement, the perfectionist millenarian groups, the Quakers and the Shakers, sexual relations have been at the heart of the reimagining of how to go about creating the New Age or the New Man in IC's. Sexual relations and family organization have thus become the locus of utopianisms' discussions of the good or bad society. Planned sexual relations are often part of utopianism, the family unit being a prime locus for experimentation for human improvement. Controlling interaction and sexual play has been important in practical utopian experiments, while sexual liberation has also had major influence, especially since the 1960's (Kanter 1972, 1973). Though communities before this had experimented with free love, others had implemented rigid systems of romantic interaction, or renunciate sex completely, often to their demise.

Sexual liberation put into the IC feminist egalitarian framework connects this liberation to safety and processes of self-empowerment. Furthermore, it is within this tension that my interlocutors attempt to create norms for social interaction, which assures that practicing consent culture shapes every social interaction into an egalitarian orientation toward the good. The study of Twin Oaks gives us insight into what happens when we take consent seriously and engage with it actively in every social act with intentionality and commitment.

"Consent" is an issue overreaching matters of sexual relations to privacy politics, also in ICs, and is often understood with the help of a terminology that considers the connection between consent and cultural cognition (Kahan 2010). However, the context of IC has allowed for intentional experimentation and development of norms, policies, processes, and politics, which has shaped the way the communards practice their egalitarianism. The influence the focus on consent culture has had highlighted sensitivity to issues that revolve around personal boundaries because personal boundaries are essential in the understanding of freedom for the interlocutors, but also because they live and work so closely, boundaries can quickly because of tension and confusion. Consent, as such, is an egalitarian value-system that pushes exploration of what equality should feel like.

Feminist circles, not only in the US, have especially discussed matters on "developing consent culture" for many decades. As mentioned, "consent culture" was gaining momentum in the public sphere as I ventured to Virginia in 2015. Approaching a new or non-oppressive way of interacting in sexual relations, flirting, and dating, understanding how to handle chauvinism and harassment, and how to treat victims of rape and assault has undoubtedly been a highly problematic field. The egalitarian communities are, for some members and visitors, places where they can stay and feel safer than on the outside, and spaces in which feminist politics is accepted as a driver in social experimentation.

Recent statistics, provided by the National Sexual Violence Center, show that in the US, one out of five women and one out of 71 men experience being raped in their lifetime. One in three women experience some form of sexual violence, and between

20–25% of college women experience sexual assault while enrolled. Statistics such as these can only be understood as suggestive; most rapes still go unreported, it is in fact the most underreported crime in the US, and it is estimated that over 64% of rapes never get reported to the police (Nsvrc.org 2019). Though rape is just one side of this debate, these numbers matter because they highlight the tensions in society at large that my interlocutors retract into community to tackle.

In 2016, before the emerging #MeToo movement, it was made public that Presidential Candidate Donald Trump Jr. had been recorded urging other men to sexually assault women, bragging about his own experiences in 2005 in a hidden voice recording. This was only one of many accusations of transgressions for the coming President Elect, and for a moment his words "just grab'em by the pussy." This was turned into one of the major talking points during the Presidential Elections in 2016. This context made the community seem ahead of their times, tapping into a tension that has great significance for working and professional life in particular. The complex issue of consent was emerging with intensity reaching all levels of society, but still the community realized, as progressive as they were, they still struggled with conflicts of consent. With this backdrop, the topic of consent in community was intensified, revisited, and exacerbated in communities in this period, partly due to the intensification of this topic in the public media. This was not the first wave of intensification of these matters, and interlocutors could attest to times in the past where the feminists on the farm were even more outspoken and confrontative against perpetrators. Consent is highlighted in policy in a few of the FEC communities, as they are bound through the organization to, as mentioned, practice non-violence and to actively work on establishing equality for all people.

Though some aspects of consent are covered in policies, social norms expand on this in interactions. These issues are closely connected to developing consent culture because it is contextualized into a more personalized experience where the emotional landscapes of consent can be more safely examined because of the norms that are already applied and followed voluntarily. This is an attempt to interlink an individual's conscious and unconscious, and the body with the mind in a way that

generates empowerment. Furthermore, ideally, these moments of empowerment for the individual should eventually lead to bigger cultural shifts, one where the person is more trained to recognize the micro-aggressions of oppression through the denial or coercion of consent. Consent and voluntary association, I argue, are therefore vital for this utopian mode of practical egalitarianism.

Consent is also particularly important in these communities because of the proximity of people, the proximity of their bodies, and the complicated interdependencies that exist in community. Controlling impulses is a necessity in practical grounded utopias—it is at the center of the paradox of the individual's free will and the freedom of the individual regarding the communal. I will show a few examples where consent mattered for my interlocutors in their interactions.

Conflicts that emerge over consent show us that consent is in part a skill set that allows individuals to perform egalitarianism as inversions of hierarchy. Instead of the consent transgressor being in power, authority is given to the one who is transgressed upon first. The hierarchies are shifted so that the communard that does not fulfill the skills needed to practice consent culture becomes ostracized and excluded. The major problems of defining how consent should happen and how consent is felt, given, and received are further complicated by the complex emotions and experiences that communards draw on in handling these conflicts.

Marianne Gullestad developed a theory of a specific "Norwegian, Scandinavian or Northern European variety" of modernity tying these to the themes of individualism and equality. Exploring egalitarian individualism from different perspectives, she argued that equality is a troupe of "sameness" in Scandinavia (Gullestad 2002). This means that people in Scandinavia develop an interactional style that emphasizes similarity and under-communicates difference to feel equal and to establish a sense of community. In Gullestad's interpretation, "equality as sameness" is a central cultural idea that balances and resolves the tensions, especially in the Norwegian ideological system. As a comparison, one could argue that consent practices in ICs show that egalitarianism in ICs, by contrast, can take the form of differences made safe, and in any case "over-communicated" to form a sense of community. Events where breeches

of consent happen are “dangerous” and “out-of-place.” This safer space also allows for members to have a conscious relationship with those emotions that they may not have “discovered yet” as their embodied boundaries. Hence, egalitarianism is about phenomenological self-discovery and discourse of empathy; the discovery of the boundary of “the other.” Differences made safe are a prerequisite for the ideal egalitarian to emerge in the boundary between outside and inside. The danger can be eliminated, “different strokes” are available for “different folks,” and the excluded individual may move on to a different community or choose to work on their consent skills.

The two-year member Doula, who had come to community partly due to the feminist practices and her previous experience as a sexual assault victim, expressed ambiguous attitudes to the issue of safety. “We are still doing better than most places when it comes to gender, I feel safe here, I have opportunities and access, I live with men that take me seriously and that realize that we all lose under patriarchy.”

This is not an uncommon sentiment that Doula is pervading; the utopianism in this way of thinking lies in the want and desire to unravel “unsafe” social relationships and reshape them into something “good” and “safe” where people can develop “trust” or “love.” She had also stated that she was frustrated with the frictions between feminists on the farm who she felt were too harsh on some of the men on the farm, visitors, and guests alike.

Doula later left the community, and after a while, she addressed the problem of sexual harassment in a public post on Facebook, where she wrote about an incident of being stalked by a man in a store, and expressed how much she appreciated the men at Twin Oaks for producing safer spaces for women[24]. The comment received some feedback from members at the farm, some of them wanting to address the issue of

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[24] The comment used the more contextually appropriate term “womyn”, noting feminist practices of alternative rewriting common masculine terms and patriarchal language. Other spellings are also used; *womban* (a reference to the womb) **or** *womon* (singular), and *wimmin* (plural) or womxn which refers to a more inclusive category including those not assigned female gendered at birth.

"patri-Oakers," claiming that they were not at all free of patriarchies' oppressions among them.

CREATING "CONSENT CULTURE" AND "SAFE SPACES"

As mentioned, "building consent culture" is put into the context of creating "safe space," which could be argued to be an example of what Davina Cooper (2014) coined as "everyday utopias," spaces in which utopias may be performed. Producing space that is safe means several things for my interlocutors. Similar to the public, safe debate has often handled issues of freedom of expression. Safe space in social movements often denotes safety from oppression in spaces, and this can be construed as anything from "safe from the male gaze" as one member described it, or as another said, "safe from the white gaze," or as a new member put it to feel "safe to be myself." The most important goal of this is to prevent rape from happening, even the rapes that are often understood as consensual but somewhat problematic sex. But other aspects of social interaction, such as comfortability and fun, are often named as important when safe spaces are created.

The project of creating safe spaces is also reflected in certain living arrangements, such as downstairs Oneida, the SLG where only women are allowed to live, and men will be expected to be invited in or refrain from entering for specific periods during the day. This particular safe space creation was also influenced early by members who were inspired by lesbian separatist movements. During the women's gathering, men were asked to refrain from nearing the conference site, and there were efforts to establish queer safe spaces, perhaps even an SLG.

At the end of my fieldwork, the communards were working on including changes in the policies that would solidify that consent also meant "felt consent," not just verbal affirmative consent, since coercion is seen as rape among the communards. That means that a person may feel coerced to sex or might not feel comfortable with something that happened after sex. "Feeling" consent can indeed be different from giving it verbally. Implementing "felt" consent into policy can also be seen as a form of resistance against the focus on "affirmative" consent, as breaching consent is a

mode of governance deemed too complex to pertain only to verbal communication. Consent studies have mainly focused on affirmative consent and the abilities of the person to give consent, or the moral implications of various work fields where consent is a legal obligation (Miller and Wertheimer 2010). Therefore, it is particularly important to problematize even the micro-behaviorisms that are somewhat coercive or breaching of consent in events to consider how consent is flexible and ambiguous even when the norms related to it are fixed. How consent may feel is something that is seen in community as something that can be developed, a form of skill or ability that is attempted, emphasized, or restructured in community.

Furthermore, communards also practiced how consent feels, and how energy in rooms will shift when consent is redrawn or not given, as I will show. However, before exploring more on how consent is handled in community as part of an egalitarian project, it is important to contextualize this issue within a wider scope of social activism. This is important for the community in the process of developing a more egalitarian understanding of affirmative consent, which is also highly focused on.

Consent as a movement

In the foreword "Ask: Building Consent Culture" (2017), activist Laurie Perry writes, "sex is where it starts, but when is anything ever about sex? The overriding of consent has become not just a social norm but a mode of governance" (2017). Twin Oaks policy had already included recognition of issues of consent a long time ago, and that consent as an implemented and highlighted norm was not only important for sexual relations but also in all social interaction and had integrated policies into their everyday lives which would counteract aspects of this type of governance by introducing a new form of intentional relationship to new norms of self-governance. Oppressive behavior is predicated on ignoring consent, which is a justice and equality issue.

"Consent" has become a buzzword in the (feminist) public sphere, as feminists, especially in the US, started speaking of the issues of boundary crossing. Where the

concept originated is hard to genealogically trace, though it is suspected that consent culture and clear establishment of rules of intimate interaction are derived from sexual subcultures, for instance BDSM, whose practitioners often explicitly arrange norms and boundaries and "safe words" to make sure the interaction does not defile anyone's boundaries. Consent culture was increasingly being implemented in policies in the US from the late 1980s and early 1990s and focused in the beginning on particularly college campuses' problems with sexual abuse (Burnett et al. 2009).

One interlocutor had been through such an experience and explained to me how much consent meant to her in the aftermath of her sexual assault. She described to me the difficulties of trusting men after her abuse and said, "even though we practice consent when we have sex, I at some point started to freak out, but he has been very good with me to try to understand, but I still feel vulnerable." She further explained, "It is the male gaze that skeeves me out."

It seemed like Twin Oaks was ahead of the curve when it came to consent; however, it was clear that the community was tightly connected to the feminist movement outside, and also some of the people that came to community were. The Feminist Think Tank on the farm used at one-point college information to think about their feminism and consent culture, as shown when one of the members circulated an information e-mail about sexual assault on UVA campus that was quite extensive in explaining the problematics, and what types of services would be available for victims. Many have waited for the form of documented and defined conceptualizations of harassment and assault that was finally being thoroughly debated due to all the people that were pressing forth the issue in social movements.

Many of the members on the farm posted #MeToo during the days after the allegations toward various profiled politicians, actors, directors, and musicians. People all over the world took to performing this statement in public, showing the enormous extent to which sexual assault and harassment work in da-to-day social interactions. Even though I found people open about their sexual assault histories, it seemed that the engagement people on the farm had on this issue was deep and was performed through mediums, such as Facebook, where some had written their long histories of

harassment and assault from various people in their lives. Most of them tell tales of repetitive sexual assault from different people.

Twin Oaks Consent Norms

As mentioned, consent at Twin Oaks expands to other social spheres; any kind of question or touch may be expected to be only executed with informed and affirmative consent and can be retracted at any point. For example, if someone is teaching another member something, and will have to get in physical contact with them, like correcting their hand placement or shifting their bodies in any way, they will ask for consent. The boundaries they have drawn can sometimes result in volatile discussion, but others felt like they could finally set the boundaries that they had felt the need to do earlier in their lives, or for some allowed for a process of self-discovery. For the most part, consent norms were treated as a normal part of everyday life, and rarely raised much debate. These boundaries are also created to minimize conflict and to let people decide themselves if they want to be involved in a situation or a conversation. The events where consent was breached varied in character and gravity for the communards.

As mentioned, all visitors must attend orientation meetings, and it was during such a meeting that my visitor group was introduced to some of the intricacies of social life and relationships that should function through the workings of consent. “It becomes important that you can decide for yourself when you want to be touched or whatever. Relationships get very intense here fast,” our teacher for the moment told us. “Like, if I want to go into a room where people are already hanging out, should I ask for consent to join them?” someone asked. “I mean, yeah, I guess it depends of course, but I think I would in that situation,” the teacher said. Then I asked: but what about physical contact? Is it awkward to say no to a hug? Would you feel bad, or I don’t know, I don’t know how I would feel if someone refused a hug from me.” The teacher seemed like they had received this question before, and some of the other visitors nodded and looked to the teacher for answers to my question. “No, I don’t feel like that, but I have been here for a while, and I don’t feel uncomfortable when people

say no to a hug from me, I don't think I would be very hurt if someone didn't want to hug me, I think I would think it was just a bad time for them. Or, you know, there are people I have that kind of relationship with, and those that I don't have that kind of relationships with. The important thing is to ask and learn how to communicate and read people!" she said before we moved on to her speaking about what it could be like to handle problematic relationships on the farm, urging us to look at the policies and involve others, perhaps, in getting advice, and the process team if we felt like the issue was serious.

Consent training is crucial for new visitors, but also when the community hosts parties, they will also often engage in consent training for guests so that they may participate better at the parties. At the annual and quite infamous New Year's Eve party, many community friends and guests will attend, and so the community urges the people from the outside and the members to go to the consent workshop that is held right before the party. For entrance into the party, one year the password was "consent."

Conflicts

"Don't be an asshole" was a term for a set of norms often used as a way to establish the norms in the community, which can be somewhat fluid in form. "Don't be an asshole" is a phrase also used to "check privilege." In other communities, they may use phrases like "check yourself," "check your mind," and similar terms to denote a sense that someone is out of line or not "on the same level" as the other people intermingling in an interaction. "Checking privilege" is a way to confront the oppressive behavior you might carry out yourself and forces the individual to gain perspectives on how situations may be understood from different angles between people with different social statuses. "Calling out" "white privilege" or "male privilege" are terms used to correct this behavior and is a social critique against male or white performativity that is perceived as colonizing or disruptive to the progress of the group.

Conflicts that emerged during the fieldwork can also be interpreted as extrapolated discussions on what is "good." The various ways in which communards have formed their policies and norms that tackle "consent" are continuously rehashed in the community as new members and old members must confront and deliberate upon new and recurring issues of consent. Learning how to treat each other with kindness and intentionality is part of the consent building that serves the purpose of creating "safe space."

Events where consent was not given and an act of a certain sensitive nature in accordance with policy and norms was performed or enacted shows that the efforts to inspire the creation of consent culture is far from unproblematic, and that communards implement resources like emotions and the skills to read micro-expressions into their understanding of consent. This requires practice, and self-governance because of the exclusions the community is likely to make in such processes.

It seemed to me that consent certainly was a "hot topic" of conversation in certain circles on the farm. Consent as embodied experience of shifting power dynamics arguably highlights the problems of ambivalence. In a sense, the issue becomes explorative: the individuals' self-discovery and the communal level of negotiating what egalitarianism is supposed to mean in their interactions while not knowing themselves what it entails. When I first arrived at TO, they had just had feedback for a member that breeched nudity norms and consent policies at different times. The following example shows how complex this matter is for the communards.

The Story of A Trickster at Twin Oaks

This is an example where a breach of consent made a community "trickster's" efforts to subvert policy into an event where utopian orientations point us to the intrinsic paradoxes of managing difference within practical egalitarian organization. Tricksters, here framed as archetypes, embody conflicts between the "repressed amoral desires of the individual and the moral demands of social life" (Laws 2019:1). The mockery of policy that the figure of the trickster performs appears to confront

different sorts of intentions and commitment to how to share spaces as egalitarians by acting on consent culture in shared spaces.

However, as the joking of trickster continued, it becomes apparent that the joke is denied. Kapferer and Handelman observed that individuals who wish to joke must receive a license from the people to whom the joke is directed (1972: 482). Handelman and Kapferer distinguished between two types of joking: Setting-specific joking, which depends primarily on resources derived locally. The structures of such joking can be fragile and follow an unspecified course. Category-routinized joking is anchored in more general social conventions and is more resistant to subversion. Jokes as such can produce fragility in social relationships. In this example, the conflict resolution process that ensued after the joke was denied showed ambivalence toward the intent of the trickster, but also toward what the joke indeed was (Handelman and Kapferer 1972).

On my first day at Twin Oaks visiting through work exchange, I was told about an art piece that had managed to rile up the community enough that they were about to have a "feedback." The member who had created the piece, which was a grass labyrinth cut into a grass lot, had announced the name of the piece "The Obsolescence of Feminism" on the community information board, called the 3 x 5. The hint that feminism was obsolete in the community had proved to be a deep symbolic provocation for many, and the community was buzzing with discussions about the intent of the piece, the member that had made it, and what the process from then on should be. The artist I was told had created this elaborate symbolic resistance piece after a conflict had emerged during a garden shift between himself and the other workers.

Managing masculinity is made important within the sections of policy that relate to feminist politics in the community. From these examples, I argue that at Twin Oaks it also relates to how bodies move, and how egalitarian communication in general is organized when sharing spaces. Egalitarianism also shapes the way consent is performed when it comes to nudity and gendered actions and interpretations of these actions.

The mentioned nudity norms often come into play when people synergized on different shifts where, for instance, it becomes hot and members would like to undress for comfort, or in different areas on the farm where different rules for nudity apply. The nudity norms are the result of quite intense community debates over the last 50 years, as freedom from societal norms surrounding clothing is often questioned by members. The general norm on a garden shift is that if you get hot and wish to take off clothing and go bare-chested, you will ask for consent from the other people on the shift. The nudity policy, which was last revised in 2004, comes with an explanation of the development of the policy, of which the details are often discussed in the community:

> The issue of nudity and toplessness is strongly tied to issues of body image, sex, safety, gender equity, child rearing, local relations, public image, and legalities. Though we all bring different perspectives to the debate, each person on the committee made concessions and is comfortable with the final policy and the way it came about... We want to address the inherent absurdity in this institutional mandate—one could be behaving in accordance with the policy at one moment, turn left, and suddenly be in violation of the policy. Thus, is the nature of boundaries. Please keep in mind our bylaws seek to "respect the liberty of each individual member to as great an extent as is consistent with the well-being of the community," and we think this policy is in keeping with that sentiment. In addition to respect for personal liberty is the commitment to uphold agreements. We urge members to respect the compromises that went into making this policy, to abide by the boundaries it sets forth, and not push limits that cause discomfort, generate conflict, or undermine cooperation. (Twin Oaks Community 2016:260)

The nudity policy is quite extensive and gives detailed descriptions of when and where nudity or toplessness is acceptable, which it often is, and describes the norms surrounding these issues. Under the sub-section of the policy named “work,” the

following premise is outlined:

> In close work environments, toplessness is ok if present co-workers' consent unless clear policy has been established for the area or location. Managers may make specific policies for work in their area. Additionally, when working with someone, respectfully ask your co-workers if they are comfortable with you being topless. For instance, it would be inappropriate to say, 'I'm going to take my shirt off. Do you have a problem with that?' Rather, something like 'Is it ok if I'm topless while we work?' If not, that's ok. If someone says they would rather not work with you topless, that should be the end of the discussion during the work shift. Please accept their answer gracefully. At a later time, you may wish to talk to them about it, but please do so in a sensitive manner (Twin Oaks Community 2016:261).

The trickster in question, let me call him Achilles, according to him,[25] wanted to tend to his curiosities, and had decided to "explore consequences" of the different policies in place in the community, particularly those that challenged and policed or corrected "oppressive behavior." During the garden shift, he performed a symbolic denial of the nudity policy and took off his shirt when he was expected to keep it on in solidarity with the people on the shift that did not feel comfortable doing so; according to the people on the shift, there were "strangers present." The conflict was ongoing, and when he produced the labyrinth and put up a note with his name, other members responded: "What is the point of this note? To stir up contention? That's about all it accomplishes," one of them wrote. It is norm to write your name next to comments you agree with or resonate with, so this response had some other names under it. Another person wrote, "Hope you explain yourself," and another, "Making a joke of feminism being obsolete in the incredibly unequal, sexist world that we live in is

[25] Here referencing what interlocutor said during the feedback. Reference taken from community notes from the meeting archives.

offensive and insulting to those who have to deal with that inequality every day. I like to think I have a pretty open sense of humor, but this crosses a line."

The tension between him as an individual and the communal, when putting limitations on his freedoms of expression, seemed intensified when he appeared unable to give a satisfactory response as to why he had acted the way he did, and what he wanted to achieve with his provocation. Instead, he spoke and wrote responses that seemed like riddles or jokes and got provoked even more. Many seemed angry and confused over his behavior. Others felt mocked and hurt. "I don't understand why he would stir the pot like this. He knew how pissed people would get," a member said during a garden shift where they were discussing the incident. He was creating confusion and tension and not the discussion about policy that he might have wanted, but I still wondered why his actions had received such highly emotional responses that were also transferred to a lengthy written discussion on the O&I board spanning over 35 pages of handwritten commentary and analysis of the behavior, art piece, and garden politics. The conflict over his joking behavior became so big that the community eventually called for a "feedback." Victor Turner's theories of such conflicts as conceptualizes them as performative "social dramas". Social drama is defined as a "harmonic or disharmonic social process, arising in conflict situations" (Turner 1974:37; Turner and Turner 1985:180). Further, it can be seen as "an eruption from the level surface of ongoing social life, with its interactions, transactions, reciprocities, its customs making for regular, orderly sequences of behavior" (Turner and Turner 1985:196). These social dramas may create tensions in social settings.

Turner (1985), in his social drama theory, accounted for the depth and range of social processes through four phases. According to his model, a social drama usually involves: a *breach*, meaning when the social norm is violated; the *crisis,* where participants address their orientation toward the breach; *redressive action*; and reintegration of the social group, or what could also end in "irreconcilable schism."

When it became time for the feedback where the community would discuss with him the appropriate responses to his behavior in the garden and the provocation of the art piece, he again provoked members by avoiding questions or speaking in

what many called "riddles." Members tried to explain how it had provoked them that he had insinuated that feminism was obsolete and wanted to know ways it was also connected to the incident on the garden shift. Some mentioned wanting to feel safe, and one member said that they considered this policy to be designed so that young women and especially children could see what solidarity between feminist allies would look like, so that they could create a better future. I came to believe that this ambivalent figure can tell us something about egalitarian sociality in general, particularly egalitarian ICs.

We see here that the conflicts often gain momentum through intentional performances of egalitarian norms and values. These social surges take on the form of egalitarian negotiations; the freedom of the individual is met with ambivalence because his joking and difficult response was not interpreted as legitimate or egalitarian.

Achilles, it seemed, had taken on the role of a type of trickster of Twin Oaks, but was considered to be the selfish buffoon that takes the joke too far. Also, I found that the trickster was very seldom appreciated in the community because they require several resources, which may be limited, to manage. The trickster—or similarly the joker, comedian, buffoon, court jester or the clown or even shadow figure—has been widely recognized as crucial in anthropological analysis. In anthropology, tricksters are often related to egalitarianism, as they are provocateurs of hierarchies and social boundaries, and inhabit insoluble ambiguities and tensions of society (Laws 2019).

The egalitarian trickster arguably points to the limits, lines, borders, and ambivalence of community organization, questioning, making fun of, or playing with the usefulness and relevance of various egalitarian policies that are in place; thus, they open for new debates and discussions by forcing an even stronger attention to difference. When his jokes are denied, the paradoxes of inclusion and exclusion are highlighted. The joke here breaks the premises of an accepted framework of joking, and the joke in a sense becomes a "matter out-of-place," something that must be ritually handled.

Trickster's performances (particularly those that play parts in rituals, conflict, politics, media, literature, and art) show us new dimensions of consciousness, as a collective representation or summation of tensions for a community. The cultural significance of the complexities of such social characters are deemed often valuable because tricksters are carriers of subversive meaning, and they are often depicted as morally ambivalent characters—characters yet to make sense of or the character that commits "cultural blasphemies." In this case, he must be investigated as a transformer of meaning and boundaries. Since he went too far, the boundary has been breached and he is excluded.

In psychoanalysis, the trickster is seen as a figure of irrational, blind impulses and the unconscious emerging. Carl Jung analyzed them as one of the archetypes that are recurring in human history and showed how tricksters can take over the psyche of a group (Jung 2016). Paul Radin (Radin et al. 1972) suggested early that the tricksters in North American Indigenous tribes are at the same time creators and destroyers, givers, and negators; the tricksters there could fool others while at the same time fool themselves. The tricksters as such emerge as either selfish buffoons or as cultural heroes (Laws 2019). It is in a similar predicament we find our trickster. In a review of Gabriella Coleman's (2014) book on the hacker underground organization, Anonymous Geismar states an important point:

> Tricksters are holders of double-edged swords. While they may encourage levity, we should also take them seriously as both a cultural form and as a mode of description powerful enough to constitute social relations and identities(Geismar 2015).

Achilles' performance reached the borders of the acceptable and creates uncertainty, yet his "joke" or "rite of resistance" remains forceful. What did he point to be a paradox of "freedom to" and "freedom from," and a tension between the individual and the communal regarding consent, as the use of the policy outdated? What reactions come from feminist practices? Did it perform the obligations of feminist

intent? Was this form of feminism still useful?

One member tried to understand the labyrinth, suggesting that the labyrinth may have been a symbolic representation of what the artist projected as a desire for the future that his art piece symbolized a form of "micro-utopia" and that his message was to create an imagery of a time when feminism would have succeeded to the point of becoming obsolete.

> Achilles, you know I'm a fan of the labyrinths. Could you tell us more about how you view the symposium of labyrinths? I see them as a walking thought journey… In addition to adding thoughtful spaces, they are also beautiful, with some mystery. Labyrinths seem like a utopian concept/decoration. The 'Obsolescence of Feminism' it seems, forms a certain perspective to be a utopian ideal, right? Perfect society = no more sexism! Yay! Except that utopia is theory and then there is the reality that feminism will or may not ever be obsolete (Enter rant explaining why feminism is still current). As someone who is intelligent and into educating himself and living here in a feminist atmosphere, and who hopefully cares about the sexist experiences of his friends, I hope you consider educating yourself more about feminism… Perhaps a name like 'Validation of Feminism' or 'Obscurity of Feminism' might be better names for the spirals.

Achilles pushed the community to revisit their common purposes, especially those related to creating a safer space for women and for women in the future; the joke served a purpose. His performance created unexpected volatility, which was further diffused by a ritual of resolution that only solved certain aspects of the conflict, while my informants and interlocutors also accepted its innate failure. The trickster artist was socially excluded as a result, and eventually left. Also, the trickster is a utopian here, as he shows the failure of the nudity policy to relive the community of toxic masculinity, asking: did this policy lead us toward equality, or does it need to be

improved? The trickster serves the purpose of highlighting the tension so that the community may conduct a reorientation toward the good and the egalitarian through emphasizing the need for consent before acting.

Comparatively, we can consider the work of Megan Laws (2019) on tricksters in Northeastern Namibia, where tricksters show ambivalence toward the people that they share with. The Jú|'hoànsi (meaning "real people") of northern Namibia who revere equality as an intrinsic good. The statement is comparative—a slight on *jú dórésín* (other people) who refuse the demands of those who are not close relatives or those they trust, and who see the act of demanding from others as deeply shameful. Conversely, to be jù jàn (a "good" person) among the Jú|'hoànsi is to sìn ||àn (just demand) and sìn |'àn jú (just give to people) (2019: 1). Demand-sharing among the "real people" stirs tricksters to engage in mockery, which strikes a balance between difficulties of knowing and the shame of doubting and suspecting others; the figures of tricksters here confront different sorts of uncertainty over conditions of transparency and perceptions of trustworthiness. Showing through the story of Kuma, the trickster that tricks a person into lending him money, and the story of Etsu who borrows money to gamble or lure tourists into collecting firewood that he would then resell to local shop owners[26].

[26] Laws argues; "What are otherwise 'good' ways of behaving toward others demanding (or even taking) from those who have more than they can consume and giving people the freedom to choose when and how they reciprocate—become primary means through which people, such as Kuma and Etsu, are said to take advantage of others. At the heart of these freedoms is the shared recognition that people should not be forced to act in a manner that is not of their own choosing. It is a value that makes ethical action less about retribution than it is about getting people to contemplate the morality of their own actions. Individuals cannot take their own perspectives as truth and use them as means to force others to act in a manner of their own choosing" (2019:5).

Though Etsu and Kuma are rarely chastised, though sometimes the bud of others mockery, the trickster at TO was in the end. Since consent here was related to the issue of establishing "safe spaces," and it was in other cases where it seemed that consent was unveiling more thoroughly what it means to feel uncertain or insecure in a space- it was questioned whether or not he was a "good egalitarian".

The joke showed the dangers of allowing individual egalitarian freedoms, as freedom of force was not prioritized over the freedom of feeling safe by ways of implementing consent norms. The shaming of the joker and the joke is a way to assure egalitarianism. Was this a moment of egalitarian renewal or one of egalitarian flexibility? This event opens up the highlighted tensions of various forms of egalitarianism that are at odds or become merged in practical daily events. As such, we see that not only is egalitarianism in a dyadic relationship with hierarchies but that different egalitarianism(s) are intersecting that become especially exacerbated through various social dramas. Let me illustrate tensions like these by exploring another ethnographic extract that reveals egalitarianism as a dramatic conflict that induces serious consequences for communards.

Consent and Sex

When I returned to Twin Oaks in the summer of 2018, almost three years since the incident with Achilles, they had recently had problems with a member who had been accused of several incidents of problematic understanding of consent. I was still unclear about the details of the story and was asking for updates on the current discourse on "consent culture" in the community.

I interviewed Demeter on the farm, and she said,

> The problem is that the people that care and show up for the conversations are the same ones, and not the people that really need to be showing up to these things. Like we have all struggles with this, and it's hard. But like, we shouldn't be having problems with this anymore, this is Twin Oaks!! But now we've had

> like two kinds of surprising culprits. Odinia said she was disappointed in us for not being her for her during all of that, and I feel bad, but I don't know…

I stepped in. "She did have other issues though; this is definitely not the first time we've heard about consent issues with her. I don't think I actually know what happened the last time either, but I remember that I didn't think it seemed like a serious thing when I was told about it." Demeter nodded, "Yeah, like it's weird, like, I don't think she would ever want to make anyone feel uncomfortable, she is just this like, sexual being, but also so loving. She would never push if she knew."

Evaluating what happened when breeches of consent arise from different perspectives can be a painful process. Often, mediations, with the help of the Process Team, are a big part of conflict resolution in such processes. If the event that happened was particularly bad, the "perpetrator" can be expelled immediately in collaboration between the Process Team, sometimes the mental health team, and the Planners.

Since the community still has not removed itself from society around, it still faces the consequences of that intermingling of outside and inside, and some parts of the community may not be as receptive to doing work explicitly on these issues, so events where consent norms are breached still happens. Achilles, the trickster pointed to earlier, also shows a case where the "fundamentalism" of feminist egalitarianism in that particular case was critiqued.

While asking some of my interlocutors about the history of feminism in the community, Lord, one of the younger long-term members who had been in the community from an early age, answered,

> I feel like we definitely had a stronger and harder core of feminists before, some of them are still here, but we had a bit more confrontational people, a bit more of a call-out culture where the tone was sometimes pretty brutal.

The same sentiments were also expressed by other members; Star Train had recently begun working with consent as a topic in her personal development and was beginning to host workshops on the topic in the community, and she also collaborated with other spaces of civic engagement by contributing to workshops elsewhere. She remarked that the community always had issues getting over some of the problems they were having with consent. She said,

> I think the feminism here used to be a bit more in your face. Consent takes practice, like you saw during our workshop, and we get new members all the time that might not be used to this kind of thinking. It can be very hard, and might take a long time… Unfortunately, like so often, the people that really need the workshops don't come or show interest.

The community had just had a feedback a few months before based on an event where one member crossed another member's boundaries during a party. The community gossip informed me that the person that felt violated had tried to show his disinterest by showing physical signs of discomfort. When I spoke to the person accused of breaching consent, she implied that she was thoroughly distressed, not feeling supported by the community anymore. She communicated that she had perhaps been too aggressive, but she certainly did not mean to be.

Star Train commented and said,

> You know, it happens, sometimes we are clumsy and not receptive of the other person's feelings. And I think we need to practice it all the time (meaning practicing at consent). It can be such small things that can show us when someone is uncomfortable or retracting consent.

When events like these happen, the community often tries to shift focus to consent culture, and hosts workshops or discussions on the matter. Conflict resolution strategies are often in place, and there will be a team that handles the issues. When

such events happen, it varies a lot what the reaction of the community is. In cases of sexual violence and transgressions, the Process Team can ask a member to leave immediately but will do so in dialogue with both the victim and the perpetrator.

Sometimes, when serious offenses like this happen, there will be inter-community exchanges over how to tackle problematic individuals, since many members as mentioned severally travel between the communities. Some members were happy that they had developed a system where the community could protect itself effectively, while others noted to me that they were ambivalent about not involving police or doing more to help the situations. Some members have also been asked to leave on suspicion of having sexual needs that made other members feel unsafe. Visitors are not allowed to baby sit nor do childcare alone, as the community prefers to screen people before letting them intermingle with children. This is also important since the community has issues with and does not want to do full backup checks on potential new members.

Thus, we see the need and the desire for safety as part of the orientation toward equality and community. Hence, learning how to conduct a consent culture is a process worth considering more closely.

Learning how to feel consent

Star Train held a new workshop, when I visited in 2018, that she had been working on for a while. Here, she introduced methods from her martial arts training into the practices of consent. I attended but promised the other people there that I would not write about them, so after the workshop, I asked Lord about the workshop instead.

I had asked what had spurred her interest in this topic, and why she had decided to arrange the workshop now.

“Well, we have the rave later today, which is part of the reason, we sometimes do this before big parties, but also because of the recent events.” We then went on to speak about her history of doing workshops and training in martial arts.

Star Train: "It is essentially about empowerment for me. It is about being truly in your body, knowing how it feels, and then being able to use that to let my body pick up on the messages other people are sending me. I learn to read the situation, their body through knowing mine better."

Mari: "Can I ask you how that feels? Like yesterday, when we were practicing, and you told us to try to feel like we wanted to go in two directions."

Star Train: "Oh yes, and after you left, I also showed how I can also sit with my face away with my eyes closed and I could be right about the other person retracting and giving consent."

The exercises had included training where we had been told to try to read the other person's changes in mood and shifts in "intentions of retracting or giving consent." Star Train had shown us how she could feel a shift in the room, or that the other person could give off an energy that one might be able to sense or read.

Mari: "Yeah, like how does that feel, like, can you describe that to me when you are able to pick up those minor things, because it seemed to me when we were doing it, very tiny minor things, like little twitches in the nose, or even just a widening of the eyes, right? Like, how can you sense it when not even looking?"

She then described to me that she had learned to read micro-expressions, that she sensed a type of shift in vibration, in the air, and that she would even without noticing shift her body toward the person if they give her consent or being pulled away if they retract it. "That's why practice is so important!" she concluded. From Star Train, we understand that consent is about a lot more than learning how to flirt without making people feel uncomfortable. It is an embodied learning process about what it means to behave as equals, and the feedback shows us that similarly to Skinner's "behavioral engineering," the correction of people through feedbacks, workshops, or mediations on consent and reorientations may shift the gaze of members to get to know their own boundaries, their freedoms, and others "as a utopian practice toward the good." A female member at the neighboring community, Acorn, yelled out during a heated discussion on consent in their smoking shack: "We will be fucking escorting

you off the property if you breach the consent norms. That's the way we do things here, get used to it."

Judging from this statement, consent is certainly a highpoint of importance. For many interlocutors, it was expressed as liberating that they could feel safe that there would be reactions if they were not respected. This in itself is transformational and being part of the decision is part of the empowerment process that is part of learning how to be egalitarians together. This requires skill to navigate and to explore, which can be a quite demanding and sensitive process.

Concluding remarks on Consent in egalitarian utopia

In summation, I have argued that "Building consent culture" is a utopian practice that anti-hegemonizes how everyday interactions will be performed, and showed how this relates to power hierarchies and values; those that are apparent and explicit as well as those that are hidden or veiled, with intentionality and commitment toward liberation and safety. Consent becomes a way of organizing and performing egalitarian relations and hierarchy, but also influences how communards go about exploring and shifting discourse on the tension between freedom and commitment to the communal. This must happen through an enskillment process that allows for individuals to explore new ways of being. It also allows for introspection for the individual, giving them space and tools to find a stronger sense of what they are comfortable with. I have shown here how consent can show problems of hierarchy, exclusion, and authority in community, but also that the inclusion of "felt" consent into norms and policy systems can show us the problems of solely focusing on affirmative consent in combatting oppression and sexual violence, for instance. This contribution informs a deeper understanding of ideas that can inform new policies that allow for the flexibility that complexity of consent demands and requires.

Consent is a practical egalitarian concern and utopian practice that makes the actions for improvement an exploration of the embodied boundaries the individual feels, and a reorientation toward finding ways of generating egalitarian relationships and social norms. This exploration of what the individual needs regarding the

community, building on consent and intentionality toward the good, is also the strides ICs make in reformulating relationships to labor.

Now, I shall direct the attention to some of the most important shared activities in community, work, and labor organization so that the reader will get a better understanding of what happens in everyday life in the community. As I will show, feminism also has plenty to do with the way work is organized.

CHAPTER 6

WORK AND RIGHTEOUS LIVELIHOOD

In Chapter 1, I introduced the reader to an intern, Oman, who before coming to the community was selling roofs and windows to people he felt did not need them. He was looking for non-exploitative and more meaningful work and more time for his Hebrew studies. Many others like him come to community to pursue a lifestyle in community where they will have to give up the meritocratic egalitarianism that dominates the ethos of the American Dream; the ideals they have held about working hard and experiencing individual struggle will eventually pave the road to financial success for the individual will be challenged and reimagined through sharing the means of production.

These neoliberal workings of the corporate state that now shape the lives of workers in America have, for some, produced "moral shocks," as I have already touched upon. For some, their desires related to work fulfillment cannot be matched with the financial obligations they have, or they feel like working will produce the future they want. Coming to the community introduces new ways of organizing labor, new ways to perform the work and what meaning and relationships come from such activities. Some that come there have been traumatized through work and have been treated badly or pushed to treat others badly.

However, this quest for a better world of meaningful and sustainable egalitarian work organization must be balanced with the needs of the group. This points to tensions between the individual's pursuit of happiness in work and the bureaucratic formation and actual needs of the group within the scope of egalitarian "values" when sharing all resources. Exclusions or conflicts based on the inability or lack of commitment to perform labor happens frequently. This provides a set of complexities that must be solved within an egalitarian open experiment, like Twin Oaks, where inclusivity and activism is intersected with organization. Capitalism and bureaucracy are both critiqued and made useful here. By exploring these tensions, we see that those new forms of anxieties surrounding labor dominate the new members that come to

community, and some argue that despite the effort of making all work equally valued, the community still produces a form of class system in some cases, while in others, the meaning of work is transformed into "the good" or "right livelihood."

To me, one of the most interesting things to observe is what happens when people do work within community parameters; the detailed discussion of how to go about it, how to plan it, and how to improve it, show many interesting aspects of egalitarian practicalities, skills and its mediations, performances, and negations. The experiments with labor organizations are influenced by desires to establish equality and solidarity, with a significant focus on gender due to the feminist focus of the members. I have come to consider how these negotiations demonstrate that utopians develop wide skill sets for problem solving with little resources available, often engaging with play and fun that appeals to sentiments of liminoid qualities of *communitas* (Turner 1982) to negate difficulties and produce more meaningful work experiences. This process could be seen as merging with a mode of governance that redefines production into being a mode of co-operation where wages, products, and social relationships are shared. However, at other times, the communards are aware of potential pitfalls and merging new hierarchies or issues of the system becoming "too egalitarian" or inegalitarian and face these tensions with intentionality toward further experimentation.

In this chapter, I explore what this entails and further consider the tensions of achieving meaningful and egalitarian relationships with and within income-sharing labor organizations where, in a sense, I juxtapose fun, play, enjoyment, and flow in producing meaningful work with more frugal bureaucratic entanglements that balance resources. First, this chapter outlines how labor is organized at Twin Oaks before exploring how such conflicts show us that egalitarian labor organization often grapples with a tension between achieving togetherness, solidarity, meaningfulness, for instance, through play while working, with flexible bureaucracy, efficiency, and capitalism. With this, I will try to highlight the ambiguities within practical egalitarianism where liminoid experiences, like sharing, solidarity, and belonging are

often at odds with the bureaucratic organization of egalitarianism or the pursuits of the "good life."

PRACTICAL UTOPIAS AND REIMAGINING OTHER WAYS OF WORKING

Utopians and alternative communities, especially religious ones, have developed social organizations that have focused on reimagining labor relationships in societies, often exploring how and if ideal commonwealths could be organized in such a way that problems of labor would be explored and resolved. Especially, the sexual division of labor has been in question in such experiments. Literary utopias have also often grappled with the potential trouble that may arise in utopia when it comes to labor.

Originally published in 1516, Thomas More's Utopia was almost prophetic in its musings over the tension between leisure and work. Everyone in his utopia was assigned tasks; women do lighter work, while men do heavier work. More depicted how slaves would be the solution to the work that was too demanding, while work such as farming was done by everyone. More (2014) explained what seemed like the constant predicament of balancing labor shortage with population control and the commitment of individuals to performing the work. Utopian tradition, from its conceptual beginnings, has thus grappled with the same problems in gaining and maintaining collective harmony through, or perhaps despite, "work."

In B. F Skinner's *Walden Two,* he depicted that an experimental system had already reached a balance where the community members had enough leisure time and only worked for four hours every day with their chosen labor, and unwanted tasks were distributed among the members (Skinner 1969). When the experiment was to be reenacted at Twin Oaks, the first few years were dominated by the lack of skills, enormous amounts of work, poor living conditions, and big conflicts related to the commitment of members to do all the work. Twin Oaks is now known in the movement to be a "labor oriented" community, meaning that the labor system is extensive, time, budgets, and tasks rigidly scheduled, and members are considered concerned with labor in many different ways. Edward Bellamy's utopian science

fiction novel, *Looking Backward* (1888), where the regimented work system outlined is pursued to develop a sense of pride rather than just making a living, was also partly influential in developing the labor structure at TO (Kuhlman 2010).

In most other communities, the demands of labor are much higher than what Skinner might have envisioned being the ideal for such alternative experimentations. It is also the topic area where the community movement in general shows great innovation, flexibility, and important experimentation in how to establish just and equal work conditions. Efforts to establish equity between members with differences can be tricky, as I will show, and conflicting ideals of equal contribution and equitable conditions often produce problems. The denial of difference through the demands for participation is a recurring conflict.

Most human groups have some term we might translate as “work,” in the sense of goal-directed activity that is distinct from something approximating play or leisure. Work within the household is often not recognized as such, as feminist anthropologists have explained, and the line between work and other activities may be blurred (Hann 2018). The blurring of lines between play, leisure, and work I hold in co-operative movements is worth examining because it shows daily life’s ambiguity toward economic and work activities, here framed as the pursuit of ethical and meaningful work that is non-exploitative—though as I will show, this pursuit is often faulted for being “too egalitarian.”

Anthropologies of work have considered a considerable array of aspects of lived life, modes of livelihood, consumption, money and barter, the gift, markets. Some have problematized the universalism of work within capitalism.

The historical development of work as an individualistic endeavor comes from the emergence of wage-labor, according to Marx. In *German Ideology,* Marx and Engels (1970) held that production always means the production of material goods and social relations, and by extension human beings. They held that “if labor comprises all those creative actions whereby, we shape and reshape the world around us, ourselves, and especially each other, material wealth only exists to further that task of shaping one another into the sort of beings we feel ought to exist, and we would wish to have around

us" (1970: Graeber 2013:223). "Reproductive labor," which has later been stressed by Marxist feminists in particular, housework, childcare, the making, shaping, education, nurturance, and maintenance of those who perform labor should not be viewed as some secondary phenomenon to waged labor. It can be seen as "the very core and essence of human creative life" (Graeber 2013). These forms of reproductive labor are equally recognized at Twin Oaks, as they are equally accredited. These efforts have been highly influenced by feminist practices.

In the reading of Marx, David Graeber held that Marx is really grasping the fetishizing of money; money represents both the value (importance) and as creative actions (labor), as such it becomes the object of desire. These values may also be other things; it is easy to see the same tendency for the object that represents and embodies the value of a certain genre of creative activity (Graeber 2013). In the TO community, money, and wages are as mentioned a secondary property and not given to the individual worker, but spent communally; thus, the primary surplus value of importance can be symbolic capital, for instance, "fun" or "meaningful," educational," etc. In the community, sharing reproductive labor and introducing gender and class equity structures is meant to relieve this tension of having to make money, while also achieving contentment, righteousness, and ethical, equitable, equal labor organization.

Scheduling and voluntary self-chosen labor

At Twin Oaks, all labor is accredited equally; one hour of work produces one labor credit. The labor quota for each member for each week changes some but stayed at 42–43 hours for most of my membership. The one exception is certain kinds of childcare, where you will have to take care of two children to achieve a full labor credit for an hour of work. While some would claim that this produces inequality within the system, others maintained that it was necessary for efficiency to have two children. But not all labor is accredited the same status. Before I delve into the various tensions that such systems produce, let me outline some of the details of the labor organizing system.

There are over 100 different work areas on the farm, some in income-producing areas, some in childcare, some in food production, and others in household chores, for example, cooking and carpentry (see Appendix A for full overview). Since the community is quite big, there is an expansive system in place to account for all the work that needs to get done. The main income-producing work areas are tofu and soy-food production, seeds, hammocks, and book indexing, and some income comes from the production and sales of ornamental flowers. The community saves plenty of the surplus they produce or invest in their facility upgrades.

Other communities, such as East Wind, do things differently; they have what is called an "industrial quota" of 12 hours a week, where the member must work in one of the money-making areas but also have a lower quota of 35. Their nut business also generates good business; therefore, the allowance for each member is higher than at Twin Oaks.

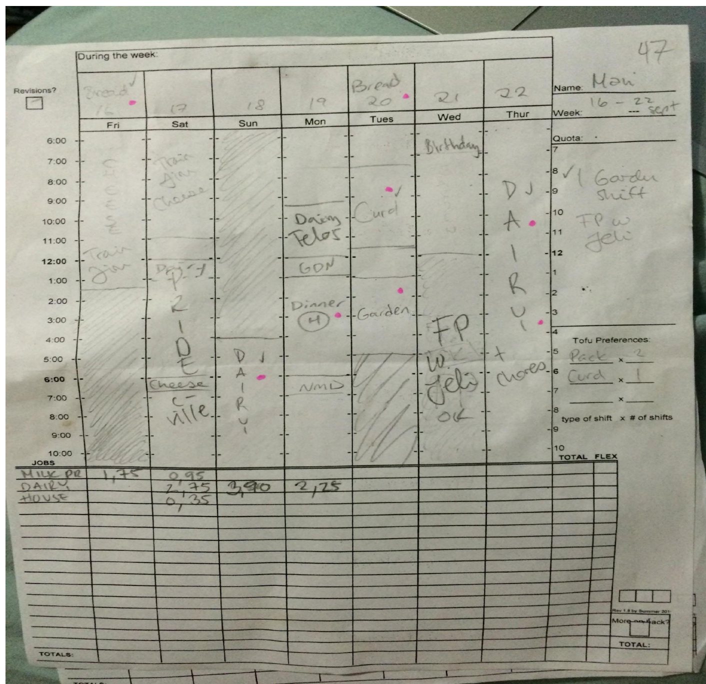

FIGURE 14- EXAMPLE OF LABOR SHEET

To organize the community's labor, much effort is usually put into organizing shifts and work areas. At Living Energy Farm, which is a lot smaller, the members and visitors would discuss the tasks for the day ahead over breakfast, while at Twin Oaks, all labor is scheduled weekly.

There, the schedules are made over a few days by a labor assigner after members hand in a preliminary schedule. Handed in on time, the community offers the member 2,5 hours of labor quota. If you hand in your sheets on time, you can easily save extra hours. The extra hours that are worked beyond 42 hours, and the hours received by handing in the sheet on time, can be used for vacation time or leisure. On the schedule, the members can write in their regular obligations and other happenings in the coming week, and cross off the times they do not wish to be assigned anything. Schedules vary a lot; some do different jobs, while others limit themselves to one or two jobs a week. Some wish to decide their schedule all by themselves and do work that does not need to happen at specific times. Tofu shifts are assigned first by a special assigner that only handles tofu work before the second labor assigner makes the additional schedule. In the schedule, the member or visitor can request shifts, trainings on new jobs, or even make dates with their friends to either work with them or meet them. The communards are free to set new types of schedules every week; therefore, they choose for themselves how much scheduled work they would want or days they want off.

The schedule is an important part of everyday interactions, which has made it also necessary for the community to have an overview of the schedules of everyone. All schedules are put together in a folder each week and put out in two communal spots so that people might find the schedules of others if they need to see them or speak with them. This is called the "people finder." The people finder reveals a complicated system of leisure and work that goes into the everyday lives of the members and contains the labor sheet of everyone on the farm. Transparent labor systems introduce both flexibility and rigid control systems that make sure contributions are equal from everyone. As such, egalitarian practicalities are formalized in this case.

The labor puzzle is hard to organize for the labor assigners. They will ask the members if they may change things or set them up for new types of training and so on. Some members work in several work areas on the farm; some work in two or three, while a few members mostly stick to one labor area—these were mostly the older members on the farm that had been in community for a long time and had made their routine to nourish one work area.

For example, Herbavora, one of the older female members, works almost solely in the herb garden that she created, and the community allows her take labor credits to tend to it and to make the surroundings at Twin Oaks more beautiful. She would create major pieces of art out of her garden and amuse the communards by cutting bushes into different shapes, putting lights in them, and so on. She also puts out little figurines that somewhat move around a bit. Sometimes, there is a big plastic spider on the rock by the path to ZK; other times, it is a mouse statue. Hamal, one of the long-term male members, likes to do mostly hammock weaving and prefers to do so alone, and works a lot at night. Demeter, a newer member, works with different processes with the seeds business, and she has three different jobs in the tofu hut and does some food processing during summer and fall. She also stocks the kitchen with what the cooks need, and sometimes makes communal lunches. Pingly, one of the new provisional members, tried to be trained in some of the work in all labor areas so that he could eventually find the work that suited him best. Exploring work is important to establish what it means to be "egalitarian," especially some find the freedom from and freedom to explore new types of work that they hope to be satisfying. Let me exemplify this with the experiments of creating gender equality in work distribution.

FIGURE 15- HERBAVORA'S HERB GARDEN

FIGURE 16- GARDENING SCHEDULES IN THE SHED AT TWIN OAKS

Undoing Gendered Divisions of Labor

As a feminist culture, at Twin Oaks we tend to disregard traditional gender roles and behavior. Women and men choose their roles in the community based

on their interests, strengths, and passions and not on anyone else's preconceived notions" (Twin Oaks Community 2010).

Before delving into various ways in which work is made important to assess egalitarian potential, to produce egalitarian governance and "skills," or flow, communitas, play, and fun, it should be noted that one of the most important strides of communities, such as Twin Oaks, is their approach to anti-hegemonization and estrangement to "traditional" gendered divisions of labor. Twin Oaks has had long-standing commitments to overcoming gender-biased inequitable work that devalues what is traditionally seen as "women's work" often in reproductive labor structures. Twin Oaks handled such imbalances early in their development but still struggles with the inability to easily relieve members of the cultural conditioning they have received in the outside. As we saw earlier in the third chapter, Wagner noted the non-traditional division of labor and attire. Women were liberated through communal meals and shared responsibilities in household chores. Women are also particularly encouraged to engage in non-traditional work, and sometimes members will organize workshops targeted particularly at women that want to learn work that has been conditioned into being more comfortable for men, such as carpentry.

While I was in the field, several other academics and students came along into the community, some of whom I spoke with and some I barely met. One undergrad was there to write about the institutional memory of the community and did a visitor period, while a few others were interested in the legacy of behaviorism in the community to write different forms of papers in mostly psychology—most of these did not do long-term fieldwork. But Jules Griffin[27], a young undergrad student in sociology and anthropology, had long been a friend of the community and is now a full member. They have done some brilliant work on the labor system at Twin Oaks and work more with quantitative data than myself, so they were a very welcomed addition to my thought process, since my main focus was not on gendered aspects of

[27] In reference list named "Julia".

work. They visited Twin Oaks for fieldwork, where they based her undergrad thesis on the gendered divisions and roles in labor at Twin Oaks, and I appreciated our talks about our observations. I will draw on some of their findings that they presented in "Unpacking Cultural baggage: Gender and work in an income sharing commune" to supplement my findings (Griffin, n.d. 2017). Even though teaching women to use tools, or urging men to take on childcare, or creating safe spaces for women, trans-or non-binary people to develop skills through work, or for instance introducing labor-gender balance quotas, for instance, as an effort to achieve gender balance in these work areas, some work areas are still feminized, as Jules argues.

I believe their findings also confirm the patterns I have observed as well. Jules' conclusions show that while the community is perceived by most of the members, in interviews with both Griffin and myself, members expressed that TO seemed to be doing very well regarding gender equality, but also that there are still many challenges to face in the continuing work for equality in all aspects of labor on the farm; tofu, for example, is male dominated still. Many of our informants rally the reasoning that it is almost impossible to get past certain forms of conditioning that most of us receive when we grow up and live in the "mainstream." Rosie told Jules, "Getting past our biases is impossible. I think people try".

Griffin explains that there was a gendered division in the tofu factory work that they link to the unfortunate resemble to structures in the "mainstream," and that packing had perhaps become feminized, while the other jobs were maintained by a majority of men. Though some women certainly took those jobs on with great success, they argue that there is still a long time until there is true equality between the genders at Twin Oaks. Their work is a critique of an article written by Rothschild, based on a few weeks of observation of the community, in which they conclude that the community has achieved egalitarianism through democratic communal cooperative work. There are several problems with Rotschild and Tomchin's article, they conclude.

Most important for our purposes in this paper is the recognition that

by employing a collectivist democratic form of organization, Twin Oaks has

> achieved an impressive level of gender equality. Men at Twin Oaks perform, on a daily basis, jobs that in the surrounding society would be considered 'women's work', while women at Twin Oaks perform many jobs that in the surrounding society would be considered 'men's work'. They do this without stigma, without resistance, indeed, with group encouragement and support. (Rothschild and Tomchin 2005:259)

Equality is mainly conceived here as balanced numbers of male of women (not non-binary people) division in different work areas, which is reductive to the complexity of gender— Griffin's thesis offers great additional knowledge to this complexity.

Doula, one of my closest interlocutors, explained some of the problem of gendered divisions of labor like this: "I am more comfortable doing what has been traditionally seen as women's jobs, that is what I was trained to do—like if I clean, I see things that need to be cleaned before the men I live with see it I think." We were discussing the differences in what women choose to do in the community and what men choose to do. We both agreed that men seemed to gravitate toward certain jobs, in which there was a gender imbalance in some work, particularly in tofu production work. We also mused over whether women were perhaps more active in learning skills that possibly did not come very naturally to them because they finally, in community, had the opportunity to challenge the gender norms that had made it so. Gendered division is observed in the activities that are done; women often would, for instance, describe how men would without meaning to be derogatory or take over tasks they felt women were not doing well enough or lift things for them when they did not ask for help. These are more veiled issues of inequality, or "cultural baggage" that makes for complications.

Many of the new men in the community had taken much interest in childcare and education, and there were some men on the farm who had come to the community specifically because they were interested in communal child rearing, her partner being one of them. Child rearing, as a collective effort that is labor creditable, is among the major steps toward egalitarianism in the community. These are relieving not only

traditional gendered divisions of labor but also the family unit itself must be integrated into the community in a way that keeps the needs and wants of the community balanced. Pregnancy is most often a collective decision; if there is a labor shortage or parents seem unfit, requests for a new child might be denied. The parents distribute the hours of their child's allocated budgets, which means that they can decide how much they want to take part in the child's day or, for instance, education. This is a downscaling from the more radical form of child rearing the community originally aimed for, where biological parents would be fully relieved of these responsibilities.

The problems of establishing equal distribution among members are more often connected to the social life that happens while working, rather than having access to the work or feeling liberated from doing certain kinds of work. Like we saw, for example, the situation in the previous chapter, when the member Achilles breeched consent norms on the garden shift. Several male-identifying members expressed to me also that they felt feminism could take too much of a precedence over other issues, or they would feel that the gender quotas did not serve certain work areas when there were labor shortages.

It is important to consider gender's intersections with other forms of cultural baggage and stratification, such as we have seen with issues of consent, or in other ways that social stratification happens, such as class. Here, we see that safety from stratification of gendered divisions of labor responsibilities and tasks emerges as an important example of experimentation with egalitarianism. We can also see throughout the thesis that egalitarianism in this regard should be seen as something that goes deeper than what statistical analysis can portray. Quotas and other issues can be difficult in balancing the areas of work with commitment toward egalitarian experimentation and in the pursuit of "right" livelihood. I have also argued that it takes more than counting numbers of representatives of each gender in different work areas to understand gender equality. Skills are developed to overcome gendered divisions, but the gendered patterns of old lifestyles still perpetuate certain inequalities. Inequalities in gendered divisions of labor is just one example; on a more generalized

scale this can be problematic in many areas; there are issues related to race, class and ableism as well.

Balancing Areas of Work with the "good life"

What is considered labor creditable work can change, as the labor budgets for the community are reevaluated each year depending on the wants and needs of the community. According to older members who had been there for several decades, the community had become increasingly oriented toward financial security and to create a surplus than before. Others through the community had become too focused on finance and had in this pursuit for security become too engrossed in capitalist pressures that could threaten the pursuit of "good life" or what they thought would be more ethical or self-sustainable practices.

Sun, who had been at Twin Oaks for almost 30 years, mentioned this as a major failure. He wanted the community to spend more money and more time on improving the social fabric of the community, and thus save a little less money. One morning, we sat outside the hammock chair workshop and music room after Sun had finished a shift of weaving the intricate patterns of the hammock chairs. We were talking about how he was doing after he had come back from a long trip to Asia. I was not the only one that had missed him; his weekly dinners were a highlight for some of us mostly because of the good mood he always seemed to create, and I was happy to see that he had made it safely back home. We chatted for a while, and then started talking about the bigger shifts in community politics, and he told me,

> I used to be manager for REC (recreational activities), and we used to have a big budget. I could buy instruments, or we used to get bands that were in the area to come in and we could pay them a little bit, or they would get some food. But now we can't afford that. It's sad. We used to get people together more! It's a shame. I miss that. It's not always easy to keep friends here, and some feel lonely. Even me after being here for decades.

Sun was addressing the issue of budgets, but also the current tendencies of pushing the community toward removing labor credits from the work that would be enjoyable or bring about fun rather than income. Loneliness in the community is not uncommon.

The careful planning of the economy had become a heightened need after the community lost their contract with Pier Imports in the 1990's and had to find other revenues that could replace the exponential hammock industry they had built. In times of stress, the community will rearrange the work areas, and make changes in what constitutes labor creditable work hours. When membership or the economy is down, this puts a strain on most areas. The budgets will vary considerably when the community has fewer children than normal, or perhaps is seeing a period of decline in income in an area. However, they will not always prioritize the income areas.

As mentioned, in 2016, when the community was going through yet another period of not finding enough workers for tofu-production, the planners and the community decided to cut production days and produce less tofu, even though the tofu is in high demand. The community would rather keep the principles of self-chosen labor than to introduce policy that would force workers into the labor that brings income. The community also decided to drop labor creditable hours for cooks not scheduled on regular communal cooking shifts. When cooking for six or more people, a member could collect "cooking hours" for it, but this was considered a luxury when the community was struggling with a labor shortage.

This was a big controversy of the budget that year. The budget allowed members to take cooking hours for making food and snacks outside of regular lunch and dinner. This was seen as one of the more fun luxuries of the labor system and was used mainly either for extra preparation for the big community meals or by members that liked to cook and experiment with food. This also limited cooking and baking for parties. A few members were really upset, and it turned into quite the debate on what community labor was. Should it all be effective and useful labor, or should there be space given to activities that are more fun and given for the people engaging with it?

By also cutting cook hours, a few weeks later the manager decided that there should only be two full members taking full credit hours for the dinner cook shifts, resulting in regular cooking teams losing one member on the shift, or having even more visitors on the shift since they are not accounted for in the labor budgets. Yet, another upsetting scale back for the cooks. Some argued that in times of extra pressure on the community, the work done to relieve stress and create good experience should not be limited, but supported, while others maintained that the community still had to produce what they needed to keep their income up. Labor that contributed to the "good life" was I such stress-periods neglected.

Extensive scheduling has been deemed necessary to keep the community sustainable long-term. What I have shown here is that though the labor system is highly demanding, it does not allow for individual economic capital to be accumulated. When sharing all income, the value of labor shifts to the value it creates socially—the biggest danger of missing work does not lie in the lack of production, but in the social risk of not contributing as an equal, or the risk of losing out on labor that is seen as contributing to righteousness or the "good life".

WHAT IS RIGHTEOUS LIVELIHOOD? ISSUES OF UNDESIRED WORK AND SOLIDARITY

Some members, especially new members and visitors, often get scheduled to do certain smaller jobs that need to be picked up by someone. This is often cause for critiqued by longer-term members who find it to create new class problems within the community, where the new and young members will be exploited and do most of the work that is undesirable. This is a heated subject brought up in community. Puff, one of the managers with the most responsibility on the farm, got upset when I asked him if he agreed. He believed that the people that were engaged in such critique were the ones that were dodging the most responsibilities and thought that if they had a problem with such dynamics, they should get involved to change them. While at least five members that I spoke with had quit doing tofu-work after feeling like they were overworked, some expressed feeling of being exploited by other members that did not take on much harder physical labor. I asked Nala, a member who had been at Twin

Oaks for six years, if she felt the labor system produced inequalities and if she thought it was unfair that some did harder and more physical labor, she responded:

> No, I think the community evens itself out, no one is being forced to do anything they don't want to do, and in the long run, if people don't want to make tofu, the community will be pressured to create new income revenues. If people want a change, then they should create viable alternatives that would create income and be better for us. But people don't seem ready for that.

What the examples throughout this chapter show us are cases of ambivalence toward the egalitarian, and the ways in which responsibilities, balances, equity, and work is prioritized. Skills are not only developed to "become egalitarian", but also to navigate this ambivalence. In my time at TO, the issue of "class systems" was a common conversation. Some members felt that there was a managerial class of members that often took the working class for granted or even exploited them. "There *is* an elite at TO," an older member once said. Even though managerships and plannerships are accessible to all, they do require certain skills and a high level of commitment that some, often long-term members, seemed to be more comfortable with.

As mentioned, tofu work was a main conflict. A resource draining job that constantly suffered from worker's fatigue or labor shortage despite being the biggest income for the community. Tofu's work clearly displayed the ambivalence members felt toward doing undesirable work.

"No one came here to work in a tofu factory, you know, like no one comes here for that. It just sucks…," Nora said while a group of us were walking back from a particularly hard shift in the tofu hut. I answered, "Well, but everyone that comes here knows that is how we make money though." "Yeah, but I don't think people realize when they join how much shit we do in there, they have maybe like a pack shift and then they leave."

If people did come without wanting to engage in factory work, tofu would have a labor shortage very quickly. The community was divided when it came to tofu, and the problems with it were plentiful and complex, and seemingly never ending. Few enjoyed the work, and enjoyment in work stands out as important when no one on the farm can make more money than others. Incentives, such as fun and work, that were considered “meaningful” were more attractive.

While some worked relentlessly to improve the tofu factory and produce more income to assure the affluence of the community, others were ambivalent about the major resources spent on work that were considered by some to be not “right livelihood.” Demeter took a different approach; she wanted the community to focus on relieving itself partly from its dependency on the capitalist market. She believed the community could do with less money resources, and produce tofu twice or three times a week, rather than having the whole week filled with production days. She had taken on extra responsibilities in the tofu hut, and seemed like she was fine with the work, accepting that it needed to get done. “I don’t know, it seems like the tofu expansion will maybe help, but not if we aim to produce more with what we have. Then shift will not be much different,” she said. It was hard to find members who were willing to take on long-term responsibilities in the hut and with the new factory expansion that was planned.

One day Kali had come down to the tofu factory to help us with the tofu packager machine once again. She was doing a cooking shift making dinner for the whole community, but I had to interrupt her in her very stressful shift to get another set of eyes on the very problematic packager, which is infamous for its technical difficulties at Twin Oaks. Though some members claimed to be “in love” with the packager, learning its intricacies and temperaments, we were not feeling as loving toward it that day. The packager had replaced a very labor-intensive manual packaging system some time ago, but the machine was said to have been built to be placed in a dry and climate-controlled area. The tofu factory is none of these things, so what the communards are left with is a highly temperamental machine that needs much care and attention, as well as highly trained people to work it.

Kali was always calm and in a good mood. She had already trained me on how to use the packager many times. I was at that point a “packing honcho,” the role of the person in charge of the packing process of the tofu. This job involves directing helpers to cut tofu into the correct size, weighing it, putting it in place into the plastic molds in the machine, taking care of the setup of the machine, manually changing the settings of the machine for different sized packages, and checking the packages for damage, air and contamination. It also entails putting the packed tofu into the big water pasteurizer, lifting it over to the chiller, and then rechecking the seals of the packages for damage. Then, it is packed in carts and put in a walk-in fridge before it is picked up and driven to the warehouse, where it is packed in boxes and driven out to the vendors. These shifts could end up being quite intensive, with many uncomfortable lifting, and one is in constant danger of getting burns from the pasteurizer if you are not careful enough.

I was not doing well with it, and the packager had started blowing extra air into the packets of tofu and refusing to align the front label correctly, so all the tofu I was packing needed to be repacked. I had been frantically trying to keep up with the tofu coming out of the press for about half an hour before I admitted defeat and went out on a search for another pack honcho that could be available to help me. After some minutes of myself and Kali trying to discover what was wrong, Kali concluded,

> I see that the arm isn’t going up as high as it should, it might need some oil, but the bottom film is also messed up... I think just that, well, the universe is just trying to tell us something with this. Like, this isn’t good, or like, ‘right’ livelihood. I think we should start cutting production to two days a week or something, it’s just not worth this, she continued. Like, how much time and stress does this cause us?’ Digby was in here the other day crying for hours because the packager fucked her whole schedule up-and she still needed to finish and then go milk the cows after…

This was part of an ongoing conversation we had been having about the sense of people burning out on “doing too much tofu” and having several problems with it

like that day. Kali felt it was partly because we were experiencing a huge flow of new members coming in that still needed to be trained properly, but also that if the community did not show more interest in the work, which the "community should listen." I agreed, and said I felt bad that I was taking such a long time getting a handle on the packager, and she explained to me that she spent over a year familiarizing her with it, and still sometimes felt incompetent handling it.

This tension of considering tofu to be uncomfortable and unnecessarily hard for people to execute was often communicated. There are mainly three main objections to running the tofu business—it being too harmful for member's bodies and that it is not a job most people want to do severally in the long run. The second is the environmental impact of selling soy products made in a factory, which uses plenty of water, electricity, and plastic to function. The third being that the financial benefits were not high enough for the uncomfortable job to be worth the trouble, often comparing this income to that of the seeds business of a neighboring community or the nut butter business of another sister community, which had "higher dollar per hour" and was considered by many to be more comfortable work Hammocks was also seen as more righteous, but did not provide the money it used to, and the work was resource draining. Though it was something everyone could do, it took a while before you became a good weaver. Especially, the seeds business was considered by many to be more aligned with what was considered "right", "righteous", or "good" livelihood.

Producing organic non-GMO seeds that would feed generations to come with carefully manufactured plants that were disease resistant was seen as an investment in the future, not only a way to make money. Seeds were also connected to eco-feminism and even the spiritual aspects of worship of nature by various pagans and Wiccans on the farm. The seeds business was also collaborative with a bigger movement, and not an isolated industry that only happened at TO. Many saw other benefits of collaborating with other communities like this and were happy with the skills and knowledge that they could access through these networks. The seeds they harvested and sold often included backstories and had been cultivated for generations already. It was seen as a way to assure greater livability on the land as well, as the seeds are

tested and cultivated for various geographical needs. This was work people “put love into,” as Kali once said. Acorn, the sister community 20 minutes away, had started the business years ago, and TO was getting more involved in cooperation with this work.

When technical difficulties like this occur, most honchos are painfully aware that it will usually mean a very late shift for the last honcho of the day, so everyone usually tries to help as much as they can and try as best as they can to hurry up the process. After Kali and I worked out the different obvious problems with the packager, it would still not work smoothly, and a bigger investment had to be made into opening up the engine to work out the problems there. Kali and I decided to put some of the ready cut tofu into barrels of water to be packed the next day, knowing that it would take a while to fix the problem.

While we were working, we put on the tofu work playlist we had made, mostly with high-tempo house music. We got the work done in 20 minutes while taking some time to dance around with the other people on the shift. I felt better from the stressful packing issues and laughed at Sparkles, who was on top of the pasteurizer twerking while the rest jumbled around getting the tofu curdled and pressed.

I told Kali that I would come and give her an extra hand in the kitchen since this had taken such a big chunk out of her cooking time. We enjoyed working together, especially in the kitchen, so she was happy with my offer. When I left the tofu factory, as I was walking up to the kitchen, I saw Peanut, one of the dairy managers running out of the tofu factory behind me in full speed while ripping his plastic apron off, while yelling to me: “Cows on the loose, the chestnuts got out!!!” I concluded that he must have gotten a call in the tofu hut about it and started running toward the fields myself to help.

Once I got down there, I saw that the whole visitor group of seven people, including two dairy crew members, had circled the group of calves and were pushing them in through the opening in the fence they must have gotten out of. Someone yelled, “We got this. They only wanted to play around for a bit, and we have all these people now.” So, I turned around to go back and heard them laugh about the sight of the tofu worker running toward the field with his beard and hairnet net still on. One of

the visitors said she was very happy to now be able to say that she has been part of wrangling up some calves, like a real cowgirl. “Cow-Woman!,” someone corrected her (calling grown women for “girls” is seen by members as offensive and derogatory). Here, we see moments of expressing undesired effects of work, but also moments of collective effort and fun that relieve some of this tension.

This jumbled scene of activity, flow between tasks and people due to unforeseen events, is not an uncommon affair at Twin Oaks. However, it shows us some of the elements of discussion, solidarity, play work and non-hierarchical movement of social relationships that are created when the work scene is meant to function without explicit hierarchies. The play and comedy alleviate tensions and stress, while also allowing for members to work efficiently to, for instance, the rhythm of high-tempo music. Play and fun are often part of the social reality that comes into existence while working together, and often we see performances like these where play has a serious connotation, as, for instance, when members comment on gender norms or the discomfort of work.

PLAY WORK

As I have shown, joining a community demonstrates a process where the limits of egalitarian participation are extrapolated and mediated by the communards, sometimes ending in social exclusions, but other times leading to forms of solidarity and *communitas* (Turner, Abrahams, and Harris 2017; Kapferer 2019). Understanding this tension is pivotal to understanding how value and meaning correlate to the experiment. Ecstatic communitas is in tension with various forms of pressure on the social body. Enjoyment in work is necessary, while maintaining the correct boundaries. This shows us that the ways in which communards handle such difficulties still remain centered on the ideal egalitarian being able to “play along.” Communitas can, for instance, be motivated by actively engaging in egalitarian “play work” that promotes new ways of working, or flow can emerge when events that require immediate problem solving happen as in the example above.

Play work is one way to denaturalize labor and anti-hegemonize the traditional ways in which people are used to work. It performs several functions other than promoting flow and communitas—the relationships that form when people synergize and is a form of performance of egalitarianism that makes for more meaningful labor through joy, enjoyment, fun, and intentionality that is directed toward egalitarianism, but the play can also have a more serious tone. ¨Transparency" tool games are often similar to get-to-know-you games, and the communards often engage in such activities, especially with visitors, as I have touched upon already.

FIGURE 17- PLAYING THE GAME "CONTACT" WHILE GARDENING

Anarchist Murray Bookchin was explicit about his hopes for a transformation from alienated labor relationships to work as play, describing how singing and co-productive art can produce solidarity and meaning in work other than the production of material goods (video "Work as Play" Interview Bookchin). Play in these cases, I argue, is thus a resource that touches on egalitarian values. Utopians, in theory, fiction, and in real lived experiments often try to unravel the oppressions of industrialized and

alienated labor in favor of their alternative visions. In anthropology, play has been understood as the lack of productivity, or as a status of "nonwork" (Malaby 2009).

We still do not have the specific tools to understand the importance of play in work. In many areas, the investigation of play is gaining momentum, often referenced as "serious play" (Statler, Heracleous, and Jacobs 2011).

Play in work and play among adults have not yet been thoroughly investigated, except for a few exceptions; Csikszentmihalyi studied playful activities and argued that they can lead to what he calls "flow." Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi 1997) described the concept of an altered state, where "flow" during the creative process can be produced, in times where people have the feeling of things as "almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused stated of consciousness," and one could argue this can be experienced similar to *communitas* (Loudon, Deininger, and Gordon 2012; Csikszentmihalyi 1997). Leisure time can be in the spectrum of being free from work or free to do something else (Turner 1982), while in ICs we can see a mixing of leisure-like activity and work. Drawing from Marx, Turner argued that liminoid experiences like these, reflected the shift from an agrarian and "tribal" culture to the industrial and modern cultures, as for instance play was a big part of work in earlier cultures— becoming more distinguishable after industrialization. Liminoid settings can spur experimental behavior. He writes that, "… to identify liminoid productions with apologia for the political status quo. "Anti-structure," in fact, can generate and store a plurality of alternative models for living, from utopias to programs, which are capable of influencing the behavior of those in mainstream social and political roles (whether authoritative or dependent, in control or rebelling against it) in the direction of radical change" (Turner 1982:64). In contrast, liminal experience is a more set and secure structural process (Turner 1982). This can be drawn on in egalitarian work relationships to dishevel the distinction between work and play, let me illustrate with some ethnographic examinations of how play meddles with work at TO.

During garden shifts, workers might indulge in various games while performing repetitive tasks; members use transparency tool games to get to know each other or process emotions or play word games or various guessing games. Having fun on shifts

was, in some areas of the farm, an accepted part of the desire for social connectedness in work, and a nice experience in making mundane repetitive tasks more bearable. In some areas, too much fun was a danger, like gardening, where games are often played, such as “Contact,” or people will have fun in other ways by telling stories or chatting. I and many others have been corrected for joking around too much or wasting efficient gardening time on horseplay. One such incident showed how this could be an important tension. Newer members, Kami, Ocean, and I, were enjoying talking with each other while thinning out the rows of carrots that had been planted weeks before. Often, there are too many seeds put in the ground, so to get carrots of a decent size, one will probably have to thin them out to being one inch apart. We were laughing and joking around and took our time with the weeding, which seemed to annoy the garden honcho. “You won’t get much done that way,” she yelled out to us, and we corrected ourselves, Kami mumbling that one “should be allowed to have some fun on the shift, or else no one would want to work in the garden anymore.” He then jokingly told us about one of the other black members on the farm who had quit the garden shifts, explaining that “being yelled at and ordered around by white people in a field seemed uncomfortably familiar.”

This was an ongoing tension and resulted in open conflicts at times where gardeners saw their role as wanting to have more meaningful work and enjoyable work and could easily get that experience in other areas. However, the garden manager had been in a big community that had collapsed because of labor shortage and had seen what unmotivated workers could do to a utopian experiment. She was, therefore, a rigorous worker herself and known far and wide for her planning and gardening skills; the garden shifts seemed to go through an unpopular period. They were thus planning to downsize the garden exponentially for the next season, but the struggle continued to get all the work done with fewer hands-on deck than normal. The garden manager was effective but had managed the garden work area for so long that she, according to her, did not have the patience she once had working with that, and new members in the garden. The garden area is big, and the amount of knowledge and scheduling demanded to feed the community is enormous, so several people had some extra

patience with the garden crew on the shifts. If the main crew seemed stressed, they had good reason to be.

The garden shifts deterred those that did not appreciate being spoken to in certain ways or disagreed with the sentiment that gardening should be something that should be done as effectively as possible—for many gardening and growing food is a pleasurable part of living at TO, it represents "righteous livelihood" and sustainability practices. Some have a spiritual practice and understanding of the work that is done directly with nature there and engage with this as a type of worship. Many of these members ended up stepping down from the para-crew, and some moved on to working mostly with the seeds business. The seeds that are sold come from different fields and are a different work area than gardening.

Thus, here, we see that play seems to hold an intrinsic function with high egalitarian stakes. If one compares it to one of the most famous accounts of play in anthropology, in the effort to display a case of "thick description" in *Deep Play, Notes on a Balinese cockfight* (1972), it is not "deep play." in entirely the same sense[28],*)*, where he implies play in which the stakes are so high that it is irrational for men to engage in it at all (Geertz 1972). As with the Balinese cockfight, both parties are in it over their heads, yet the risky game creates significant meaning, nonetheless. As when my interlocutors engage in the ritual of play, there lies big meanings and cosmologies of meaningful labor and egalitarian intent, sometimes the stakes can make the game deep; however, this would in most cases be an exaggeration. Phillips Stevens was prompted by the apparent divide between work and play in his essay *Play and Work: A False Dichotomy?* (1980). There, he made a vital point that if by "play," we are trying to signal a mode of human experience it is difficult to differentiate between that which is play and that which is not. These are also not a cases of "shallow play" where little is at stake, but something in-between that we can perhaps conceive of as utopian play, since the play is so intent on bringing about new ways to work. Playfulness generates

[28] Geertz uses the term, borrowing from Bentham's theory first presented in 1887 of deep play in The Theory of Legislation (Bentham 2013).

communitas and thus harmonious egalitarian movement, yet this is a constant tension with the needs of the community.

FIGURE 18- FOOD FIELDS AND HOOP GREENHOUSE

Working Too Hard- Being "too egalitarian"

"You have to be willing to work very fucking hard and to be very fucking poor to live here," Twinkles said one day while I was interviewing him in the little quaint library in Oneida. He leaned back in the small chair in front of me, poked his fingers through the holes of his jeans to assess how big they were, before he continued, "I work hard, you know, but I plan to be here. I'm not going anywhere, and I see myself here when TO is 100, and that it will be around for the bicentennial." Twinkles had

made several sacrifices to be at TO, and we were looking back on his year, and talking about different changes to the community we had observed. He had just broken up with his partner, who had decided not to stay at TO, partly because of his commitment to the community. It was a painful decision that he still struggled with. One of the more common reasons for leaving the community is issues derived from love relationships, or lack thereof.

FIGURE 19- LIBRARY IN UPSTAIRS-ONEIDA

We were also talking about the challenges with members underperforming in their work areas, and some annoyances around those that only do the basics, and do not put in any extra effort when finishing jobs, such as cleaning up properly or taking for granted that someone would pick up the slack later in the day. I had just walked into a pack shift in the tofu hut earlier that day and was running late to my interview with Twinkles because the packer before me had taken long breaks, and when I had gotten to my shift the person was not there, so I had more than I could handle of tofu

to pack that I thought should have been packed before I got there. This problem had occurred many times, and Twinkles said that it perhaps was a misunderstanding that the tofu could wait when the pasteurizer was too full to put any more in, and we discussed whether one should do as much as they can as fast as possible when on a shift, or perhaps just go with the natural rhythm of the day. Either way we concluded that there were always things to do in the hut, such as cleaning or maintenance, and that breaks on a short shift was perhaps unnecessary. “It’s so good when we get that flow going, but it’s hard with a lot of newbies on, and training happening,” we reminded ourselves. Worker’s alienation often comes in the form of worker’s burnout in communities; the stress of work often conflicts with contentment.

My interlocutor Zigzag and a small group of us were in the tofu hut one late night cleaning up and complaining about our long day together. She yelled to me over the noise of the water hoses running, “Goddam, I am so sick of wearing plastic shit and these gross boots! I think I’m going to stop doing tofu, why the hell should I?” We had all put in extra effort lately, as the membership was a little lower than usual, straining the remaining artisan tofu producers with more than enough to do. She was suffering from tofu-burnout and was trying to find other areas of work that could fill the hours on her labor sheet.

As mentioned, the visitor period functions as a screening, partly for the visitor to become acquainted with the community and to discover what type of work one would like to be involved with, and if the community is a good fit for them. The community at large observes this process, and the established members assess the chance of the visitor becoming a functional member of the community or will for some reason or other become a problematic member. Very often the relationship the visitor gives the impression of having to work and responsibilities connected to work is a topic handled with care and attention. One of the first things the visitors are told is to not show up late for shifts. “What you do here really affects others and let us know if you’re not feeling well because your shift needs to be covered by someone else if you can’t show up,” a member told my visitor group on our first day of our visitor period. Complaining lack of commitment to work and harsh critiques from visitors

would very often be met with contempt from the established members. If a visitor did not show up for a shift or would show up late, it often became a subject of discussion or was even implemented as feedback later in the membership process. One is expected to work hard, as hard as those that work hard already; the ideal egalitarian is most prevalent when symbolized as the "good worker." Working hard, as Twinkles said, had be balanced, but working too hard created ambivalence and conflict.

Asceticism and work

I have shown how frugality, degrowth, and issues of chosen poverty is an important ascetic-like practice in many communities; this also connects the ways in which people dedicate themselves to the communal through work. Especially, frugality in combination with dedication and hard work build social status. Some would live without using much of even their community allowance or saving it for something special. Some work much above their quotas, some to take time off, and some due to other reasons. Certain members have so many labor credits that it seemed unlikely they could take enough vacation to spend it in their lifetime. The ascetic-like lifestyle is often reflected in the way people eat, exercise, and the effectiveness of their work. Pulla was among the members that worked much more than the labor quota. On several occasions, I had heard other members mention him, sometimes referring me to him when I had questions, or when issues of policy were debated. Several members expressed distress over his potential departure, even though to my knowledge he was not intending on leaving any time soon.

Pulla, and many of the members, believe that self-improvement and societal transformation will come from self-discipline, frugality, and intentional relationships to the material surroundings. What was perhaps most intriguing was that Pulla and several others of my interlocutors referenced the book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People by* Stephen R. Covey (Covey 1989). I kept seeing copies of this book in different shelves and rooms but did not realize the importance of it until I started interviewing people. I asked 10 members if they had any literature that was formative for them in their lives or decision to come to community, probing for information of

perhaps Skinner's books or something related to other utopian literature, and three of them mentioned this book. I also brought the book up in conversations, and it seemed to me that it was a widely read book in the community.

What makes this so interesting is the backdrop of the best-seller was that in a time where pop psychology and self-help books were becoming more popular was its' unusual approach to issues of self-improvement, focusing on principles of fairness, integrity, honesty, and dignity. Covey researched literature that spanned over two centuries to account for what highly successful people do to be successful, focusing on relationships and the self. The main argument of the book is that the way we see the world is entirely built upon our perceptions— we must change ourselves to change our perceptions of the world. The book focuses mainly on how to master the self and how to go from being dependent to independent. The second aspect of the book turns to the social aspect of self-mastery: how to move from being independent to interdependent through communication skills and cooperation.

This again can explain the careful attention communards put into social relationships and commitments toward the good, here through hard work and investment in social relationships through commitment and intentionality.

Pulla said during an interview,

> Some people think like that we're all hippies lying around getting stoned, but obviously we have to run some businesses to get money, and we need other types of work to survive, like we have to produce food, and take care of kids. I don't think people realize before they come how much work there is, and that we are a very work-oriented community. You can have it set up where you make minimal effort, but that's not the style here. The other communities in the Federations sometimes make fun of us and all the scheduling and work we do to manage it all. They usually work a bit less than us, but they also make more money at Acorn and East Wind, with seeds and butters, so they don't have the same problems. But then again, many come here, complaining that they don't like the lack of structure there. So, I guess, different things work for different

> people. The people that don’t want to work hard usually don’t work out, unless they work hard for a while, and then get their routine. You know, I have to admit, even though we have labor credits, it’s amazing what a difference there actually is in people’s commitments. Like there is a huge difference between doing tofu for 10 hours and doing something like peeling garlic, which should not even be considered labor creditable if you ask me. But that sort of difference is ok as long as the work gets done. I think it has a tendency to be evened out still; people can mess around and have like a Twin Oaks «adolescence» and then they grow up and take on more responsibility because they get invested or see the need. Or they make other types of contributions to the community sometimes that aren’t creditable. Or, I mean, some just leave, I guess. Like Marsha, remember? I don’t know how she got in the labor whole so hard after such a short time, but obviously you can’t come here and only work half your quota. If she is that sick, she needs to go take care of herself first, and maybe TO was not for her this time, and with her personality she just took up so much space and created so much conflict over a little period.

Being unable to change your perceptions on work can create troubles. Provisional member Marsha had just left the community, with somewhat of a bang. She had not been happy there, and in her short time as a member, she had made some friends but had also a tension-filled relationship with quite a few members by the time she left. She had fallen deep into the “labor hole” and struggled with her work responsibilities. It was unlikely that she would be recommended to stay on without being able to fulfill her quotas. She had accused the system of being ableist, as she struggled with various health concerns, and was quite disappointed with her time there as a member, it seemed.

As the labor system is referred to as “trust based,” everyone is free to take on jobs they want and not to do other work that they are not interested in. As long as they fill their quotas, the community is prone to trust that the labor has been done, and people tend to be careful about accusations of labor cheating or distrusting those

imbalances in labor quotas due to exploitation of the system. Marsha had not been able to and would have to leave. There is very little room for members that cannot work as much as everyone else. When members suspect people are breeching these trust norms and for instance, cheat on their labor sheets or shy away from work, they are quickly put under social scrutiny. Others cheat the system and perform various forms of "tricksterisms" or resistance acts against what they consider unfairness to handle or illuminate the boundaries between what is considered egalitarian and inegalitarian.

Cheating Egalitarians

Even though I learned that many communards "cheat" on their labor sheets, they would justify this by arguing that the work was being done, and that there should be changes to the system so that efficiency would be rewarded. They believed that the current system encouraged laziness, because the longer you spent doing something, the more rewards the individual would get in the form of labor credits. This shows us the discrepancies between the individual and the communal in egalitarian intent.

The more dedicated communards that were intrinsically concerned with "the communal" being the most important would produce as efficiently as possible, to save hours in the labor budgets, and to produce more for the community—three members described being idealistic at first, and then, after a while of observing other people cheat, the system grew somewhat disillusioned and started doing so themselves.

A female informant who used to "honcho," which means manage or lead, regular dinner shifts said, "Well, they demand this and that with diets and having exciting, tasty food." We were both regulars on the cooking and baking shifts, and we had both felt the strains of the different cuts. "We can't cater to 100 different people's tastes always with only two full members cooking. Training visitors takes time and is stressful as well. Like it diminishes what we do, food is important!" she yelled over the loud noise of the exhaust fan. I answered, "Yeah, and it's hard as well, stressful at times to get all the food out. Food that supposed not to be too spicy, not have onion, garlic, gluten, dairy, factory meat, and all the other stuff people want without getting bored. When you're stressed, overworked, and bored dealing with this, the most fun

thing I do here becomes a pain. Having so many visitors on the shift as we have now is too much, and if we have to do some prep on our own time that just makes it worse."

"Don't let them cheat you for hours," she replied, "take food processing or whatever; just take the hours you use." I wanted to ask who she meant by "them," but she continued, "Like we all come up here and do stuff, like soak beans or get doughs started, I'm taking hours for that no matter what they tell me." We then joked about putting up a sign by my table showing that I was not taking cook hours, but food processing hours and was therefore not a third full member on the shift just in case someone was upset by seeing so many members in the kitchen.

Others would claim hours of work they did work the full duration. One member described that if he was doing double work, during a shift like taking a bread baking shift, while also cooking lunch, he would take hours for the lunch and an amount of hours he found suitable for the bread baking. He would be working only three hours but was doing work that would usually take five hours separately, so he would take 4,5 or 5 hours.

We see here that there are small manipulations to the labor system happening, one where the communard claims hours for his own evaluation of what would be "fair" for him to take as a more effective worker but is also upscaling the time he actually takes—he still considers that he saves "the system" some hours. The second example shows a form of antagonism toward the system in place for budgeting, and manipulation of the system to suit the tasks performed, but as in a form of everyday resistance toward their own direct democracy. This shows that there are strains between different forms of egalitarian intent.

Ambivalence toward work and how the community engages with the capitalist market through their industries, which are seeds production, hammock production, book sales, book indexing, and tofu production, was common, and at Twin Oaks. Managers and certain teams on the farm are often accused of constituting an elite. This is by the managers counter-argued to be a mistake, since they take on the responsibilities others do not want make, it makes them vulnerable for critique. However, it seemed clear from several interlocutors that the rotation of managers and

decision-makers often circulated between well-established leaders among them. Alina, a female member, explained to me during an interview that she sometimes felt that she was being punished for being fast and good at her job.

> Like, I don't care if I take an hour more on my sheet than I actually did, because I work so much faster than new members do. Like Allan, he could go at the speed of light when it came to hammocks, so he used to take some extra hours just to make up for it. I mean, that's fair, until we have other incentives to work harder, or like we get anything out of it. The system at Twin Oaks can quickly lead to exploitation. I think that's why we have sort of like a class system here, where new members go to do tofu, where no one else wants to be, and the slow workers on the farm, like Bob or Jayla, can get away with working slow because they work in stuff where they can work slow. Like, I don't think that's right. If you do those jobs, and do them well, perhaps there should be awards.

I continued by asking, "What kinds of rewards?" She answered, "like extra hours on your sheet or maybe even an allowance bonus if you do so and so many hours of tofu in a week, let's say you did six shifts because other people refuse to do it, then yeah, I think they should be rewarded." Some saw the tofu bod hours, time allocated to maintaining strength and physical movement that you could take when you worked over a certain number of hours in tofu, as a source of inequality within the membership. One member said, she always claimed tofu bod hours, and she would take them, even when not working out because she felt she deserved them, and that resting and stretching for tofu workers was perhaps more important than for others. Some felt that the decision to give tofu workers bod hours was not egalitarian in the first place, since everyone should take care of their bodies, and tofu was not the only manual and hard physical work on the farm. These inequalities had created some divisions, some said class divisions on the farm.

The tension was usually portrayed as one that meant that no other jobs on the farm were as physically demanding, while the other camp argued that no such work was there that was that demanding and repetitive, and therefore could be very damaging for the workers. One member of the garden crew made the same case for garden work, while arguing that it is each member's responsibility to stay strong and with good health so that they could do their work and that tofu should be no different than other areas. Maintaining good health is important for the community; if members cannot maintain their labor quota over time, the community will have to respond to maintain equality between the members.

EACH TO CO'S ABILITY—WOLF AND THE PROBLEMS OF EGALITARIAN LABOR

A MA thesis handed in at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University called "*Integrating the Individual and Community: The Power of Equality and Self-chosen Labor"* (2013) by Emily Katharine Bernhard considers how individuals are integrated into Twin Oaks through labor. The student explores how the system creates alternatives to what the student calls "mainstream alienation." The thesis concludes that community's revaluing of labor causes members to live cohesively with others rather than in competition with others, and she argues that studying Twin Oaks provides insight into how community can come to prosper and liberate individuals from alienation.

This raises interesting questions about the tension between equal contribution and equal access. I would argue this would depend on the status of the individual and the individuals' abilities to fulfill their obligations. When communities grow, they often experience the need to focus communally on planning and organization. People will have to commit to the specific system that is created in that community, whether it be that you decide yourself exactly what you want to do or work with and when, or whether you need to pick up work tasks that there is a need for in the community. Most communities come to the conclusion that they need to have some control over how many people actually work, and the tasks that need to be done on a regular basis, to keep the community running smoothly. If a member or visitor cannot or will not

work their full quota, they can over time be given various incentives or sanctions to work. At Twin Oaks, if you do not fulfill your labor quota, you might end up in the labor hole, which, in turn, can end up in the community requesting a "labor contract" that assures that the labor is repaid.

Labor contracts are most often used when a member is in the "labor hole" but can also be used if the member's behavior is problematic at work and sets the terms for the member's engagement with work to make up for their gap or to change their behavior in various work if they are problematic.

One of the members that had a hard time contributing to doing his fair share of the workload was Wolf. He spoke often about his ideals but also about his problems facing the community. The organization of labor was too rigid and did not leave much room for long-term illness or other problems, and it was clear that some members wanted Wolf to leave, claiming he had received more than his fair chance to correct his labor quota. One night while we were sitting in the smoking shack, admiring Wolf's recent efforts to install automatic lights outside, plenty of communards have fallen trying to make their way down a dark staircase and the uneven path to the courtyard. We came to talk about Wolf's recent problems with the community. He was about to be put on a "behavior contract" after being on several "labor contracts." that would be an attempt at correcting his problematic behavior within a certain time frame. He reflected on his path into the situation he was in, tracing his issues back to an injury he suffered before he came to Twin Oaks.

"The doctors destroyed me when I got hurt, with their pills, so I had to go look for something else to do, even though I had a good job making good money. They had me doing electrical wiring on whole buildings," Wolf said. We were discussing his difficulties with keeping up with the labor quotas and had been through difficult community feedback recently. He continued, "I thought community would be different. I thought that it would be better than that. But here it can be even worse, and I don't have anywhere else to go now really." Wolf had physical and mental problems that had been making it difficult for him in the community for a longer period, and we often discussed his problems with what he perceived as a lack of commitment to

solidarity between members and with those suffering from illnesses on many occasions.

"I don't think negative incentives is the way to go, and now they keep hassling us when my son wants to come visit because he had problems with work when he was here too." He was referring to the denial of the request for long-term guesting for his son based on his son's previous labor shortage from his membership. The community had been very divided on issues surrounding Wolf and his son. Some wanted to protect him, and support them through their difficult circumstances, while others voiced strong opinions of discomfort draining the community of energy and labor. Wolf had been assigned a care team, and he was also putting considerable stress on the mental health team.

Some of the older members had been skeptical of his membership since the beginning, and the tensions were starting to run high surrounding his withholding to sign the behavior contract that the contract team had written up for him after his heated feedback. Another member had told me that he was so upset after the feedback that he decided to help Wolf, and had changed his mind about him, wondering what kind of community they were at all if they could not take care of their weakest. This member had initiated discussions on a new way of saving labor credits within groups so that they could give labor credits to those in need.

Wolf had become a prime example of the failures of the system. He was taking too many sick hours for the community to sustain him, and was not showing up when he was needed, and he would not follow through on the jobs he was supposed to do.

Wolf was consistently philosophizing over commitment and community and believed that there were members and structures within the community that were too oppressive. The first time I met him we were all in pensive mood after, yet another, heated feedback based on issues between white males and feminism. "Rules," he said, "are the first steps toward oppression." I realized that his refusal to sign the behavior contract at first was a commitment to this statement, and not a lack of commitment to improving the relationship between himself and the community at large. He felt that signing a contract would be a form of solidifying the lack of trust in this relationship.

He explained that his verbal communications of intentions of improvement, his cooperation with the care team, and willingness to go to the doctor would be enough to show that he wanted to change for the better, and he believed a contract was unnecessary. He also did not agree to some of the terms laid out in the contract and felt like he might not be able to work as much as the community had set out for him to do. Keeping up with the labor quota seemed like a very stressful aspect of living communally to him, and on top of that, he was not the young man he once used to be. Some members communicated that they were unhappy with him when he underperformed and said he would do things and take too long doing them, but that when he showed up that he was a great worker, and fun to work with.

Wolf serves as an example of balance that needs to be achieved in community; he is betwixt and between the borders of what one may call “the Twin Oaks” way of being an egalitarian communard, within the premises set by the community’s system. Here, egalitarian negotiations are concerned with the degree and form of policing and self-policing the community that should demand. The community creates a structure of control that is meant to guide individuals back into their set criteria for being egalitarian. It is also an evaluation of how much labor the community can afford to spend to cover the needs and losses in the system when one individual is not fulfilling what is expected and becomes a burden for the community. Surprising amounts of time and effort are put into the process of feedback and contract processes, hours of meetings and planning, and efforts to follow up the members to see if they are fulfilling the criteria set in the contract. All these processes are highly bureaucratic and create ambiguities within the collective exploration of what it should entail to live together in egalitarian ways.

Members who do not fulfill their quota will eventually have a debt to the community. This focus on egalitarianism and the individual only supports the egalitarian who has the qualities and skillsets of egalitarians—they are all equally obligated to policy and peers. Exclusions that are permanent reduce the previous member to victims of egalitarianism’s hierarchical tendencies. Overall, here, we see several instances of ambiguities in establishing ways of going about the egalitarian

individual's development and commitment. We also see how egalitarian experiments can open new ways of organizing work or acting while working, which is perceived as liberating, more just, or to produce righteousness or what is good.

We see here various conflicts and social tensions that might arise when egalitarianism is to inform the mode or prism in which social organization and action is to be, or rather should be. The issue of renunciatory communities not being able to totally alleviate oneself from the oppressive ways in which work is conducted outside of the community is at the core of their practical expression of egalitarianisms' greater conundrums. Members feel they reproduce the oppressive injustices and hierarchies they very clearly wanted relief and liberation from. The system as such can be perceived as being "too egalitarian," and with this homogenization of commitments is for some felt as "oppressive." The question of how to integrate difference in equality and the individual with the communal shows the barriers of creating ruptures that are complete.

Conclusions

There are several reasons to pay attention to the flexibility within the egalitarianism as a practical engagement with reorganizing work organization of these ICs. As global economies grow, worker's conditions and rights remain problematic. I have shown that these problematics are handled in community through reorganizing labor relations through anti-hegemonic principles, but that even with stated goals of equality of values and effort put into labor, tensions boil down to different understandings of what commitment to the labor system entails. The flexibility of the system thus meets a barrier in resolving issues of contention over unequal efforts or differences of abilities and commitment. This depends on developing certain socially controlling skillsets or skillsets to navigate new ways of being equal, and ways of knowing how to engage with their labor systems as equals. This can be problematic. Also, as I have shown, members perform rituals of resistance by "cheating" the labor system or introducing transparency games or creating behavioral contracts that alleviate some of the discontent with these perceived inequalities, and simultaneously

hold potential for more meaningful work and enjoyment in it. Despite conflicts over levels of contribution, these labor systems show great innovation in producing flexible work conditions and organization. This fosters ownership, experimentation (here exemplified by cases of liminoid experiences like play), solidarity, and resilience through economic and organizational innovation. This shows that creating meeting grounds or rituals where such tensions may be mediated and discussed is essential to the resilience of the community.

CHAPTER 7

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUDING REMARKS— "THE ALT-RIGHT IS JUST ANOTHER WING OF THE GOVERNMENT."

While I was revisiting the field for the 50th-anniversary celebration in the summer of 2017, the communards were more preoccupied with the recent developments after Trump had been elected as the US President than when I had last seen them right before the inauguration. The alternative right-and right-wing extremism was on the rise and was more publicly active than before the election. However, the community seemed to flourish under pressure. Twin Oaks had gone from having a labor crisis because of a shortage of members to have a waiting list of new members wanting to move in in just a few months. "This is the place to be right now,"—one of the new members said. It seemed that the uncertain times had, for at least a little while, given a boost to invigorate the movements' potential for holistic approaches to the egalitarian utopian good life. Social unrest, political and ideological conflicts was at the time heightened. Many communards were concerned with the rise in interest in white supremacist ideologies.

When the white supremacist, Dylann Roof, shot and killed nine African American community members in the Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston in 2015, one of the significant beacons and hubs for African Americans in the South, the event spurred protests. The frustration of the activists and social justice "warriors" was directed at the handling of Confederate symbolism that is so normalized in the South (Strickland 2018).

While the voices of the right-wing organizations were getting louder in the public eye, what was happening in the South was immense historical importance. Public spaces that salute the sordid past of the Confederacy in the South are now being more radically challenged with greater success than before. Monuments all over the country, especially in the South, featuring everything from statues of officers in the Army to the esteemed members of the Ku Klux Klan, are being torn down. The contestation of the symbolic representations of history has colored many heated

tensions between the far right and far left during the presidency of Trump. The iconoclastic movement has been accused of wanting to change the narratives of history.

The removal of monuments, perceived by the black communities to symbolize the history of white supremacy in the South, has been a topic of heated debate, also internationally; it is the battle of who has the power to define and shape the historical narratives and what types of symbolisms we all wish to live within the public spaces of the commons. To keep the monuments as landmarks, curiosities of racism, coloniality and imperial development have been deemed an insufficient argument to keep them as they are. Statues in Louisiana and Virginia were the first to be removed. During the George Floyd Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, many more were torn down by activists. Protests were held in 2400 places in the US, and several cities worldwide followed their lead during this period.

At the time of my return to the field, the alt-right in the South had adopted a neo-confederate stance, making the removal of statues hard to swallow for them. They now saw the need to protect their historical symbols. Robert Edward Lee's image and name are often featured in the South. Lee was, even before the war ended, a character of great interest and report with whites in the South—as the perfect image of the Christian gentleman and optima of strong white masculinity, and long served as a role model for the youth all over the country before and during the Civil War, despite the abundant historical research that has challenged this heroic image of Lee. Although he questioned some of the morality of slave ownership, Lee decided to support and fight for white supremacy. When Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was put forth, he described it as "brutal and savage" and urged the government to save the white race from pollution. His fears of racial pollution peaked with the slaughter of 200 black Union soldiers in Virginia in 1864 under his orders (Levin 2017; Strickland 2017).

The first monument to be removed was in New Orleans, a contested space where the history of slavery can be recognized through many monuments; some are especially contested due to their placement in UNESCO heritage sites. Four monuments had, at this time, been removed and are now in storage. Then monuments

in Memphis, Tennessee, were removed, and then it was the Robert Edward Lee statue in Charlottesville to be the next in line for removal. Charlottesville is 40 minutes from Twin Oaks, so the more active Antifa (anti-fascist) activists in the communities' hub were getting ready to "defend Charlottesville" from the protestors that were going to the town to object to the removal of the statue of Lee. As I portrayed at the beginning of this thesis, the protests sparked my interlocutors' ambiguous and painful emotional responses.

This societal tension, I believe, shows a tendency of resonance between various new social movements and grounded utopian movements. These now find more commonalities, for instance, through social media platforms, and with this, co-organizes divisions and borders, sparking debates, or perhaps revitalizes debates about how racism, colorism, gendered stratification, class, "whiteness," and imperial legacies have shaped our social contracts and national paradigms, alongside social identities. The community members seemed surprised that so much alt-right activity was happening in the quaint little town that they visit so much. We spoke about the plans they had for going there while engaging in a ritual on the farm.

Kami, one of my closest interlocutors and now friend, was preparing to smoke-infuse a cowhide with herbs as a wedding gift for my partner, David, and myself. We had agreed to gather at the sweat lodge since Kami and his partner Demeter had just fixed this space up. The pole frame of the sweat lodge was redone, with a cleared fire pit inside, ready to be covered by blankets for insulation for the next ceremony. This ritual had been adopted from local indigenous tribes and was often performed on the farm with one of the Sun Dancers, Hydrea. She was a long-time friend of the Lakota tribe and a ritual performer for many sweats in the surrounding areas in Virginia. Sun dances are often vision quests, and for Hydrea, relatively energy-intensive. Therefore, Hydrea decided it was time for her to pass the torch to someone else, as her latest quests had been particularly draining.

The fire pits outside had been cleaned up, and they had also beautified the space around. They had planted mosquito-determining herbs on an earth mound filled with rocks brought there on different occasions—Hydrea would always ask people to bring

back rocks from their journeys for her to bring to the rituals and put on the mound. I presented a black rock my partner, and I had picked up at "Heksegryta" or "the Witches Cauldron" in Norway. I told Demeter that, according to local lore, anyone who would walk up Heksegryta would be connected for life, whether they liked it or not. My partner and I had done so, but we felt that the rock should be at TO, where we met. Demeter was pleased and hugged us both and put our rock next to the sage and other rocks on the mound.

Kami and I worked together on the dairy team and shared a fascination for the cows. We had many similar ethical commitments and concerns regarding how we wanted the cows to be treated. Kami was a vegan and committed to Theravada Buddhism at the time. He had committed himself to the dairy program early on in his membership to improve the lives of the animals he now partly owned with the rest of the community, although he felt ambivalent about it. He had reached a conclusion to participate in that work after some long nighttime discussions in the smoking shack, fretting over the ethical problematics of keeping domesticated animals in an egalitarian space. Kami expressed that he was concerned with perpetuating the slavery of his forefathers and foremothers through animal husbandry. He would often mention his family members, who were poor chicken farmers exploited by more prominent companies, making his approach to factory farms and farming, in general, one of complex ambiguity.

Kami and Demeter gave us the cowhide because they thought we would appreciate that it was from a cow that we knew and had milked and that the cow had been respectfully treated during and after the slaughter. The cow, Pennywhistle, had been the matriarch of the herd. We all reminisced over how strong she was and how beautiful and shiny her pelt was even when all the other cows would be covered in mud and laughed about the stories of how tricky she could be to get into the barn if she was busy.

This was the first hide that they had prepared— a very labor-intensive process when done without chemicals. My partner and I were very moved by their gift, knowing how much work and care had gone into it. Kami was preparing a fire in the

outside pit while Demeter lit a little stick of palo santo wood that she passed around for a cleansing. The stick was passed around so that everyone who had joined us could cleanse themselves and the space around them. I mimicked the movement of Demeter and our other friends and did as Hydrea had taught me—to call on the North, East, West, South, and the Spirit.

More members were starting to turn up and did the same. One of them commented on the use of the wood, saying that many believed that burning, instead of sage for cleansings, was more "grounding" and that co liked it very much. They were all affected by the party the day before, some still wiping the sleep out of their heavy eyes. Some were still covered in glitter and body paints. A few of them had clearly slept outside that night and were dirty from mud.

Kami set up some buckets that were balancing sticks to hold the hide over the flames, and then put eucalyptus leaves and some of the fragrant palo santo on the fire underneath. The smell of the herbs, fire, and wood started to fill the air while the growing group of us sat down on the small benches around, chatting about the latest community gossip after the parties the night before. Some had been partying all night, while others had spent the day catching up with former members and had gone to some of the scheduled events and discussions that had been going on. There had been several gatherings in the evening all over the farm, and people seemed tired of having a vast mass of visitors on the farm for the 50th-anniversary celebrations. Kami and Demeter held each other, which made me happy, knowing they had a little tiff over the poly-boundaries they were trying to establish while experimenting with, involving others in their relationship the night before.

The conversation eventually moved on, and Kami mentioned that he had to return home for a little while because he had a court appointment. He had recently been arrested on a possession charge while visiting his family back home and felt he had been profiled by the police, as he lacked illegal substances in the car. The police officer claimed he had found green speckles of dust in his seat, which he claimed was marihuana. "It's bullshit and a complete waste of an arrest," Kami said. He preferred to "save" his jail time and arrests for political activities and was particularly annoyed at

having to go home for his trial when there were more pressing needs to address. This meant that he had to avoid being arrested at the next protest.

The Ku Klux Klan planned on having a summit in Charlottesville the following week at the Lee statue, and Kami and some of the other members were going to the protests organized to sabotage the KKK's plans. They had prepared themselves to be arrested for it. The alternative right was also joining forces, and it was looking like this part of Virginia would get many visitors over the next coming months. "The alt-right is just another wing of the Government," he said. "I mean, wasting an arrest on this bullshit back home, this is why I moved here, to get away from all of that… They would not let other terrorist organizations gather like this. Just goes to show we have the KKK in white, and we have the KKK in blue."

The group nodded. Many of them had already felt the strain of being minorities in the US and the fear of being arrested or attacked because of their visible identity markers, like being visibly non-heteronormative or the color of their skin. Some of the gay, trans, and non-binary members were scared of being arrested in rural Virginia, expecting that they would receive particular unfair treatment by police officers and in prison. White males in the group had experienced being arrested and expressed being fully aware that they received privileged treatment for offenses a minority person probably would not have if in the same situation.

Kami and eight other members had been arrested the year before when they stopped the traffic on the freeway going into one of the bigger cities in Virginia with Black Lives Matter. They were held overnight in uncomfortable hand locks, twisting their arms on their backs all night. While we were sitting around the fire, I was reminded that, during their court hearing, a POC staff member in the courtroom had said that it was "an honor" to have them there. This event was often mentioned as an example of having to work within a system of oppression, even when you are yourself being oppressed like so many non-white Americans must.

They all served small jail sentences but were released before they even got through the process of being fully checked into jail. Demeter mentioned the apparent

foolishness of not having them perform community service instead. What was the point, and how many taxes had it cost the American people? She asked.

When the KKK met in Charlottesville at the beginning of July 2017, the reports were that there were about 30 Klansmen present and between 1000–3000 activists protesting them. On Facebook, the communards saluted each other's actions, and many showed a great sense of pride in being involved in the action. Jumbo, a long-time activist, and member of TO, was arrested at the protest.

FIGURE 20- CHARLOTTESVILLE PROTESTS 2017

Description of Picture: Kami, second to the left, communard and social justice activist, here wearing his "Sunday finest," a well-known tradition of the Civil Rights Movement's strategy: looking like the Other or what the White establishment has deemed appropriate or respectable. When engaged in activism, wearing this is a ritual of inversion. He is holding a bottle of apple cider vinegar and water if he and other protesters have to endure mace or teargas. The protesters are locking arms to protect other activists—The picture was taken from his Facebook page with permission.

Weeks later, new protests and counter-protests happened, and as mentioned in the introduction, it led to the murder of activist Heather Meyers, who, together with many of the people that have been presented in this thesis was there to show the alternative right that they were not welcome.

Experiment as Struggle

As a settler state, the US was built by pioneers looking for land and new possibilities, often escaping the feudal landholding systems or increases in taxes without representation. Expansion, greed, and exploitation are sometimes accepted in the pursuit of happiness (Hochschild 2016). These historical developments can be seen as "emotional grooves" to draw from one of Arlie Hochschild's terms. These are periods in which deeper narratives about who we are surface. Hence, colonization, state formation, and production of Fundamental Documents, such as the US Constitution and Bill of Rights, are resurfacing with revitalized importance, as they represent periods and events that produce stories about identities and evoke pride. As a form of rehashing of the emotional grooves created in recognition of politics and Civil Rights gained in the 1960s, ICs as new social movements are both drawing on the movements of the 1960s. However, they also critiqued these movements for their failure to bring about structural and social justice, particularly regarding politics meant to assure racial equality (Taylor 2016).

For instance, the social contracts and events that shaped this colonization provided a particular framework that reproduces colonial social relationships in the present. Significantly, European social contract theories from the Enlightenment shaped the socio-economic futures for generations to come all over the Americas and has assured various lines of social stratification into the present differentiation and various forms of egalitarianisms today. The struggle for egalitarian innovation in ICs must reckon with these reverberations but still struggle with racism, classism, and ableism, despite the fundamentalist approach to how they experiment with practical expressions of egalitarianism.

The critique or problem of modern utopias that have emerged in new social movements and emancipatory movements is that they have been unspecific in their form and ideology, rather than understanding these unspecific or ambiguities within their experimentations as interesting or even good. This flexibility or rather "lack of common focus" has been deemed ineffective and problematic, and pundits have almost defined it as detrimental to some. Sargisson argued that the most estranged and single-focused ICs could become dangerous and oppressive; some of these we can now perhaps classify as cults or sects.

The acceptance of ambiguity and differences creates the flexibility needed for the sustainability of the movement. This way, the communities may find proper changes and new solutions that will respond to new and old challenges, but the ethnographic exploration also shows that differences can be too resource-draining. Thus, the IC movement has generated "different strokes for different folks," and people can move within the movement to find a better fit with a different IC.

As Kami's time at Twin Oaks ended some time ago, he serves as an example of searching for different strokes; eventually, he became connected to a farming IC, which focuses on the interconnections between social justice awareness and worker ownership, food systems, and farming. In a recent Instagram post, he was pictured with other black community farmers. The caption explained the strain on POC to farm “under the white gaze” and explored how white farmers could become fruitful allies. Racism, classism, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, and ageism remain to be unraveled, as they are ingrained in ways we perhaps have not yet fully understood or come to terms with—it is still an open multifaceted, ever-changing issue, where ICs can highlight these micro-problematics and behaviorism in what I have argued fruitful ways. Twin Oaks has since had several social upheavals due to the heightened focus on what it entails for POC to live in its predominantly white community. The egalitarian configurations through solidarity activism like this pushed further experimentation within the communities. The process of sharing such experiences embodies the sharing of experience and the development of skills to navigate a realm and space of egalitarian and utopian experimentation.

THE BIG BAD EGALITARIAN WOLF— UTOPIAN TENSIONS OF EGALITARIAN EXPERIMENTS

Karl Popper warned that utopias with ideal blueprints is sketched out, may conflict with human freedom and may lead to violence. We can understand his argument being about conflict. Humans have different preferred ends in mind, and different utopian visions may come into conflict—often leading to violence as the only means of overcoming such conflict (Popper 1953). Others, like Jacoby, accused social movements of having forgotten about utopian desires altogether (Jacoby and Soron 2001). The development of the contemporary ICs' movement tells a different but probably more contentious story than a social movement resulting from a generation of violence, apathy or escapism. Although the insecurities of modern times have soured apathy and discontent, it also gives fruitful ground for utopian thinking; intentional communards are at the very heart of this tension between discontent, suffering, and hope, between inclusion and exclusion of life as it is on the outside and the inside the struggles of "mainstream" life, while carving out spaces in the periphery of the state. Post-world war development saw the creation of a middle class that, in many ways, served corporate interests and revamped the potentials of the American Dream based on merits and hard work. This creates disillusionment with meritocratic egalitarian ideals and pushes people toward seeking new ways to live.

However, among others, Fredric Jameson claims that the radical leftist revolution as an idea has for many lost its ideological influence—the omnipresent and complicated system and cannot be replaced—and for many, it is easier to imagine the end of the world through imaginaries of dystopias or the apocalypse (Jameson 1994). I would have liked to explore this further than I have done here, as there is much to be gained from the deeper investigation of the tension or dialectic between utopian and dystopian imaginaries. We should also explore how this can be linked to egalitarianism, for instance, as egalitarianism has too often been a way of romanticizing or exoticizing the past or the Other. However, we also see that here is connected to imaginaries and ambivalence of a dystopic future.

I argue that this ethnographic exploration shows that utopian ambivalence is, in practical utopias, accepted as paradoxical, inherently fuzzy, and that these aspects

create new openings for holistic approaches to solidarity, equality, equity, and freedom(s). It drives fruitful exploration and manages to produce organizational structures that they deem successful enough to keep, like the planner–manager system or labor organization systems at Twin Oaks. I have argued that these renunciation processes are in place not to disengage with struggles but as an introspective process anti-hegemonizes and reengages with more explicit intent and commitment toward the good.

Communards go about producing processes where the good life is a process of anti-hegemonizing hierarchy consistently. This process is construed as relational and individualistic, in everyday acts, through hopes and desires, and the emotional process of the individual finding its place in the community. When these issues intersect or start with the stated egalitarian values, it allows groups to reconsider the true potentials of egalitarianism. We see here cases of what it entails to hold egalitarianism as a primary value, engrained in government, structure, institutions, social relationships, and organizational system. What I have argued is a form of prism or mode to act and think with egalitarianism, as it emerges as a "many-headed hydra," as Kapferer has noted (2015). These mediations of everyday acts and conversations also show the flexibility of egalitarianism in the ICs, as it is constantly shifting and recontextualized. I coined this utopian mode of the egalitarian process as being a form of practical egalitarianism.

I compared communards to having similarities with the renunciatory individual’s potential like the sannyasins in India, as theorized by Luis Dumont (1960), who argued within the all-encompassing paramount values of hierarchical structures based on ideas of purity and impurity of the caste system. One may leave the world, or society, to seek complete liberation, or freedom from oppression or freedom from being the oppressor. "Life in the mainstream is not the real world," my interlocutor Keisha said once when I had committed a cultural faux pas and referred to the outside as "out there in the real world" during a conversation. This mistake is common, and corrected immediately by the communitarians, that their claims to "realness" or "reality" are one of a perhaps more "authentic" experimentations of the

human condition and its social organization that is not skewed by the more destructive forces of for instance open market capitalism, political oppression of peoples, and other problematic aspects of modern life.

Relating to this tension, I have compared ICs to grounded utopian movements, but Robert C. Schehr argues that IC's are best understood as parts of the "new social movements" category and claims that the dismissal of these in social sciences is related to the view that these movements are the opposite of movement, that these "subaltern modes of resistance" have been ignored because they are disregarded as escapist, or even as failures because they have failed at creating movement (1997:25-31). The reduction of utopias or communes to that of a type of "outsiderhood" is problematic as they often do not seclude themselves but intentionally participate with the outside. However, as I have shown throughout the thesis, interlocutors do not secede into enclaves entirely, but the movement chooses how and when to engage with the outside carefully. This is so that they can achieve safety for their members in pursuing and experimenting with a new lifestyle while also stay engaged with other major political movements that they deem fruitful, like BLM.

Schehr further argued that these movements are measured by their success in early social science, assessed through their longevity as a community or movement. As Schehr stated, this is not usually how people living in ICs who are active in other social movements measure their success; instead, it is to achieve varying goals or to simply consider utopia as a practice or process—as a mindful and intentional meditation of the meanings and reverberations of acts and through the actual force of the reverberations of willed change (Schehr 1997). As Schehr also argues, success can, for example, also be the level of self-improvement that happens for the individual or the amount of activism that they do (Schehr 1997:11). Though longevity for some dedicated to staying in one specific community is essential, this can be a misrepresentation of their social experiments, in which the main objective is to be experimental. The only failure of that is to become stagnant. Practical egalitarianism, in this case, must remain experimental to be utopian. Hierarchies are there, but the values producing these must be questioned in this context continuously— as such they

are highly unstable social orderings, encompassed by egalitarianism, but continuously unpacked and critiqued.

The same sentiment can be compared to the arguments furthered in David Graber and Rhiannon Firth's writings: utopians, in their writings, exemplified by the case of anarchists and how they explore through failure (Graeber 2004; Firth 2018). When the community fails, they muse their findings and process very transparently. As we have seen, this can often appear as performances in which the egalitarianism of the community is questioned. Another criterion for success could instead be establishing an alternative, no matter how it actually turns out. Either way, success, and failures are more of a dialectic that drives utopianism forward, creates discussion and new conflicts, or even forces change that is not planned. Concerning oneself with the processes of these so-called successes and failures is more interesting than deeming the communards efforts of utopia as either or retrospectively.

My interlocutors often express disillusionment with their state and the ideas of success and ideals of happiness that seem to mismatch their abilities, access to resources, or status in life. The reverberation of past social justice struggles and social movements, though making enormous strides, did not produce the ruptures with structural inequalities that my interlocutors today dedicate their entire lives to disassemble for a better future. As I see it, these are examples of blurring the boundaries between political projects and utopian imaginaries. Projects of this nature are attempts to forge a new political future in the present for a better future, and I have shown here examples of the negotiations of such prefigurative politics shaped by modes of utopian egalitarianism. I have, in this thesis, hopefully, contributed to the vast anthropological tradition of the study of egalitarianism and/or egalitarian societies. With my research, I have linked the utopian impulse to the egalitarian and argued for an egalitarian utopian mode that highlights and reflects upon paradox and ambiguity through the practicalities of everyday life. This thesis thus should also be interesting to researchers of social movements, and of values and hierarchy.

ICs depend on certain homogenizations, but these can often be taken too far, and it becomes unsustainable, or the community may become coercive. ICs that hold

egalitarianism as a core project are good examples of this; their experiments show that they depend on separating themselves from the unwanted ways of being in hierarchical relations to each other in order to experiments and explore new ways; however, they are always situated in this tension. In some ways, one may argue that my interlocutors both affirm this and try to intentionally contend this, trying to find ways of escaping this problem but rarely manage to. As I have expanded and contextualized this as value-mastering as a skill developed as of highlighted importance and analytically, this is significant for the understanding of the individual concerning the whole, renunciation, and integration. Hierarchies form and are disbanded to become "more egalitarian" or "more sustainable."

My ethnography shows that although utopian communitarians seek to create a community without significant and oppressive hierarchies, these processes create inegalitarianism, new hierarchies and substantial exclusions. Society has produced oppressive hierarchies that sometimes cannot be overcome. The conflict appears when the individual seeking to renounce these oppressions refuses or cannot be part of the whole or does not incorporate the whole into their identity. These tensions are accepted as part of the difficulty of achieving total equality, and these disillusionments are integrated into everyday speech to explore new possibilities. To engage with such ambivalence is also part of being a skillful egalitarian. Fragmentation illuminates the communal ideology and creates moments of retrospection. In these cases, some forms of egalitarianism are agreed upon, but some form so proper sociability is uncertain, flexible, or yet-to-be-decided on collectively.

For some who choose to live in the community, their utopian endeavor shows empirically to be hard to pinpoint; the same goes for articulating specific end-goals or ideals. Instead, my interlocutors and community peers show that they act and reflect on a very uncertain future where the community is seen as a strategy for change in some cases but could also lead to more problems. Failures and conflicts, often depicted as events, are productive toward utopias—they cause reorientations, recontextualizations, and exclusions that are flexible yet necessary. For interlocutors, moving to a community is a personal rupture, not a societal one. Bound in the

paradoxes of an omnipresent and sometimes mysterious mode of the processual ontologies of practical egalitarianism, the dangers of being liminal and liminoid spaces in the periphery of the state make them volatile. Nevertheless, when merged with policy development and openness toward experimentation, the flexibility of egalitarianism reduces this volatility. Communities may disband, but that does not mean that their entire projects can be deemed unsuccessful — members of these still learn and are nourished by these experiences.

The membership process is one of inclusion and exclusion, illustrating that the egalitarian ideals they keep are believed not to be suitable for everyone. Nevertheless, we may see an ethos of the movement regarding the ambiguous feelings of the communards, in that they have yet to feel like they have resolved unequal outcomes or the production of inegalitarianism or hierarchy.

These affective turns articulating the insecurities created by the neoliberal oligarchical states also reveal some of the emerging inequalities in the communities. At times, we can see egalitarian communards as often reverting to "tricksterisms" where they play around with the boundaries of accepting egalitarianism; its tensions and ambiguities are displayed and highlighted—sometimes they are resisting or cheating their systems. The ethnography presented here shows moments in which values are confronted as parts of the negotiations toward a better future and the discussions on what the community needs, where ambivalence in which we see examples of how paradoxes and contradictions of egalitarianism are approached and acted on through ways of intentionality and various social commitments. As an example, I presented several cases where consent was overridden, like in the denied trickster figure Achilles, who became the bud of his own joke and eventually left the community. I also showed that cheating with labor credits could be such a process.

The anthropological contribution of this thesis is constructed on the ways I have sought to open up and unpack the concept of egalitarianism by departing from locally meaning and use of this concept, hoping it would fruitfully expand to how we may analytically understand how such concepts shape complexity in social life. I have explored the sometimes-unexpected ways in which the concept of "egalitarianism"

produces meaning and social norms and shows us what is to be expected from these particular expressions of practical egalitarianism.

This thesis has most importantly contributed to the body of anthropological inquiry into the unpacking of egalitarianism, emphasizing what I have explored as an expression of egalitarianism, here coined as practical egalitarianism. The significance of such work is to encourage the study of local imaginaries related to egalitarian ideology and value so that anthropology may be at the forefront to challenge understandings of such utopian movements. As local vernacular takes the concept of egalitarianism and engrain its meanings into all social life, it is a study of egalitarian philosophers and egalitarianism from "the ground up".

Expanding on the vast body of theories drawing from Luis Dumont's understanding of egalitarianism and hierarchy, this thesis urges anthropologists to continuously unpack the contemporary dynamics of egalitarianism, both as a concept and how its force shapes social life. This, compared to grounded utopian movements, looks at the processes that speak to social change brought about by social movements that seek to unravel the reverberations of colonization, imperialism, patriarchy, and other oppressive influences. Exploring how this relates to egalitarian ideology and paradox is thus an original contribution to the thesis and should inform other studies of egalitarian movements and experiments.

Egalitarianism as a Utopian Mode

Overall, I summarize here the findings, assessments, and explorations already presented throughout the thesis. The first part explored IC history and the essential topics that would be problematized in the community and this thesis. In the first chapter, I explored the intersections between the topics of utopias and egalitarian ICs. Here, I established some of the main concerns of this thesis: understanding what it means to take egalitarian experimentations of those self-proclaimed "egalitarians" who live in this interconnected hub of communities seriously as everyday modes of exploring the good life as egalitarianism(s). Also, the reader pictured the conceptual foundations for these complexities, and I established my methods and ethical concerns

with being a member while also researching my member peers. I showed here the political context that transpired during my time in the field to explore how ICs that hold egalitarianism as a core focus can show us interesting aspects of willingness for the good life and of grounded forms of practical egalitarian experimentation. By investigating some of how egalitarianism has been conceived, understood, and conceptualized in anthropological inquiries, I argued here that there are significant knowledge gaps in how we are to understand such endeavors still and that ethnographic explorations of utopians can provide valuable insight into the "many-headed hydra" of egalitarianism (see Kapferer 2015:108).

In the second chapter, the reader was introduced to the historical context of this particular hub of "egalitarian" ICs, and I vested considerable space in also exploring the outlay of the community Twin Oaks to reveal to the reader what life in the community looks like and established some understanding of the intellectual and ideological historical heritage drawn from the community. Here I showed how egalitarianism as a "political" project has come to hold salience and showed how communards view and perform a collective social utopian history with literary, ideological, and other utopian settler movements and societies. This was exemplified through showing, for instance, the various nostalgic and symbolic representations of other ICs that buildings are named after. I then explained what the community's political and social organization of Twin Oaks looks like, as an example of a holistic egalitarian experiment through nostalgic representations of other ICs that buildings are named after. I explained how TO developed from a behaviorist utopian experiment to the current political and social organization of the community looks like currently, as an example of a holistic egalitarian experiment.

In the third chapter, I sought to delve deeper into common patterns in the motivational factors of individuals and the group to engage with the IC movement and explored the initiation process for new members. Here I argued for the importance of liminal qualities of this process and established my argument that this mode of egalitarian utopianism depends on "different strokes for different folks," which allows for collective constitutive processes that assure egalitarian forms to configure. I argued

that finding the right members encompassing egalitarian skills or potential is fundamental for the sustainability of commune and egalitarian governance. I exemplified this, mainly through the formalized system at Twin Oaks, where the rigorous initiation process shows several significant arrangements and dynamics of intensification of certain forms of egalitarian expressions, like that of equal commitment.

The fourth chapter explored the experimentation with “radical sharing,” connecting this to ideals and values related to resistance against over-consumption and individual accumulation. It showed how communards do this by expanding processes and skillsets regarding frugality, degrowth, asceticism, and highlight discourses of sustainability, and how they go about connecting this to sharing as a way of committing to egalitarian processes. I investigated here the motivations, conflicts, and concerns of communards, alongside the various forms of sharing of resources that happens in the community, from income sharing to place sharing to sharing objects like clothes or learning how to “make do” with limited resources.

In the fifth chapter, I chose to highlight a set of norms that organize how communards allow for self-exploration, empowerment, and safety in social interaction—by experimenting with "consent culture." I showed how this is a movement in world society at large and how it is taken as a central feature of egalitarian social life in the ICs with which I have worked with. Here, the communards explore consent in even the most minor interactions and behaviors to engage more deeply with understanding what consent can do for social justice and equality. The liberating aspects are essential for members while they sometimes struggle with implementing consent in every interaction or face struggles with members resisting the norms. We see here that the community went far in establishing understandings of what it could mean to consent to something verbally and how it feels or how others can read it. This is as such an egalitarian skillset, not easily navigated, but nonetheless radical in that it takes the boundary creation and investigation seriously and expands on consent culture to entail the sexual and romantic life and insert it into all social life. While this informs us about the importance of speaking about consent in general, it

navigates the issues we see now being brought up in many nations and local communities across the globe, where verbal consent to sex is increasingly integrated into legal frameworks and shows how this can be a problematically narrow understanding of consent. I argued here for deeper engagement with exploring consent to understand better the complexities of social interaction that might be oppressive.

The sixth chapter, the labor system at Twin Oaks, was mainly examined, where the issues explored touch upon many of the topics in the previous chapters, such as commitment, sharing, frugality, and solidarity. Departing from this, I made this point the foundation of a more extensive discussion where I stressed the importance of balancing the needs of the group with the individual in this form of organization, where all labor is accredited equally regarding labor "credits." I reviewed how this anti-hegemonizing gendered divisions of labor and showed how the worker-owned system like this allows for innovative designs, such as worker-ownership and other egalitarian experimentations. Emphasizing liminoid experiences and settings, I also showed how vital flow, communitas, and solidarity are, exemplified through playwork. I noted that these highlighted modes of egalitarianism are in tension with and must be balanced with the vast bureaucratization of egalitarian social organization. We saw, for instance, the glitches in the commitment of members that cheat or feel like they are suffering from burnouts, or those or that they are being exploited or discriminated against. This tension reveals what it could entail intersecting a righteous livelihood with a more fundamentalist approach to the practicalities of egalitarianism. This shows a practical approach which balances on the verge of becoming “too egalitarian”, or too problematic at times.

I have shown here how egalitarianism intersects with action, organization, ideals, and values. Overall, we have seen examples of egalitarianism as having many expressions; exemplified here as sharing, egalitarianism as community, egalitarianism as intentionality and commitment, egalitarianism as organization toward the good, egalitarianism as economic structure, as political structure, as norm systems for behavior, as a system of governance and skill-making or resocialization, and egalitarianism as reflection of emotions, embodied practices, play and fun, and other

intersections of action with social norms and values. An egalitarianism for the good life is here, in this hub of ICs, in a way a form of proper sociality that opens old wounds and explores ambiguities and processes of practical utopians.

Egalitarianism and utopia seem to share some of the same paradoxes and struggles—they are concepts that fold onto themselves and become their own limitations and impossibilities. Based on these ethnographic explorations, I have only begun to scratch the surface of how these ICs are examples where everyday life can be seen to open up the ways one may understand and act on these two concepts. I have shown that these processes refuse hierarchies by creating new ones and argued that new forms of equality are opened as potential possibilities. New ways of being equal emerge as well, as shown through the experiment of consent or the cases of income sharing. There is indeed something playful about these concepts, something tricky, ambiguous, paradoxical, and ironic.

Andrew Sayer (2011) construed the human situation as one of the necessary suspensions between present and future. This tension induces a processual ontology, one of becoming both at the individual and a social level. We live between what is and what could or should be; ethical ideas themselves are related to both the kinds of beings we (think we) are and the kinds of beings we (think we) should become through our actions (Levitas 2013; Sayer 2011). Utopians and communal explorations of big human enigmas through everyday situations and life, such as how to go about creating more just and egalitarian futures, should be explored thoroughly. I have here sought to unpack what such egalitarian pursuits may encounter of difficulty and successes in the everyday lives of communards. I believe these to be highly complex and fruitful interesting topics of great importance, and that anthropological research is ideal for understanding such pursuits, as we ask big questions about the more minor issues in the everyday lives of people.

As a member of Acorn Raven wrote in a popular "Commune Life" blog post, "Really, communes are important, as far as I'm concerned because they are laboratories for social change, experiments to see what works and what doesn't as we try to create a better world. Let's commune!"(Raven 2016).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A- TWIN OAKS LABOR AREAS

Council	Areas representing Labor-creditable Activities and Management
Agriculture	Bees; Dairy; Farm; Fences; Forestry; Garden; Herb Garden; Mushrooms; Orchard; Ornamentals; Poultry; Seeds; Alt-Orchard
Child	Schooling, care, Managers make up a board, and there are 3
Community service	Local Relations, Movement Support
Construction/Utilities	Building Maintenance, Domestic Sawmill; Electrical Maintenance, Equipment Maintenance, IT (phones, computers), Plumbing Maintenance, STP (Sewage Treatment Plant), Woodshop
Culinary	Cook, Food, Food Processing, Kitchen, Meat processing, milk processing
Domestic	Commie Clothes, House, House Furnishings, Pets, Room Assigning; Stereo, Trustery
Grounds	Footpaths, MT (Modern Times) Garden, Pond/Sauna, Yard
Health	Dental; Health Team; Mental Health Team; Safety
Material Support	Archives; Darkroom; Library; Recycling; Woodheat/BTU
Office	Accounting, Office, Taxes.

Outreach	Communities Conference, Community Visitor Program, Federation of Egalitarian Communities, Leaves of Twin Oaks Newsletter, Recruitment, Visitor Correspondence, Women's Gathering
Planning	Community Planners, Econ Team, Labor, Land Planning/Space Use, Legal, Membership Team, New Member Liaisons, Process Team
Social Support	Holiday, Recreation, Video
Transportation and maintenance	Auto Maintenance, Battery Carts, Bikes, Machine Shop, Road Maintenance, Vehicle Use, Welding
Income Council: Rope Products-operations	Desk, Fairs, Marketing, Purchasing, Shipping, Warehousing
Income Council: Rope Products-Production	Fabric Beds; Grommet; Hammocks Chairs; Hammocks Kits; Hammocks Shop; Pillows; Rope
Income Council: Rope products-Wood	Warehouse, Chair Varnish, Sawmill, Stretchers
Income Council: Tofu	General Manager, Management Team, Marketing, Accounting, Purchasing, and Upgrade, Scheduling, Tempeh, Soysage
Other income	Directory Distribution, Herb Workshop, Indexing, book sales; Ornamentals, Outside work, Seeds

(Updated version of Table 1 in Berhards (2013).

APPENDIX B - TWIN OAKS BYLAWS

ARTICLE I. Definitions and Purpose.
ARTICLE II. Membership.
ARTICLE III. Governance.
ARTICLE IV. The Property Code.
ARTICLE V. Dissolution of the Community.
ARTICLE VI. Amendment of the Bylaws.

ARTICLE I. Definitions and Purpose.

Paragraph One. Definitions.

A. Twin Oaks Community, Incorporated (hereinafter "Twin Oaks" or "the Community") is an intentional community owned and operated by its members, who act in accordance with its Statement of Religious Beliefs and Practices, share all income and expenses, rear their children communally, and are collectively responsible for all the needs of the Community's members and children, including food, clothing, shelter, medical care, education, and other needs and amenities considered desirable, insofar as the Community is able to provide them.

B. Throughout these Bylaws, "the Community" is used in a sense that implies that the Community makes decisions or takes actions. All such references shall be interpreted as meaning that the responsible officers or directors of the Community make the decision or take the action referred to unless otherwise specified to mean the voting membership of the Community.

C. Whenever in these Bylaws the word "member" or "membership" is used without the qualifying adjectives "full" or "provisional," the word shall be taken to apply to all full and provisional members.

D. The term "members in transition" shall mean members during their first seven days of membership, or such portion of that time as is provided for by Community policy, and members during their final four weeks of membership, or such portion of that time as is provided for by Community policy.

E. The terms "voting membership" and "voting members" shall in all cases mean the full membership, except for members in transition, and shall exclude the provisional membership.

F. The word "co" shall mean "she or he"; "cos" shall mean "hers or his"; "coself" shall mean "herself or himself."

Paragraph Two. Purpose.

Together our aim is to perpetuate and expand a society based on cooperation, sharing, and equality:

A. Which serves as one example of a cooperative social organization, relevant to the world at large, and promotes the formation and growth of similar communities;

B. Which strives to treat all people in a kind, gentle, honest, and fair manner, without violence or competition;

C. Which assumes responsibility for maintaining the availability of natural resources for present and future generations through ecologically sound production and consumption;

D. Which in the behavior of individuals and of the Community strives to eliminate the attitudes and results of sexism, racism, ageism, and competitiveness;

E. Which has no special privilege or benefit associated with positions of responsibility, and does not permit the power or influence necessitated by efficient government to differentially promote the welfare of the governing group, or of any other subgroup;

F. Which assumes responsibility for the material and social needs of its members, according to the principle "from each according to cos ability; to each according to cos need"; and

G. Which strives to be self-reliant by producing for itself the goods and services necessary for the maintenance of the Community.

Paragraph Three. Implementation.

The Definitions and Purpose stated above shall be implemented through:

A. Intentionality in our planning and daily functioning to discover and encourage the most desirable behaviors for individual members and the most desirable goals and methods of functioning for the Community as a whole;

B. A system of internal economics that holds all land, labor, and other resources in common, and makes the material benefits of the Community available to all members equally or according to need;

C. A general practice of respecting the liberty of each individual member to as great an extent as is consistent with the well being of the Community and the laws of the government in whose jurisdiction it lies;

D. A participatory form of government in which the voting members have either a direct vote or the right of impeachment or overrule;

E. A collective form of maintenance, care, education, and responsibility for all children residing in the Community;

F. An emphasis in the Community's social policy and practices on fostering responsibility and commitment, on cooperation rather than competition, and on affirming rather than punishing means for changing behavior;

G. A general practice of open membership, so long as the potential member's acceptance is consistent with the purposes and social needs of the Community and with the happiness of its members;

H. An insistence on the non-involvement by all members in acts which are defined by the Community as conflicting with the purposes and policies set forth in this Article.

Paragraph Four. Use by Other Parties.
In no event shall the resources or facilities of this Community be used to further in any manner any project or activity or purpose of any group or individual that is inconsistent with the purpose of the Community as set forth in this Article.

Article II. Membership.
Paragraph One. Membership Agreement.

The Community shall at all times have a form of a membership agreement, a copy of which shall be filled out and executed between the Community and each member of the Community. Said form of said agreement is attached to these Bylaws as Exhibit 1, and may be amended by the same procedure as this Article of these Bylaws. Upon amendment of said form of said agreement, each member of the Community shall acknowledge the change(s) by executing with the Community a new agreement as amended.

Paragraph Two. Classes of Membership.

Membership in the Community consists of provisional members and full members.

A. Applicants may become provisional members after having been accepted as such by established Community procedures in accordance with and upon approval of the Board of Directors of the Community, provided that such applicant signs a membership agreement with the Community within four weeks after beginning such membership.

B. Provisional members may become full members six months after joining the Community by signing a membership agreement as such, if they are accepted as full members by established Community procedure in accordance with and upon approval of the Board of Directors of the Community.

C. If a member voluntarily terminates cos membership in the Community, or cos membership is involuntarily terminated as provided in paragraph Four of this Article II, co shall not be entitled to a return of any property which co may have donated to the Community. No member nor cos heirs nor cos assigns shall have any claim or right, title, or interest in any property of the Community on account of the services performed by such member for or on behalf of the Community during cos period of membership.

D. Members under the age of eighteen years shall have all the rights and duties of their membership class except such as may be determined to be legally inappropriate to minors.

Paragraph Three. Requirements for Membership.

Assuming that the Community is financially and otherwise able to accept new members, membership is available, without financial requirements, to any person who is deemed to be a desirable member by the Community.

Paragraph Four. Termination.

A. The term of membership (provisional and full combined) is for the life of the member, unless voluntary termination of membership or expulsion occurs.

B. Voluntary termination consists of a public statement by a member that co is resigning membership, which shall include, however, a member's departure from the Community, and interpretation by the Community that co intended to terminate cos membership. The effective date of termination shall be set by the member with the consent of the Community, and shall be designated on the leaving document signed by the leaving member. If the member fails to set such a date, the date shall be set by the Community.

C. In the event that a member, after leaving the Community as above described, shall change cos mind within 30 days and wish to return, the Community may, at its discretion, readmit co to cos former status and treat the intervening time as if it had been vacation. However, under these circumstances the Community is not obliged to provide the same housing or work or positions of responsibility that the member formerly had. Any spending of money or other financial transactions in which the member may have engaged during the interim which shall, viewed retroactively, be seen to have violated the Property Code (Article IV hereunder) shall be dealt with at the discretion of the Community. The former member may also choose to apply for provisional membership as a new candidate, should this be acceptable to the

Community.

D. Expulsion of a provisional member may occur at any time during the provisional period and for any reason, including but not limited to those specified in subparagraph (E) below, provided only that the Community believes that said provisional member is undesirable. Expulsion shall generally occur, except for unusual and exceptional cases, if said member does not become a full member or voluntarily terminate cos membership within a year of becoming a provisional member.

E. Expulsion of a full member may, but need not, take place for any of the following reasons:

1. Co openly repudiates the principles of the Community and works against their implementation.

2. Co is found guilty by local, state, or federal authorities of some crime or misdemeanor and the Community therefore feels it is no longer appropriate for co to remain a member.

3. Co consistently does less than cos share of the Community work.

4. Co absents coself from the Community for more than three weeks beyond the point of legitimate vacation according to current Community policy or without having made satisfactory arrangements with the Community with regard to cos absence.

5. Co physically, sexually and/or mentally abuses another member or guest of the Community, or any child, by any aggressive action and/or words which the Community interprets as sufficiently serious and/or likely to be repeated to warrant expulsion.

The application of the foregoing provision to abusive words is not intended to inhibit the free expression of information, opinion, belief or emotion. It is intended to apply when oral or written language is presented in a threatening, harassing, or violent manner such that it would be reasonably expected to cause physical, sexual or mental harm. Guidelines for Aplying the Mental Abuse Provision of the Bylaws

6. Co repeatedly and/or flagrantly violates the equality principle by appropriating to cos use items (including but not limited to cash) intended for the use of the Community as a whole or property designated for other use; or co repeatedly or flagrantly steals property belonging to someone else;

7. Co is discovered to have made bad faith declarations of the extent or disposition of cos property when entering the Community or subsequently, or co grossly violates the Community Property Code (Article IV below) with regard to the disposition of said property or the disposition of any income co received while a member.

8. Co deliberately and overtly attempts to destroy or disband the Community by any legal, extralegal, or financial means or in any other manner, provided that this shall not be broadly interpreted to refer to the holding of disapproved opinions or to behavior which from time to time might be considered dangerous. It is intended to refer specifically to deliberately making trouble between the Community and civil authorities, involving the Community in a lawsuit, involving the Community in unauthorized financial obligations, and such similar hostile acts or attempted hostile acts.

The above provisions shall not be taken as requiring the Community to expel a member, even for these reasons. The Community may, but need not, expel a member for any of the above reasons. The Community also has the option of substituting other remedies or sanctions.

F. Expulsion Mechanism.

The procedure for expulsion shall be as follows: Expulsion may be proposed by any voting member. The Board of Directors of the Community, and/or such other body of members as the Board of Directors may authorize either ad hoc or as a matter of policy, shall hold a public meeting or meetings on the proposed expulsion -- provided, however, that at one meeting or another the member in question shall be given full opportunity to answer any accusations or to explain cos conduct or view and express cos desires concerning cos membership, if possible. If, after the member in question has been heard, the Community desires cos expulsion, if possible co shall be so informed, at which time co will normally be allowed at least three days before co is required to leave the Community premises. Extensions of this period may be made at the discretion of the Community.

ARTICLE III. Governance.

Paragraph One. In General.

The affairs of the Community are, in accordance with its Articles of Incorporation in the State of Virginia, managed by its Board of Directors. The Board of Directors has the authority and responsibility for making policy decisions for the Community.

Paragraph Two. Board of Directors and Officers.

A. The Board of Directors shall consist of the members of the Board of Community Planners ("the Board"). There shall be three regular members of the Board. An additional person may be designated as a stand-in member of the Board, and shall assume the responsibilities, duties, and powers of a regular member of the Board during the event of an absence of a regular member of the Board or in the case of a vacancy on the Board, and a second stand-in planner may be appointed when desirable because there are insufficient regular members of the Board due to absence or resignation or for other reasons, in order to maintain a full Board of three.

All members of the Board shall be voting members of the Community. Upon termination of a person's term as a regular member of the Board or as a stand-in within six months of the termination of cos regular term, co shall not be reappointed to the Board for a period of at least six months, except that co may be appointed as a stand-in planner for up to three months in case the Board finds it desirable for reasons of continuity or for other reasons.

B. New members of the Board shall be appointed after the following general process with periods for and intervals between steps in the process being determined by the Board, except if there is no current member of the Board, in which case the procedure shall be as specified in subparagraph (D) below: The Board shall post public notice of each upcoming or current vacancy. The Board shall solicit the voting members for individuals interested in serving on the Board. A notice containing a list of the interested parties shall then be posted publicly, and any additional voting member may be added to the possible candidates by co placing cos signature on the notice. The Board shall then solicit the general membership for opinions of the candidates, after which the Board shall nominate an individual to fill the vacancy. A general ballot of the voting members shall then be held and all such voting members shall have the opportunity to accept or reject the nomination. If more than twenty percent of the members eligible to vote reject the nomination, the Board shall rescind the nomination, and, if not, the nominated individual shall be appointed to fill the vacancy. The term of regular members of the Board shall be eighteen months. The term of a stand-in member shall be three to six months. The term may end earlier by reason of resignation, death, or recall (method of recall is provided in subparagraph Three (A)(3) of this Article).

C. No member of the Board of Directors shall serve alone for a period of more than six weeks. Should this period pass without the appointment of at least one additional member of the Board of Directors, the remaining director shall resign and elections shall be called immediately by said director or any member of the Community, as provided for in subparagraph (D) below.

D. If there is no current member of the Board of Directors, due to resignation, recall, or for any reason whatsoever, elections shall immediately be called by any voting member of the Community. A request for candidates shall be posted in a public place in the Community for not less than 7 and not more than 14 days, and any member of the Community who wishes to be a candidate for the Board of Directors shall place cos name thereon. At the end of this period, elections shall be held. Any voting member may conduct this election; if no member steps forward within a week from the time at which there ceased to be a Board of Directors, then the election shall be conducted by the voting member who has been a member for the longest period of time. Each voting member of the Community may cast a vote for up to three of the candidates whose names appear on the slate, but no member may vote for the same candidate more than once. The three candidates who obtained the most votes shall be the new Board of Directors, provided that each of these candidates obtained votes from at least a majority of eligible voters voting in the election. If any of the three candidates did not obtain

the necessary votes, then co shall not be appointed director; however, if one or two candidates did obtain the required votes, they shall be appointed the new Board of Directors and shall obtain additional members in accordance with the provisions of subparagraph (B) above. If no candidate obtained the required votes, runoff elections shall be held immediately.

E. The Board shall appoint three voting members of the Community to be the President (who shall also be a member of the Board), the Secretary, and the Treasurer of the Community, and the Board shall appoint such other officers and representatives as it deems necessary, all with such powers and duties as it finds necessary or convenient for the governance of the Community and/or the conduct of its external relations. Said officers shall be appointed for a term of one year, shall serve until their successors are appointed, and shall be removable at the will of the Board. The Board shall also designate an officer, a member of the Board, or a member of the Community to maintain a record of voting members of the Community. The Board may also appoint such groups as it deems appropriate to aid the Board in the performance of its duties.

F. The annual meeting of the Board of Directors shall be held directly after the annual meeting of the membership and at the same location, and no notice of the meeting shall be required. The Board shall appoint officers of the Community and conduct whatever business may be before it at its annual meeting.

G. A quorum of the Board of Directors shall be two members of the Board, except that if there is only one member of the Board, co may serve for up to six weeks by coself, as provided in subparagraph (C) above.

Paragraph Three. Participatory Governance.

A. In general, any reasonable means of managing the affairs of the Community may be entered upon and tried, without the necessity of amending these Bylaws, so long as such means shall be upon direction by and supervision of the Board, and providing:
1. That the governing body shall at all times manage and govern within the principles and policies of the Community as specified in these Bylaws;

2. That the government shall be participatory to the fullest extent possible, with general public forums to allow the consideration and input of the membership on all substantial policy decisions;

3. That the voting members of the Community shall always have the right to recall the governing body or a member of the governing body. A recall shall be preceded by a meeting of the membership called by any voting member with at least ten, but not more than fifty, days of public notice prior to such a meeting. At this meeting, the member(s) of the governing body whom it is proposed to recall shall be given full opportunity to answer any accusations

or to explain cos/their conduct or views. After the meeting, should the voting membership of the community desire to recall the member(s) of the governing body, it may do so by obtaining the signatures (including written or telephoned vote in absentia as provided in subparagraph (B)(2) below) of no less than a simple majority of the voting members of the Community on a petition of recall. Any voting member may initiate such a petition.

4. That the voting members of the Community shall always have the right to overrule any decision of the governing body. If any voting member of the Community wishes to overrule a decision of the governing body, co may attempt to do so by initiating a petition of overrule. To be successful, the petition must receive the signatures (including written or telephoned vote in absentia as provided in subparagraph (B)(2) below) of no less than a simple majority of the voting members of the Community. The Community may set a higher percentage for issues concerning the acceptance or rejection of members, as it deems wise. Said petition must be completed within three weeks of a decision's being made public by the governing body.

B. Provisions for Voting:
1. The record date for any notice shall be the date of the notice. The record date for eligibility to vote at any meeting shall be the date of the meeting. The record date for eligibility to sign a petition shall be the date for required completion of the petition, as per paragraph Three (A)(4) above.

2. No vote may be cast by proxy, but any voting member may submit a written or telephoned vote in absentia on an issue which is brought before a vote of the membership, and said written or telephoned vote shall be treated as a vote cast in person or as a signature on a petition, as appropriate. For a telephoned vote to be valid the member must speak directly to two voting members of the Community and state that co is casting a vote.

Paragraph Four. Meetings of the Membership.

A. The annual meeting of the membership shall be held on any day in November or December of each year on the property of Twin Oaks. An officer or member of the Board of Directors shall post notice of said meeting in a public place in the Community, which shall constitute personal notice to each voting member of the Community, at least 10 and not more than 50 days in advance of said meeting, except that if said meeting will be the official meeting with respect to a change in the Community's Articles of Incorporation, said notice shall be provided at least 25 and not more than 50 days in advance. If no notice is posted, then the meeting will be held on the first Friday of December at 3:30 p.m. in the normal place at which Community meetings are held, and no changes in the Community's Articles of Incorporation shall be discussed.

B. Any voting member of the Community may call a special meeting of the membership by

posting notice of such a meeting in a public place at least 10, but not more than 50, days before the date of such a meeting. Such a meeting may be called for any purpose for which a general membership meeting is required or for any other purpose.

ARTICLE IV. The Property Code.
Paragraph One. Intent.

A. Insofar as possible, it is the intent of this Article to accord equal access to life's material benefits to all members regardless of their financial position previous to membership. Accordingly, it is necessary for Twin Oaks to limit an individual's use of assets while co is a member of the Community.

B. Members in transition are not subject to the Property Code.

Paragraph Two. Assets Existing Prior to Membership.

A. Personal Property:

1. General Provisions:

a. Personal property, whether petty or grand, shall not be converted to cash or exchanged for other personal property, with the exception of personal property converted to a member loan or member donation.

b. It is Twin Oaks' intent to maintain borrowed property in accordance with its normal standards of maintenance for Community property, but it cannot be held liable for any damage or loss due to any cause whatsoever.

2. Petty Personal Property: This includes tangible personal property that in its normal use might be kept in a member's private space or carried on cos person (unless specifically designated grand personal property by Community policy), including but not limited to furniture, bedding, small tools and appliances, clothing, jewelry, watches, books, phonograph records, and bicycles. A member may keep such property in cos private room or designated private area. Co may also lend such property to the Community by putting it in a public space with the Community's consent, in which case the Community will not dispose of it without the member's permission, except that the Community may require the member to remove said item from public space, and co may take it with co if co leaves.

3. Grand Personal Property: This includes all tangible personal property that cannot in its normal use be kept in a member's private space or carried on cos person, or is determined by the Community to be unsuitable for such use, including but not limited to automobiles, trucks, motorcycles, trailers, tractors, and other vehicles, stationary power tools, and other large

machinery. A member may not bring such property to the Community without the Community's permission, except that a provisional member may bring such assets to the Community for storage only, with the Community's consent, until co has applied for and been accepted for full membership. Co may keep such property elsewhere as cos own property, but the Community will not provide funds or labor for its storage or maintenance. Such storage and maintenance may be paid for out of the member's member loan or capital assets, when necessary. If co keeps such property at the Community during full membership, co must either donate it to the Community or lend it to the Community for the duration of cos membership. In the case of motor vehicles, the Community takes title. Such property will be used, maintained, and insured or not, entirely at the Community's discretion and expense. The Community will not dispose of lent property without the member's permission, and will return it to co if and when co ceases to be a member, provided, that the Community may at its discretion require as a condition of accepting such loans a written agreement with the member providing, in the event of cos departure, for such payments to the Community and/or continued use of the property by the Community as will assure the Community the benefit of its expense for maintenance or improvements.

B. Capital Assets: Provisional members shall turn over all income from any assets to Twin Oaks, as provided for in subparagraph Three(A) of this Property Code, and may convert such assets to a member loan, but are encouraged to arrange their affairs in a way that will not be inconvenient for them should they leave the Community, until they have applied for and been accepted for full membership. Twin Oaks prefers that members lend or donate any capital assets they own to the Community. Any lent assets shall be for the duration of membership and shall be interest-free to the Community. All assets not loaned or donated to the Community shall be left inactive from a management or investment point of view, except that, at the Community's discretion it may allow a member to reinvest or manage assets, if it is to the Community's advantage that this be done. This restriction includes, but is not limited to liquidation, transfer, reinvestment, loaning, sale, trade, or disposal of any unloaned assets, with the exception of the conversion of a member's assets to a member loan or donation to the Community and with the additional exceptions that (1) provisional members may spend from their capital assets to tie up their outside affairs, and in particular to pay medical and dental expenses; (2) any member may spend from cos capital assets to make payments on debts which existed prior to membership, including payments on pre-existing insurance policies; (3) the Board may, on a case by case basis, and at its discretion, allow the spending of capital assets for the following purposes: charitable contributions, child support and other contributions to the expenses of children not living in the Community, including contribution to such children's education, living and medical expenses of parents and elderly relatives; and (4) the member loan may be used to make payments for expenses of retained personal property and capital assets, as specified in subparagraphs Two(A)(3) and Three(B)(2) of this Property Code. All assets lent or donated to the Community shall be used at the discretion of the Community. All assets not lent to the Community shall be listed individually by type and value in a member's membership agreement. The intent of this section is to promote equality

between members by encouraging individual gain to be directed to the benefit of the full Community.

Paragraph Three. During Membership.

A. Receipts:
1. General Provisions: This section distinguishes between various types of receipts during membership, and whether such receipts accrue to the Community or to an individual's account.

2. Accounts Receivable: Accounts receivable are any funds due to a member at the inception of membership, including but not limited to debts, royalties, payments for goods sold or work performed before becoming a member, tax rebates, inheritances, and lump sum insurance payments. Such receipts shall be capital assets handled as above, and shall be listed in Schedule A of the membership agreement as they occur. The member assumes all tax liability for such proceeds, and payment for any such taxes may come out of the member loan.

3. Unearned Income: Unearned income includes but is not limited to the following: bank interest; dividends or income from stocks or bonds; alimony; rents; unemployment compensation; welfare, social security, retirement, or disability payments; pensions; child support (if said child is a resident of Twin Oaks); trust fund or estate income; and, in general, any periodic payment meant to supplement income and/or be a financial return on investment. Such unearned income shall be donated to the Community, except for income of a provisional member under the age of eighteen years, which shall not be required to be donated, and the Community assumes any and all tax liability for such income, except for any such income of provisional members under the age of eighteen years which is not donated to the Community. Any expected unearned income shall be listed in Schedule A of the membership agreement.

4. Earned Income: Any and all income earned by a member during cos membership shall be property of the Community, with the exception of income earned and spent according to current Community vacation earnings policies, and with such exceptions as the Board may deem appropriate for provisional members under the age of eighteen years.

6. Gifts: Gifts may be received according to current Community gift policies. Said gift policies shall be consistent with the egalitarian principles of the Community and the intent of the Property Code.

7. Inheritances: Money or property which are inherited shall be treated as pre-existing capital assets and shall be subject to the provisions of subparagraph Two(B) of this Property Code.

B. Expenditures:
1. Personal Debts and Liabilities: Personal debts and liabilities are defined as any financial

responsibilities other than those specifically assumed by the Community in these Bylaws or by contract between the Community and said member. They shall be treated as follows: A member who has cash obligations to any person, business, institution, government, or other such entity outside the Community is responsible for such debts. Co must either pay them off before entering the Community or make special arrangements with the Community for paying them off, including making payments out of cos member loan or capital assets. Such arrangements may vary from member to member at the Community's discretion. If such debts will not be fully paid off during provisional membership, the arrangement for paying them shall be in writing and signed by the member and the Community, and shall be attached to the membership contract. In the event that such a debt is incurred or discovered after a person becomes a member of the Community, the Community will not be responsible for said debts, but may at its discretion make an arrangement with the member for payment thereof.

2. Capital Asset Expenses: Should any capital asset of a member require payments to be made (for example, land taxes), such expenses shall be paid from any of the following sources:

a. Income derived from the specific asset requiring expense.

b. Income derived from any other assets.

c. The member's member loan and/or personal savings.

d. The member's vacation earnings and/or allowance.

e. The sale or liquidation of some portion of the specific asset requiring the expense.

However, the Community may at its discretion contract to lend to a member funds to cover routine capital asset payments.

Paragraph Four. End of Membership.

A. Personal Property: If a person leaves any personal property on Community premises for more than six months after the termination of cos membership, co shall be deemed to have donated said property to the Community, unless the Community has made a written agreement to the contrary. Otherwise, any personal property lent to the Community shall be returned to the leaving member according to the schedule in cos membership agreement.

B. Capital Assets: All money or other capital assets lent to the Community shall be returned to the leaving member according to Schedule A of cos membership agreement.

C. Wills: A member may bequeath cos property (whether lent to the Community or not) to any beneficiary co chooses, including Community members, the Community itself, and other

persons and institutions.

D. Income Taxes: For the tax years of the beginning and/or ending of cos membership, the Community will pay a fair share of a member's income taxes, and the member shall be responsible for the rest. This fair share shall be determined by an explicit formula established by the Community. If the application of this formula for the beginning year of membership results in a payment from the Community to the member over and above any rebate from the governments concerned, then the member must treat the amount of said payment either as a donation to the Community or as a member loan. During the years when co is a member of the Community for the full year, the Community will assume responsibility for income taxes on a member's share of Community income, on income treated under the provisions of Unearned Income, subparagraph Three (A)(3) of this Property Code, and on Earned Income, subparagraph Three (A)(4) of this Property Code, donated to the Community (and shall pay said taxes either directly to the United States and the State of Virginia or shall pay same to the member to be paid by co). Individuals are responsible for any additional amount of income taxes beyond said taxes.

E. Disputes: If a dispute should arise as to whether any item represents continuing or past income, or ought to be divided between the two, or as to the means of paying off a debt, or as to the interpretation of any provision of this Article in any particular case, then such dispute shall be settled by two arbitrators, both being members of the Community, and being neither the disputant member(s) nor members of the governing body, one arbitrator being chosen by the Community and the other by the disputant member(s). If the arbitrators cannot agree, they shall appoint a third arbitrator who is not a member of the Community, and who will decide the dispute. The results of the arbitration shall be binding on both the Community and the member.

ARTICLE V. Dissolution of the Community.
Paragraph One. Voluntary Dissolution.

The Community may be dissolved, after resolution recommending dissolution adopted by the Board of Directors, by two-thirds plus one vote in favor by the voting members of the Community. A vote to dissolve the Community shall be preceded by a special meeting of the membership with at least ten, but not more than fifty, days of public notice prior to such a meeting. Should the Community wish to dissolve after said meeting, it may do so by obtaining the necessary number of signatures or written votes in absentia on a petition to dissolve the Community.

Paragraph Two. Disposition of Assets.

In the event of a voluntary or involuntary dissolution, the entire assets of the Community shall be liquidated and applied to the debts of the Community. Thereafter, all full members of the

Community and each dependent child shall be entitled to $1,000 (one thousand dollars) each (in 1979 dollars, which is defined to mean an amount which is approximately the same in buying power as $1,000 was in 1979, using U.S. government figures for the rate of inflation or deflation) from the remaining assets for the purpose of re-establishing themselves upon leaving Twin Oaks. Should there be less than this amount available per full member and child after debt payment, then the remaining assets shall be divided equally among the same. All remaining assets thereafter shall go in their entirety to the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, Inc. ("the Federation") or its designated successor, provided that (1) the Federation or its designated successor is still in existence and (2) that Twin Oaks is a member of the Federation or its designated successor. If these conditions are not met, remaining assets shall go to another organization similar to Twin Oaks and containing in its bylaws an article of dissolution similar to this Article, and the choice of said organization shall be left to the discretion of a majority vote of the voting membership remaining at the time of the dissolution.

ARTICLE VI. Amendment of the Bylaws.
Paragraph One. Amendments by the Board of Directors.

Except as in paragraph Two below, these Bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds majority vote of the Board of Directors (the sections which may be amended by said two-thirds vote of the Board of Directors are Article II -- Membership and Article IV --Property Code). In the event of any decision to amend these Bylaws, such amendments shall be posted in a public place for at least ten days prior to a forum of the membership in which such amendments shall be discussed. Additionally, notice of said forum shall be publicly posted at least ten days and not more than fifty days before said forum. The amendments shall not take effect until after said forum. After said forum, if the Board of Directors does not change its decision, they shall be signed by at least two thirds of the governing body and shall be added to and become part of these Bylaws.

Paragraph Two. Amendments by the Full Membership.

The following parts of these Bylaws may not be amended by the above method without the consent of the voting membership by a two-thirds majority of the voting membership:

Article I -- Definitions and Purpose

Article III -- Governance

Article V -- Dissolution of the Community

Article VI -- Amendment of the Bylaws

The procedure shall be as follows: Upon the passing of the proposed amendments by a two-thirds vote of the Board, said amendments shall be posted in a public place for at least ten days prior to a public forum in which such amendments shall be discussed. Additionally, notice of said forum shall be publicly posted at least ten days and not more than fifty days before said forum. After said forum, if a petition of amendment is signed by at least a two-thirds majority of the voting membership, then said amendments shall be added to and become part of these Bylaws.

17 January 1996 (TwinOaks.org)

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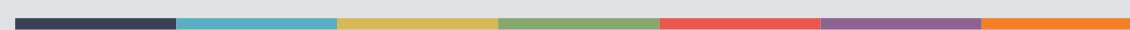

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