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CULTIVATING COMMUNITY: INVESTIGATING PERFORMANCES OF COMMUNITY
IN ECOVILLAGE SETTLEMENTS

by

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B.A., Georgia College & State University, 2012

M.A., Southern Illinois University, 2017

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree

School of Communication Studies
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of Communication Studies

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Alex Lockwood, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Communication Studies, presented on February 24, 2023, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale

TITLE: CULTIVATING COMMUNITY: INVESTIGATING PERFORMANCES OF
COMMUNITY IN ECOVILLAGE SETTLEMENTS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Jonathan Gray

This dissertation considers the subject of ecovillages, intentional ecologically-oriented sustainable communities developed in the U.S., and the different understandings of community involvement, structure, and challenges that members of these communities confront in their efforts at managing these time and labor-intensive settlements. Informed by the work of performance ethnographers and critical phenomenologists, I consider twelve interviews I conducted on-site and electronically with people living in ecovillage settlements. Taking these interviews and my own observations from on-site visits to two ecovillages as entry points, I conducted a phenomenological analysis informed by a critical phenomenological ethos of these accounts, highlighting five motifs that recurred across their recollections of their lived experiences: (1) intentional design; (2) happenings; (3) community; (4) motivations; and (5) political and environmental ethos. I then considered how these motifs suggested several contingent foundations that underwrite the experience of ecovillage community formation more generally. I identified three such contingent foundations: (1) intention; (2) boundaries; and (3) becoming. From these foundations, I propose a phenomenological rendering of community in ecovillages as a purposive act of ongoing relating between the human and more-than-human world that is cultivated through an attention to articulated principles, enacted through actions and behaviors that follow from these principles, and reaffirmed through mutual witnessing and commitment to the aforesaid principles. Such an understanding of community poses interesting

implications for communication studies and related sub-disciplines. I consider some of these implications in the conclusion to my dissertation, before outlining some of the future work I hope to pursue relating to ecovillages and intentional communities more generally.

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CHAPTER 1

DISCOVERING ECOVILLAGES

In this introductory chapter of my doctoral dissertation, I present the basic outline of my study of ecovillage living and performance of community. Taking inspiration from Robert Cox's and Soyini Madison's situating ethnographical and environmental research within ethical imperatives, I begin with a narrative of my own awareness of ecovillages and sustainable living settlements. Following this narrative, I situate my project in the wake of Cox's formulation of environmental communication as a crisis discipline. I undertake a review of the literature on ecovillages and performance-oriented research into communities, during which I will examine some of the extant research into these settlements, as well as the gaps in that scholarship that might be expanded on through performance studies perspectives. Following this review of the literature, I make the case for a phenomenological approach to the study of ecovillages as a means of attending to the phenomenon of ecovillage living as bound up in the context of global climate change. I then detail how I hope to approach ecovillage communities and apply a phenomenological method of semi-structured interviews, including thematic expansion and participant observation. Finally, I provide a preview of the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

Personal Narrative

Allison writes that narrative, rather than presenting a complete recounting of events, is “always embedded within an ongoing narratization” and that narrative acts as an ongoing dialectic between past and future (123). As I begin this work on ecovillages, a form of work that I aim to continue through future activism and scholarship, I reflect on several moments over the past decade that marked a broad shift into concern for human adaptation in the face of global

climate change. The narrative of events I present here, rather than encompassing the broad scope of my environmental education, reflect several interactions I have had that have shifted my perspective on the matter of environmentally-oriented action.

In the summer of 2013, I worked at the National Processing Service Center (NPSC) in Denton, Texas for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as a part of my term of service with AmeriCorps. As the primary call center for the agency, the NPSC is often the first place where people have interactions with FEMA. My job was to answer the phones and begin the registration process for people applying for federal aid after their homes and personal property had been damaged in natural disasters. I received calls from all over the country—from survivors of recent flooding in Chicago, to east coast business owners who had been in the path of Hurricane Sandy, to survivors who had been affected by Hurricane Katrina eight years prior. In my time at the center, I was eventually asked to take case management calls, where aid applicants would inquire about specific claim denials, and begin one of several possible appeals processes that might result in further aid. One day, in early July, I received a call from a man whose home had been flooded in Chicago. I spoke with this man for nearly three hours. He spoke of the rejections he had received from FEMA, and I looked over his case, listing the forms he was being asked to submit for each item.¹ He had not submitted the most recent reports of his annual income, and the receipts he had provided for some of his damaged belongings had faded

1. The procedure for receiving FEMA disaster relief funds typically involves the submission of evidence of damaged property, and different forms of documentation that attest to the value of the damaged property, and whether or not these items are also covered by private insurance. Although FEMA also provides emergency funding to assist in more large-scale re-housing efforts, no such widescale evacuation or re-housing disasters occurred during my time with the agency.

into illegibility due to water damage from the floods. He was worried that he might be evicted from his apartment.

Over the course of the call, our voices became increasingly strained, as the man pleaded for assistance. I remembered the destruction I had seen several months ago in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, along the coasts of New Jersey and New York. I remembered the influx of new students at my high school in 2005, as refugees fled from New Orleans to Atlanta after Hurricane Katrina. I looked to the advisors who had been assigned to our AmeriCorps team—full-time FEMA employees who worked at the NPSC year-round—and I was met with the practiced headshakes and sighs that accompanied each denial. There was nothing we could do, other than encourage the man to submit the proper paperwork. By the time the call was approaching its end, it was nearly the end of the day, and our voices were ragged with emotion. I knew that this was my last week at the NPSC before my AmeriCorps team left to assist with recent floods near Jefferson City, Missouri. I dropped my mask for the man. If it were my money, I told him, if myself or my team were present at his apartment, if I had any pull over this byzantine and inaccessible federal apparatus, if I were able to drive up to Chicago and help out, I would do so.

I was broadly aware of how intractable federal aid agencies could be, hardened by the abusive neoliberal economic models and an “ethics” of austerity that supposed if a person could not jump through whatever hoops were set before them, it must be for a lack of moral fiber. I told the man of my own frustrations with the agency he was contacting, and I felt angry at myself, for representing the stubborn purse strings of the “most powerful nation in the world,” tightly clenched over clerical minutiae. I issued a final reminder of what FEMA required of him. The man sighed, resigned to another appeals process as we ended our call. I was quiet around my team and fellow FEMA workers for the rest of the evening. This was not the only call where I

deferred an individual assistance pending paperwork, but this was the one I spent the most time on during my time with the agency.

On July 4th of that same year, a group of my AmeriCorps teammates and I boarded a Greyhound bus from Denton to Austin to visit our former teammate, Annie. Annie had been a member of our team for the first few months of our term of service, but left the program after realizing that the work we were doing would be more related to emergency management rather than frontline emergency relief. Annie's family lives in an earthship, a house made largely from recycled and sustainable materials (i.e., bottles, tires, insulation left over from construction sites, straw, clay, etc.). During our visit, she told us about the ways that the house was insulated to stay cool in the Texas summers, how the use of collected rainwater made keeping track of the shower and sink usage an important part of living in the space. We walked through her family's garden, where they grew local herbs, vegetables, and other plants, and she detailed how their garden had been designed to work with the landscape, feeding the scarce water downhill to the more resilient plants. I felt so inspired by the innovation and effort put into making this house work with the surrounding ecosystem. Ecological conservation and material sustainability are both implicit in the design principles that inform the construction of earthships (earthship.org). Our visit was short, but it left me with an ongoing fascination about the challenges and possibilities that come from this ecologically-oriented style of living.

These two moments, each taking place within the same month, seem to possess a kind of synchronicity to me. On the one hand, I am struck by the dehumanizing bureaucracy that I was a part of during my stint with FEMA. I do not remember any of the names of the people whose cases I processed or reviewed over the phone. In an average day, with claims proceeding smoothly, I would take anywhere between fifteen and thirty calls during working hours. I am

reminded of how relatively straightforward the man from Chicago's requests were—he wanted his carpet flooring replaced, and to be compensated for the water vacuum he had had to rent to re-enter his apartment. Still, this request for what could not have amounted to more than several thousand dollars in assistance was jealously guarded through a dehumanizing system that still paid congressional representatives over \$8,000 each during the seventeen-day government shutdown in October of that year (Plumer). The whole experience seemed to resemble what Christian Parenti terms the politics of the armed lifeboat. This politics, Parenti warns, engenders a potential approach to climate change in which governments respond to disasters by “arming, excluding, forgetting, repressing, policing, and killing” the victims and refugees of climate crises (11). Contrasting this recalcitrant military-industrial real estate scheme wearing the skin of a human-centered government, I am reminded of the earthship that my friend's family had built, and the ingenuity and integration that the house displayed in its design. Engineered to harness the elements, the earthship seemed to work with the environment to make the space livable for Annie and her family. I remember how, at the time, I felt that such engineering projects seemed to offer a sustainable response to the worsening climate crisis that the climate scientists I spoke with at FEMA regarded with a kind of gallows humor.

My interest in sustainable living has continued over the years, and I have found the existence of ecovillages to be especially interesting in this respect. Where earthship design principles place an emphasis on transforming single buildings into materially sustainable living spaces, an ecovillage seeks to accomplish this transformation across an entire community. Ecovillages and ecovillage-like settlements are often portrayed in popular media as possible

ways that human societies might adapt to the worsening climate crisis.² In this sense, the existence of earthships and ecovillages paints a hopeful picture where groups of people are developing practices and infrastructures that provide a possible template for living with climate change and adapting to the hotter world we seem to be marching toward.

Rationale

While my experiences with FEMA and AmeriCorps deeply inform my personal commitment to environmental advocacy, my choice of pursuing this work through scholarly writing places my efforts in conversation with several other texts and perspectives. The most widely available of these texts is the watershed Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report released in 2018. This report details for policymakers the impacts that might result from projected climate change, and necessary steps that would need to be undertaken across U.N. (and presumably non-U.N.) countries to ensure that rising global temperatures are kept within 1.5 degrees Celsius on average. This report offers extensive and stark details about the widespread changes that would be required across all areas of culture in order to meet this goal. The report offers examples for “a wide range of adaptation options” in areas including

ecosystem-based adaptation, ecosystem restoration and avoided degradation and deforestation, biodiversity management, sustainable aquaculture, and local and indigenous knowledge . . . coastal defense and hardening . . . efficient irrigation, social safety nets, disaster risk management, risk spreading and sharing, and

2. Popular depictions of such settlements include the City in Starhawk’s Maya Greenwood trilogy, Acorn in Octavia Butler’s unfinished Earthseed trilogy, and Ecotopia in Ernest Callenbach’s novel of the same name. In addition to these, there have been any number of idealized communities that sometimes evince some ecovillage tropes presented in utopian/dystopian fiction dating back to ancient times (e.g., Plato’s republic, H.G. Wells’s Eloi, Ursula LeGuin’s Omelas, etc.).

community-based adaptation . . . green infrastructure, sustainable land use and planning, and sustainable water management (10).

This bevy of locations where steps may be taken to mitigate the impacts of global climate change provides scholar-activists with many avenues to engage and explore environmental policies and practices already in use among population groups. One such avenue that the IPCC report suggests are the many cultural practices, habits, and values that inform a population's interaction with the environment, and the impact that such practices have on the feasibility of implementing policy adaptations to improve climate sustainability (18). This is reinforced in the 2022 summary for policymakers, which states that efforts at minimizing the role of anthropogenic climate change to stay within a temperature change of 1.5° C must involve physical adaptation, and social cooperation on the part of human communities working alongside governmental and indigenous powers to more sustainable modes of living (21). For years, figures in academia and global governance organizations like the IPCC and the U.N. have argued for the necessity of collective action in confronting climate change. Individual adaptations intended to reduce personal emissions and consumption habits may presage the kind of lifestyle that may be necessary for climate resilience, but such action cannot halt the advance of global warming without commensurate adaptations on the part of whole communities and, perhaps even more importantly, on the part of the energy grid and industrialized economy. By focusing on cultural practice as an area for intervention in climate change, I aim to continue the tradition of performance studies scholars analyzing the ways that performance is a “social act relying upon emergent principles and cultural conventions for enactment,” and to follow the understanding of performance as serving a primary social and cultural function that is imperative for addressing potential and ongoing responses to global climate change (Pelias and VanOosting, 224).

While an interdisciplinary approach informs my understanding of ecovillages (which have been studied through sociological, conservationist, and philosophical lenses, among others), I locate my project within communication studies, and more specifically, at the juncture of two subfields—performance studies and environmental communication. In attending to these settlements, I take up Robert Cox’s positioning of environmental communication as a crisis discipline, one that “must offer recommendations for management or intervention to protect . . . biological communities, or ecosystems, under conditions of urgency and often without theoretical or empirical guarantees” (6). By attending to this crisis-oriented perspective in environmental communication, I also hope to animate performance studies’ attention to the lived negotiations with social and symbolic processes that underscore a community’s existence for its members. Kirk Fuoss reminds us that performance is always “a site where social agents enact contestation and, in the process, negotiate community” (*Striking* xiv). By engaging in a phenomenological analysis of these community performances, I hope to bring greater insight into the ways that community is negotiated with an attention to environmental engagement--noting performance’s role in how a community identifies itself to itself and others through active negotiation of shared meanings and commitments. Ecovillages and their cultural performances, in this understanding, do the work of making (technical) environmental recommendations part of a lived (practiced) commitment.

Review of Literature

In this review of the relevant literature, I will provide an account of the ways that ecovillages and community have been studied within relevant academic fields. Beginning with a discussion about the origins of the term ecovillage, I engage the academic literature surrounding

ecovillages. I then elaborate a similar exposition for the concepts of community and review environmentally-focused literature within the performance studies subdiscipline.

Terminology

In order to give context to my own research on ecovillages, I begin this review of the literature with a brief history of the term itself. I often find that people are able to formulate a general understanding of ecovillages from the name. Indeed, when I've discussed the topic with my friends and family, I often encounter a sort of intuitive understanding of the term. They might imagine small communes populated by white hippies, adorned with gardens, situated in some rural locale, and operating with some degree of insularity from the wider world. However, I typically find that a series of questions unfold from this initial gestalt. I've been asked, "so, how do those places work?" or "do those people work 9 to 5 jobs in the city?" or "do they pay property taxes?" and other questions about the lifestyle of ecovillagers, as well as questions generally focusing on what is and is not included under the label ecovillage. These two aspects--uncertainty about the inner workings of ecovillages, as well as confusion over the breadth of the term—are broadly corroborated as consistent themes within the literature. Discussion of terminological slippage in works on ecovillages and intentional communities testifies to this confusion (Daly 1359).

As a way of clarifying terminology, researchers often employ one of several definitions of an ecovillage that have emerged over the decades. The available literature on ecovillages crosses a variety of different media, disciplines, and genres. Intentional and alternative communities are a phenomenon spanning centuries, and ecological stewardship has often been a tenet within such communities. Meanwhile, the term *ecovillage* is of relatively recent vintage. Coined by Georgia Tech professor George Ramsey in his 1979 address to the World Energy

Conference, Ramsey offers the “Eco Village” as a potential plan for redeveloping languishing commercial spaces.

a shopping center in which housing would be provided, for all the employees, over and beside the shopping center; and the parking lot would be converted to agriculture and recreation for everyone living there. The human movement experience is therefore through distinct and well planned community spaces which provide daily necessities of housing, work, recreation, social intercourse, and the exchange of ideas, food, and products primarily through renewable human energy systems (239).

Ramsey’s description of an ecovillage primarily focuses on an image of spaces cobbled together from the remains of existing shopping centers.

The term entered wider usage when later adapted by astrophysicist Robert Gilman. Writing for the magazine *Living Together* in 1991, Gilman defines an ecovillage as “a human-scale, full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development, and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future” (n.p.). Since Gilman’s contribution, the literature on ecovillages has expanded substantially within the popular press, academic studies, and so-called grey literature.³

Another noteworthy definition comes from the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN), a non-governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to connecting ecovillages around the world for the purposes of outreach and mutual collaboration. GEN’s description gives further shape to

3. Publications and texts produced by ecovillage inhabitants and circulated online or via ecovillage networks (i.e., zines, magazines, mission statements, published testimonial pieces, manifestos).

ecovillages as being “intentional, traditional or urban communit[ies] that [are] consciously designing [their] pathway through locally owned, participatory processes, and aiming to address principles in the four areas of regeneration (social, culture, ecology, economy)” (n.p). I think it is noteworthy that each of these definitions imagine the ecovillage as a future-oriented construct that works to address some of the ills of modern living.

Within academic writing, literature on ecovillages primarily emerges from two major camps. The first consists primarily of quantitative studies produced within the physical sciences—including engineering, environmental science, and sustainability studies. This literature focuses on research intended to observe and measure the sustainability efforts and impacts of ecovillages along one of several metrics—most commonly ecological footprint or carbon footprint (Daly 1359). These studies sometimes accompany their findings with policy suggestions for greater efficiency in managing consumption and ecological footprints (Carragher 86; Sherry 186). By pursuing research intended to assess the ability of ecovillages to live up to their aims of environmental sustainability, this body of research provides numerical verification of the claims that some ecovillage advocates may make regarding the ecological stewardship and responsible consumption practices enabled by such communities. However, for the topics of communicative practices and concerns, works produced within the areas of anthropology and sociology provide the bulk of peer-reviewed literature.

In his review of ecovillage research, Felix Wagner identifies three categories that social scientific and humanities studies on ecovillages typically work under: examinations of individual perspectives, sociological investigations, and ethnological and cultural investigations (85). While Wagner’s identification of these categories is helpful, I suggest that they might be productively understood as themes that intermingle within the literature. Studies on ecovillages often contain

multiple explications on the individual perspectives of community members; ruminations on the roles played by governance, gender, spirituality, and other social practices within a community; and considerations about what the development of ecovillages might foretell about community involvement and development in society writ large. Of particular note for my purposes is the theme Wagner identifies within sociological studies that examine the phenomenon of ‘community’ that often work to describe and categorize different forms of ecovillage organization (83).

Some examples of studies that turn attention to ecovillages include reports on Sieben Linden in Germany, Ecovillage at Ithaca in New York, Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Missouri, and Hurdal Ecovillage in Norway. Across these case studies, researchers look at the villages employing a variety of methods ranging from individual interviews on motivations for joining to thematic analysis of social trends within village life (Rubin 448; Kirby 326; Beck 12-17). A common approach uses mixed methods in research to give voice to the ways in which ecovillages respond to scientific reporting about their policies (Kirby 328).

Other studies give voice to more philosophical ruminations about the role of ecovillages from the perspective of sustainable development. Dias et al. offer an ambivalent but important discussion about the transformative potential of ecovillages. Dias considers the difficulties that ecovillages face in promoting sustainable living in a widespread fashion due to their general aggregation in the global north, but allows that ecovillages pose considerable social and academic relevance as examples of *concrete* experiences that increase the visibility of ecologically sustainable living practices that might gradually shift into the public mainstream (90).

Perhaps one of the most extended treatments on ecovillages on a global scale comes from Karen Litfin, whose book on the subject chronicles her encounters with eleven ecovillages across the world. After conducting a year of short visits at the different ecovillages, Litfin provides accounts that draw attention to the philosophies, building and material decisions, and performance and cultural practices that emerge in the communities she visits. One noteworthy incident where Litfin touches on themes of community planning and performance describes takes place in the Sieben Linden ecovillage in Germany. There, the village is confronted with the first death of a member and must devise and enact funerary rites in accordance with their own understanding of the member's wishes, and in compliance with local laws. The result, Litfin finds, is a concerted community effort to develop a set of performances and events that enmesh themselves within existing seasonal holidays (144-5). Litfin's account stands as one of the more extended treatments of a specific performance within an ecovillage.

In addition to the sociological and anthropological articles that look at ecovillage living and social organization, a number of publications explore ecovillage living from the perspectives of individual members. This literature, usually published within grey literature periodicals such as *Communities* or *Better Living*, provides an array of testimonials from members of ecovillages on subjects related to their lives, their communities, and the broader ecovillage movement. Some contributors give voice to the perspective of parents raising children in ecovillages (Brown 8-13); some discuss the role that economic class and labor play within ecovillage decision-making systems and development (Adkins 38-9; Bang 46-9). Still others create how-to manuals that develop advice on either finding or founding an ecovillage community, or discussing the political implications of the movement more broadly (Greenberg "Ecovillages" 34-7; Hummel 44; Walker). This grey literature comprises a considerable body of text that speaks from a position of

living in accordance with sustainability as a concrete principle, and takes part in a wider effort at public education and outreach about these settlements.

Liz Walker's book *Ecovillage at Ithaca* describes the life of its author in her gradual process of founding the Ecovillage at Ithaca, in Ithaca, NY, and developing the community alongside others. Walker details the degree of improvisation required for developing new celebrations, rituals, and habits of communication in a budding community. In addition to "corn roasts in the fall, and a strawberry festival on the summer solstice," Walker details baking days, women's and men's baking events, winter solstice candlelight vigils, and rites of passage for death, birth, and stages of life (66-75). For example, Walker describes a time in which one villager "created a special ritual to honor her menopause and asked our women's group to witness it" (116). Walker provides several personalized rituals that members of Ecovillage at Ithaca created over the years, exemplifying what she calls a rekindling of magic that the rituals bring about (77).

While this literature spans from the advocate- and member-oriented genre of grey literature to socially scientific interviews on governance, to the soil-sampling ecological footprint measuring natural studies, there is a relative paucity of literature exploring ecovillages from a communication studies perspective. After searching through the Communication and Mass Media Complete, the NCA Taylor and Francis catalogue, and Communication Abstracts databases using the search terms *ecovillage(s)*, *intentional community/(ies)*, and *cohousing*, I found fewer than ten articles that explored either ecovillages or intentional communities more generally. Among these articles, several provide interesting insights that hold relevance for a performance-oriented investigation. For instance, Casey et al. draw upon ethnographic research conducted in Cloughjordan Ecovillage in Ireland to discuss the ways that villagers foster

reflexive behaviors regarding energy consumption through visual art, shared driving schedules, and other behavioral adaptations (227). *Leda Cooks* considers the production of sustainable food advocated by permaculture writers, and more generally examines permaculture—a common organizing philosophy of ecovillages—as a possible vector for resistance to the hidden operations of capitalistic production (94).⁴ Flanigan examines the development and usage of the gender-neutral pronoun (and later noun) “co” in the lives of members of the Twin Oaks Intentional Community in central Virginia beginning in the 1970s (27). Outside of these search results, Antonovich’s master’s thesis addresses family communication in several different ecovillages and intentional community settings. The available literature from neighboring disciplines in the social sciences and humanities provide examples of an array of practices within ecovillages that would be of interest to communication studies scholarship. This paucity is also somewhat surprising, given communication studies scholars’ impressive corpus of work on the concept of community itself, which I explore in the next section of this literature review.

Community

In his history of intentional communities in the United States, Timothy Miller argues that these settlements embody “not so much an episodic series of isolated occurrences [as much as] a continuous, if small, ongoing theme in American life” (xiii). This is important for my study, because while I conceptualize ecovillages as a distinctive manifestation of intentional communities in the United States that spawned out of the environmental movement, ecovillages are not unique in terms of their history. Consequently, the people living in ecovillages often do

4. I want to mention here that while permaculture may be a somewhat commonly understood concept within ecovillages, several communards I spoke with expressed some frustration with different aspects of the philosophy. My dissertation is not about permaculture per se, but I feel it is important to note that some ideas that may be commonly understood as foundational parts of the ecovillage movement are not always embraced by individual members of these settlements.

not view their participation in these settlements as radically new forms of civic engagement distinct from their involvement in communities from which they arrived. Rather, the habits and norms enacted within the ecovillage come to structure and compose the daily habitus of ecovillages, such that the village is “home” for the members, rather than a novel structure that takes the place of a more normative home located elsewhere.

Community remains a commonplace topic across a wide range of popular and academic discourse. Throughout the past several years, amidst mounting global stress, community has come into focus as U.S. Americans confront long-entrenched social, racial, gendered, and economic inequities and create new forms of social organization that posit community cohesion in an unsteady juxtaposition against mounting violence. An example of this may be easily found in the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ) that occupied the Capitol Hill neighborhood of Seattle during June of 2020. Communication studies, as a discipline concerned with the processes and impacts of human communication, is well-positioned for research that looks into the phenomenon of community within specific types of social organization. Indeed, communication studies has frequently undertaken such research, identifying and examining communities organized around many different categories (e.g., religion, region, health, performance communities) (Price, Reimer, Martinez, Baldwin). In addition to the ongoing research into communities that continues to emerge in the discipline, performance studies in particular has the study of community in some of its foundational literature. Dwight Conquergood and Victor and Edith Turner research the role of performance in constructing the social life and ongoing work of community. However, the works of these performance ethnographers did not emerge in a vacuum, instead growing out of a long-held debate over the

meanings, definitions, and lived understanding of community that finds expression in early sociological literature.

In his key concept overview on the topic of community, Gerard Delanty identifies several animating themes of community as it is conceptualized through political discourse in the 19th and 20th centuries. These discourses share themes of loss and nostalgia that lend a utopian dimension to the idea of community. These nostalgic and utopian orientations may construe community as an “expression of belonging irreducible to any social or political arrangement” (4). Delanty conducts a rhetorical analysis of community, reckoning community itself as a discourse that “exerts itself as a powerful idea of belonging . . . its reality consists of its persuasive power as the most social aspect of society” (4). By following this persuasive appeal of community within political philosophy, Delanty begins to explore the ways that community is understood as a utopian idea within sociological literature. Community, in this register, “expresses the utopian desire for an alternative to the status quo” (10), and figures as both a record of specific practices and events that take place in the world (community histories), as well as an ideal that is constructed in conversation with those practices (building/recovering/finding community).

This idealized, normative dimension of community is evident not only in common discourse surrounding “lack of community” (or uses of *community* as a marketing appeal), but is heavily present in early sociological literature on community. The 19th-century sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, author of *Community and Civil Society*, writes that in community “we are united from the moment of our birth,” and that community “means genuine, enduring life together” (18). Indeed, for Tönnies, community is “derived from an *a priori* and pre-determined unity” that expresses itself through bonds developed within the immediate family, neighbors, and friends (52). Community not only details a means of cooperation, but is specifically “organic,”

“original,” “primal,” “natural,” and otherwise pre-determined in its nature (22, 27). Tönnies’ community finds initial expression in the family unit, which eventually extends beyond blood relations to those with whom a person shares a location, and from there to those who are comrades in ideas and goals (27). Tönnies juxtaposes this conception of community based in innate human connection with the “essentially disconnected” civil society (54). This depiction of community as the most originary of human connections goes on to color a style of discourse that persists to this day—that of the community as an always-prior and often already lost sense of social cohesion that must be recovered.

Tönnies discusses the idea of community within sociological studies using a loosely Marxist framework, in which the machinations of modern capitalism alienate persons from their more innate connections. However, this did not stop this idealized portrayal of community from being adapted by fascists who deployed the notion of an innate primordial connection in their attempts to bind together individuals around national and racial divisions in the 20th century. Even at the time, Tönnies’ understanding of community as an originary and pre-determined connection was contested by several contemporary thinkers, including Emile Durkheim and Max Weber. That said, many of the basic concepts Tönnies introduced have influenced the vocabulary of community research—such as the distinction between the personal and intimate *community* and the indifferent and formalized *society*.

An alternative theory of community is expressed in the anthropological studies of Victor and Edith Turner. For the Turners, community is not so much located in specific relationship criteria, as much as it is brought about through the production of cultural performances. Victor Turner contends that the performances developed within a social system are “reciprocal and reflexive . . . often a critique, direct or veiled, of the social life it grows out of” (22). These

performances exist not only as critical texts developed by associates sharing a locality, but also produce the terms and tropes used by community members in understanding their community. Turner offers criticism of research trends in anthropology that dehumanize the subjects of study by “regarding them as the bearers of an impersonal ‘culture,’ . . . or as determined by social, cultural or social psychological ‘forces,’ ‘variables,’ or ‘pressures’” (72). Such contributions that figure community as a force that exists independent of human enactment may obfuscate the ways in which group members diverge from the practices of their wider social networks. Instead, Turner views social systems “as a set of loosely integrated processes, with some patterned aspects, some persistences of form, but controlled by discrepant principles of action expressed in rules of custom that are often situationally incompatible with one another” (74). This processual viewpoint brings focus to a swath of cultural performances that, while not wholly encompassing a community’s existence, provide much of the basis for continued meaningful existence—“plays, concerts, and lectures . . . prayers, ritual readings, and recitations, rites and ceremonies, festivals, and all those things which we usually classify under religion and ritual rather than with the cultural and artistic” (23).

From this initial approach to community study, the practice of investigating individual communities by way of their performances has a noted place within communication studies ethnographies post-Turner. Dwight Conquergood, reflecting on the role cultural performances play in community, writes that “it is the capacity of cultural performance to induce self-knowledge, self-awareness, plural reflexivity” (“Performing Cultures” 19) and that this reflection holds implications for the ongoing lives of community members. Community, rather than being a particular group of people, instead becomes a processual interpretation that is negotiated through the tensions and bonds brought into focus by the mundane and special performances that

members of a group develop and enact. Conquergood's writings explore many of the struggles and practices that a researcher interested in investigating the performances of specific communities must consider. Conquergood's own ethnographic research among Hmong refugees in Laos, public housing inhabitants, youth gangs, and prison populations in Chicago demonstrate much of his commitment to a mode of research that reflexively engages the communities he was personally involved in.

This mode of research that takes the cultural performances of community members as an orienting set of practices that ground understandings of community gives credence to Kirk Fuoss's claim that community is not, generally, problematic on a conceptual level for people living within a community ("Community" 81). When I think of the communities that I consider myself part of, I do not think of these groups in terms of their relationship to a normative mode of relation. Rather, I understand my communities by the practices and operations that my membership entails, and the role that these specific practices have in negotiating a broader set of relationships within other communities in which I engage. I do not think of my involvement in the Marion Kleinau Theatre community as a form of striving towards a utopian form of connection with the other people who work in that space. Rather, I think of my involvement through the actions that constitute that involvement—meetings, talkbacks, performances, and other such rituals. Performances, according to Fuoss, are one of the primary vehicles through which communities externally and internally articulate their own existence ("Community" 82). Externally, performances articulate community by negotiating, reinforcing, or troubling boundaries between the community and some other collective. Internally, performances articulate community by "constructing, maintaining, or reforming the relationships among a community's members" ("Community" 82). Performance studies, in framing the articulation of a

community through its lived practice, emphasizes a research approach that is situated in the lived world of its inhabitants, rather than through the positing of an ideal *communus* from the outset. In this way, performance studies is well-suited to a phenomenological mode of investigation—looking into the processes and habits through which a particular understanding of community comes to hold meaning for people in their everyday experience of a given group.

This approach to community, which situates the different operational demands of complementary and competing social contexts is further developed by Fuoss in his analysis of striking mine workers in the Great Depression. Fuoss emphasizes the role of cultural performances as a means by which people become directly engaged in their surrounding social context, and that such engagement is already involved in shaping existing status quos (*Striking xi*). Fuoss begins to advocate an approach to performance that ties advocacy-oriented concerns with the performances that directly engage social issues on individual and community levels. This trend has found wider purchase across performance studies in recent years, as research and advocacy focused on global climate change has been brought to the fore of several widespread social and political movements, such as the Extinction Rebellion (Gardner), Indigenous land rights protests in Brazil (Hanna, et al.), and the promotion of a Green New Deal in the U.S. political sphere (Osborne).

Environmental Performance Studies

A final trend that should be acknowledged in this literature review, and that I will expand on in more detail below is the extant writing on ecological and environmental performances that already exists within performance studies scholarship. Performance studies scholars have long emphasized the importance of social context as both a subject of performance, and as a surrounding set of norms and communicative patterns that act in tension with performance texts

(Langellier 61). This attention to social context finds further extension in the work of some scholars who turn the lens of inquiry onto the surrounding nonhuman actors that impact and are impacted by human activity.

Although I hesitate to point to any single text as a sole transitional moment that first connected performance studies and environmental communication, some notable trends emerge in a variety of texts in the recent years. The link between performance practices and environmental concern has grown more evident over time. Often taking cue from the aforementioned performance anthropologists and ethnographers, as well as theorists like Jane Bennet's and Donna Haraway's work on nonhuman agents, performance scholars have begun to point to beings or elements often considered inert—plants, fungi, office materials, animals, weather—as deeply involved in constituting the performances that shape culture. Recent efforts by scholars such as Travis Brisini, Jake Simmons, Shauna Macdonald, Jonny Gray, Craig Gingrich-Philbrook, and others embody this trend through their works that have considered the role of performance across a variety of nonhuman perspectives and human-nonhuman encounters. Collectively, these works mark one strain of what Brisini has termed the “naturecultural turn” in performance studies (“Mapping” 2).

Another prominent strain in this environmental turn involves an attention to human performances that explicitly invoke or involve environmental concerns in their production and presentation. Phaedra Pezzullo has written on the practice of toxic tourism, in which communities impacted by the destructive practices of petrochemical companies in Louisiana organize tours as a means of advocating for environmental equity. Similarly, the performative aspects of environmental activist groups have been well-chronicled and examined in anthologies such as *Performing Nature* and *Nature Performed*, that each offer a variety of case studies of

environmental performance practices in America and the UK. These works discuss the ways that performances adapt to address the continuing issue of global climate change by considering such disparate projects as the University of Arizona's Biosphere 2 facility (Kershaw), or the "slow activism" of everyday performances undertaken with some degree of awareness about the environment, such as recycling or reducing the use of fossil fuels (Heim).

Given the implicit environmental focus of ecovillage construction and life, my project enters into this wider disciplinary conversation of environmental coherences in performance studies scholarship. Throughout this dissertation, I aim to examine the ways that a phenomenological approach to environmental performance may enrich our understanding of performances as they are lived, interpreted, and understood by the people creating them in the moment. I also look for ways that performance that is experientially situated on a stage that is both figuratively and literally alive informs environmentally-conscious living in these community settings.

Research Design

For Fuoss, community "appears as a near perfect example of . . . [an] essentially contested concept" (Community 80). Coined by W.B. Gallie, essentially contested concepts are those concepts whose use "inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of the users" (158). This essentially contested quality of community renders phenomenology as a useful method for investigation. Phenomenology, and particularly phenomenological interviewing, attends to the lived understanding of a phenomenon as it is encountered by the interviewees. Because ecovillages (and other intentional communities) attempt to form community from the ground up, they serve as interesting spaces where the phenomenon of community may be investigated. Unlike communities that emerged through naturalistic

processes, ecovillages must attempt to forge community where, in many cases, no prior relationship exists among the inhabitants of these spaces prior to their arrival.

I conducted semi-structured phenomenological interviews with ecovillage inhabitants and (where possible) did participant observation in ecovillage settings—with particular emphasis given to cultural and aesthetic performances that took place within an ecovillage setting. I made contact with ecovillage members through emails using publicly available addresses on ecovillage websites and social media pages. After sending initial emails attempting to explain the scope of my project and make contacts, I worked with the members of different ecovillages in distributing calls for interviews among community members. I practiced snowballing participation recruitment, and occasionally visited ecovillages where I had the support and assistance of community members. I conducted twenty interviews with sixteen communards across five different ecovillages. In addition to interviewing, I also made three visits to two different ecovillages. Interviews can be useful when attempting to form an understanding of storied performances that form ongoing traditions within a community. However, attending to interviews to the exclusion of participant observation may occlude the ways that some performance practices may develop in an improvisational, temporally situated manner. Toasts, community gatherings, song circles, and working songs provide examples of stylized performance behaviors that may occur outside of demarcated temporal and spatial aesthetic performance arenas. For these types of performance behaviors, participant observation within a community are a useful means of identifying areas where performances occur outside of a specifically designated cultural performance event. Using a phenomenological interpretative process that I expand on below, I look to explore the lived meanings that specific performances hold for community members. This thematization will largely concern identifying themes and

common elements among interviewees' descriptions of life in ecovillages and performance practices developed within their communities. Following this identification of themes, I attempt to clarify how certain common experiences may shine light on essential components of performance-oriented community negotiation.

Preview of Remaining Chapters

In this first chapter of my dissertation, I introduced ecovillages as a form of environmentally-oriented intentional community, and began to make the case for my phenomenological study of sense of community in these spaces. I offered a review of the extant literature on ecovillages, community, and environmental-oriented performances, and explained the basic outline of my study.

In chapter two, I delve further into the methodological outlooks of ethnography and phenomenology. I trace some of the recent adaptations that phenomenological researchers have made that aim to incorporate the insights of critical theory into the phenomenological process. After outlining some of the basic steps of the phenomenological method, I explore how phenomenologists have written about community and climate change already, and offer an account of my research procedure and selection criteria.

Chapter three comprises a narrative account of my research procedure and visits to two ecovillage communities. I proceed chronologically through my interviews with ecovillagers during these visits, and offer observations about some of the behaviors and norms that I observed during my time there, hoping to give further characterization to these villages that I expand upon in the fourth chapter.

In chapter four, I move to an exploration and analysis of the themes that emerged over the course of the interview process. Employing a phenomenological analysis, I look to the

recurring themes of intentional theorizing, boundary negotiation, and communal becoming. For each of these, I identify several modes of givenness that arose in the interviews, and relate each of these themes to other theoretical literature.

I conclude my dissertation in a fifth chapter, in which I offer thoughts about possible directions and subjects that future researchers interested in ecovillages might explore, the limitations to this project, and some reflections about the possible opportunities I am considering for continuing this research in the future.

CHAPTER 2

CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I provided an introduction to my study of community belonging in ecovillage settings. I introduced the subject of ecovillages and explored their history arising from engineering conferences and the environmental movement as a form of ecologically-oriented intentional community. I elaborated on the relationship between ecovillages and other ideas of community, utopian goals, and contemporary efforts at sustainable development. I assessed the extant literature on ecovillages and noted a relative paucity of attention in the field of communication studies. As a means of addressing this absence, I introduced the possibility of a phenomenological study into these communities as a means of outlining areas of possible future interest in them within communication studies research.

In this chapter, I undertake a methodological exploration of a critically-inclined phenomenology. This phenomenological disposition serves as my observational lens on the performance of community in ecovillage settlements. I begin with a reflection of ethnographic methods and an examination of the tensive relationship between the epistemological suppositions of ethnography and phenomenology vis-à-vis structural issues such as global climate change. I mark the emergence of a critical phenomenological movement that has (re)emerged in recent years as an effort at incorporating lessons from critical scholarship into phenomenological practice. I then move through an explication of the basic steps of phenomenological research: eidetic description, phenomenological reduction, and analysis through free imaginative variation. Next, I mention some extant phenomenological literature that informs some of my efforts at approaching ecovillages, before finally moving on to a summary of my application of the phenomenological method in considering ecovillages. Throughout, I hope to highlight how my

study serves only as an introductory step to the consideration of community construction in these villages.

Ethnography and Phenomenology

Ethnographic methods remain some of the prevailing means of studying communities within communication studies and across the social sciences and humanities. Ethnographic best practices and ethical commitments inform my work and provide useful insight for me, even as I depart from ethnographic methodology in my study. In particular, the work of scholars like Victor and Edith Turner, Dwight Conquergood, and Soyini Madison influences my choice to approach phenomenology through a critical light.

Clifford Geertz, in his review of James Clifford's *Routes*, coins the term "deep hanging out" to describe a classical approach to ethnographic fieldwork in which the ethnographer becomes embedded within the habitus of the community being researched. Conquergood describes classical ethnography as establishing its "rigor, disciplinary authority, and professional reputation . . . by the length of time, depth of commitment, and risks (bodily, physical, emotional) taken in order to acquire cultural understanding" ("Rethinking"). By these accounts, ethnographic research considers involved fieldwork as both a rite of passage that the ethnographer undergoes in order to secure academic legitimacy, and the vehicle through which the ethnographer comes to a kind of understanding about a community's practices, structure, and worldview. Per this tradition, ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation would both serve as excellent methods for research on ecovillages.

There are ethical quandaries about the involvement of the ethnographer in a host community, of course. While Geertz criticizes Clifford's "hit-and-run" approach to fieldwork, Clifford's basic critique of the anthropological and ethnographic enterprise as embedded within

colonial relations remains trenchant (n.p.). Conquergood further considers the ethical dilemmas that ethnographers face in representing and potentially profiting off of communities in academic performance and discussions (“Performing”). In addition to these longstanding ethical puzzles, a more practical hindrance to ethnographic research for my study has been the COVID-19 pandemic and its resultant limitations on in-person observations. All that said, I have attempted to integrate some degree of fieldwork and in situ interviewing into my project where possible in order to gain a more personal familiarity with some ecovillage communities that I contacted. Phenomenological writers have often tasked researchers to directly engage with the phenomena in question—particularly when said phenomena are related to human involvement with the more-than-human world (Stewart, 363). I delve further into this fieldwork in the next chapter.

Madison argues that critical ethnographers engage their work as part of an “ethical responsibility . . . a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on principles of human freedom and well-being and, hence, a compassion for the suffering of living beings” animating their involvement with communities (5). I feel this commitment exists in productive tension with phenomenology’s directive to neutrally attend to first-person descriptive accounts of lived experience. This tension may afford new paths for future research in ecovillage and other community settings. In particular, I observe some tension between a community members’ individual experiences of a place, and how these individual perspectives may or may not coalesce into a collective understanding of a community that is able to be identified as a coherent phenomenon in itself. I appreciate this openness in phenomenology’s methods, as well as the imperative to resist making final claims—instead relying on descriptive accounts of the ways in which a phenomenon is given over in experience as a means of elucidating new shades of an experience that might provide groundwork for further exploration by future scholars.

Phenomenology's vocabulary of essential qualities and human (inter)subjectivity has sometimes been critiqued along postmodern and post-structuralist lines that attest to the socially-constructed and historically contingent nature of subjectivity. This critique is made explicit by Dermot Moran in his introduction to phenomenology, where he frames it as a movement in the past-tense, and suggests that Derrida's deconstructionist critique of the availability of meaning, "led to the collapse of phenomenology as a method" (21). Although phenomenology's continued attention to individual experiences may be troublesome upon scrutiny, I think that, like Fuoss's reminder that community is rarely a problematic term in practice, so the self may remain a useful starting point for an exploration of complicated experiences that don't easily yield to a singular definition.

More problematic, I think, is the critique that is sometimes leveled against phenomenology regarding a perceived inattention to material conditions in favor of examining individual subjective experiences that constitute a person's lived understanding and engagement with the world. Soyini Madison and others exemplify this critique of phenomenology by observing that in its philosophical underpinnings "the perceiver determines meaning, and therefore it is human perception, not external influences or objects of the material world, that is at the core of [its] analysis" (70).⁵ I find that Madison's critique deserves consideration, as her juxtaposition of phenomenology's enterprise with that of ethnographic research speaks to ethical

5. I do not entirely agree with Madison's characterization of phenomenology in this instance, although I recognize its origin. While Husserl was primarily concerned with structures of consciousness, he also argued that our subjective experience was premised on a more fundamental intersubjectivity. Heidegger extends this form of intersubjectivity into an ontological dimension. However, critiques of Husserl's preference for transcendental subjectivity, and Sartre's notion of ontological freedom do raise questions about the degree to which phenomenology's observations can stand aside from considerations about historical and political conditions (see, for instance, Marcuse's critique of Sartre).

imperatives that researchers must consider, especially within the context of ongoing global climate change as an historical event that directs attention to human interaction with and impact upon the material world. One response to this critique might be to acknowledge phenomenology's occasional ambivalence about the role of historical conditions in favor of first-person accounts of these conditions as an additional dimension that a researcher should incorporate into any analysis of a phenomenon. Such an approach would ideally attend to individual experience, while not wholly discarding critical attention to external conditions that may escape active observation. Merleau-Ponty provides some degree of precedent for this form of attention by reminding us of the ineradicable presence of the non-human world that we are always rooted within ("Phenomenology" 307). The world, far from being the product and receptacle of human consciousness, always available for human intervention, instead resembles a "a possibility, a latency, and a flesh of things" that subtends all engagement between individuals and others ("Visible" 131-3). This configuration of the world as an endlessly expansive weave of active human and non-human participants that each engage one another through their presence and participation in time and space reminds us that our understanding of experience is always imbricated within the experiences of human and non-human others. As an expression of this kind of critical attention to material conditions in phenomenology, I mark historic and recent trends within phenomenological writing that attempt to integrate the insights of critical scholarship into the phenomenological enterprise—a move that advocates term critical phenomenology.

Critical Phenomenology Past and Present

Although the authors presently associated with critical phenomenology have coalesced more prominently within the past several decades, I think it is important to note that there has always been a degree of critical thought within the phenomenological project. Husserl conceived

of phenomenology as an intervention into an ongoing crisis in scientific thought. In his critique of positivism, Husserl argues that the physical sciences “can only be and remain meaningful . . . if the scientist has developed in himself [sic] the ability to inquire back into the original meaning of all his meaning-structures and methods” (*Crisis*, 56). Science comes situated in a series of epistemological prejudices that act as “obscurities arising out of a sedimentation of tradition” (*Crisis*, 72). Husserl argues that a return to lived experience as it is first encountered is required to outstrip these prejudices. This first experiencing, prior to the objectifying tendencies of natural science codified in theories and quantification, is one of phenomenology’s primary objects of consideration. Phenomenology’s exhortation to return “to the things themselves” (*Logical*, 168) signifies a call to turn an inquiring mind to phenomena as it is experienced by a person in a situated moment, rather than as it is conceptualized in reflection and theory.

This project of engaging phenomenology as a mode of intervention into extant conditions finds further expression in today’s critical phenomenology. Critical phenomenology, as introduced by Lisa Guenther, Gayle Salamon, and others, takes up phenomenology in its role as an enworlded response to crises, and merges it with the insights made by critical theorists into the social conditions that shape individual experience. For Guenther, critical phenomenology is “a method that is rooted in first-person accounts of experience but also critical of classical phenomenology’s claim that the first-person singular is absolutely prior to intersubjectivity and to the complex textures of social life” (*Solitary*, xiii). I think this is a vital step for a phenomenological account of people’s experiences within social and ethical superstructures like climate change, global capitalism, or the carceral surveillance society—what Guenther terms “quasi-transcendental social structures” (*Critical*, 15). Taking up the question of how these social structures might be considered phenomenologically, M  r  dith Lafert  -Coutu notes the

ways such systems prescribe “or rather structure, in ways that can be described phenomenologically, both forms of perceiving and manners of givenness” (96).

Critical phenomenology helpfully extends the central conceit of phenomenology by articulating an explicit position with respect to the actions that arise out of individual political decisions that rise to the level of quasi-transcendental social structures. This posture tasks the phenomenologist who would engage in research to remain cognizant of these structures, and how their own research places them in conversation with these conditions. For Guenther, it is the task of critical phenomenology not only to describe the quasi-transcendental structures that condition experience, but to recognize the role of the phenomenologist as an active participant in the phenomenon they are describing, “developing concrete strategies for dismantling oppressive structures and creating or amplifying different, less oppressive, and more liberatory ways of Being-in-the-world” (Critical, 16).

An Accounting of Phenomenology—Epistemological Framework

Phenomenological studies have enjoyed an ongoing presence in communication studies as a means of engaging with communicative practices as they are experienced by the practitioners that bring them into being. Lenore Langsdorf argues that phenomenological approaches to communication studies allow researchers to “reject an exclusive concern with data in order to reflexively attend to the conceptual context that exercises directorial if not dictorial control over the many and subtle choices a researcher must make as to what will be studied, how, and for what purpose” (4). Phenomenology asks researchers to consider experiential data both as strands of a discrete experiential thread that may be identified through recurring characteristics, and as an ongoing co-constituting act that sets human beings in tandem with the linguistic, historic, and interpersonal contexts that surround them. Jessica Sturgess offers a recent call for

communication scholars to continue carrying forth phenomenological projects into new arenas “wherein [phenomenology’s] deep descriptions might assist us in illuminating further the conditions of our being-in-the-world-together” (15), and I hope that this project contributes to that call.

I think of phenomenology as a confluence of approaches to research that take part in a shared protest against scientific reductionism through an active foregrounding of lived experience as the epistemological foundation that feeds theoretical explications about the world. Edmund Husserl, the founder of the modern phenomenological movement, coined the motto “to the things themselves” as a rallying cry for phenomenologists to understand their work as a return to lived experience as the soil from which meaning sprouts. This sets phenomenology apart from philosophical projects that would shunt the moment-to-moment encounters with a phenomenon in favor of pre-existing explanatory frameworks. Many of phenomenology’s classic texts do not present step-by-step instructions for the execution of phenomenological research. However, phenomenologists often share a set of basic epistemological claims and interpretative processes that link the works of different authors under the same heading. These epistemological assumptions include the intentional structure of consciousness, and the presence of a mode of being termed the natural attitude, both of which I outline below. I also note here that my representation of these thinkers is not entirely doctrinaire. Heeding Spiegelberg’s collative approach to the method of the 20th century phenomenologists, I borrow from Husserl’s work at some moments of his career, and Merleau-Ponty at moments of his, without necessarily delving into the programmatic development of their thought.

Intentionality

One of Husserl's major positions with respect to his phenomenological project is that our ongoing consciousness and experience of a phenomenon are intentional. That is, our consciousness is always consciousness *of* something. We are forever engaged not only with separate phenomena that inhabit the world, but with the fact that our consciousness is always already ensconced within the world, and that our observation of a phenomenon can never escape to a view from nowhere. By observing the phenomenon, we are taking some part in it, even if our part is only in the role of an observer. This claim places people as involved in an ongoing relationship with the world around them, instead of framing human action as taking place against an inert world of objects that are acted upon. The intentional structure of consciousness, in conjunction with the idea of the natural attitude, provides the basic outline of the phenomenological actor.

Natural Attitude

Phenomenologists posit that our everyday experience of the world is distinct from our experience of reflecting and positing about that world. Husserl terms this mode of everyday experiencing the natural attitude, in which "corporeal physical things with some spatial distribution or other are *simply there for me, 'on hand'* . . . whether or not I am particularly busied with them in my considering, thinking, feeling, or willing" (Basic, 51). Husserl uses the example of a writing desk that is immediately before him in composing his works, and notes how the desk remains an instrumental part of his intuitions even as his mind might wander away to other matters (Basic, 51). Both this instrumentalization of the writing desk, as well as the easy conceptualization of the remainder of a house are instances of the natural attitude, as both occur in the throes of mundane, everyday experiencing. For Husserl, this natural attitude is the object

of phenomenology's critical and descriptive project. When a phenomenologist attends to a particular phenomenon (e.g., time-consciousness, perception, gendered bodily motion, etc.) they seek to look at this phenomenon as it is lived in the natural attitude. The adoption of a phenomenological attitude, then, is a project of attending to experiences in the natural attitude. In so doing, phenomenologists seek to provide rich understandings about the structure of particular experiences, and the different manners that such phenomena can be given over to us in our everyday movement through the world.

An Accounting of Phenomenology-Steps to Interpretation

Within this epistemological framework, phenomenologists engage a process of several techniques each aimed at thoroughly describing and highlighting the different parts that make up a phenomenon as it is lived in everyday experience. These steps include eidetic description, a series of reflexive perspectival shifts called reductions, and interpretation conducted through free imaginative-variation to reach a more thorough account of the different ways that a phenomenon may be given in experience.

Eidetic Description

Phenomenology is a descriptive field of philosophical practice. The concern with experience that lies at its core is manifested through descriptive accounts of individual encounters with a phenomenon as it is lived in the moment. For Spiegelberg, phenomenological description comprises three parts—intuiting, analysis, and description (682). Intuiting comprises an identification of a lived phenomenon or phenomena. Analysis (at this stage) consists of an explication of the phenomena as it is understood in existing discourses. Description, meanwhile, involves providing an account of the phenomenon as it is lived in experience. I have provided examples of intuiting and analyzing the phenomena that I focus on, community in ecovillages, in

the previous chapter. In the subsequent chapters, I provide my own descriptions alongside those gathered from the interviews I conducted.

Reductions

For Husserl, a reflexive attention to oneself and one's own taken-for-granted assumptions comprises the first step in any phenomenological venture. Termed the *epoché* by Husserl, and typically translated as "bracketing," this step consists of a "put[ting] out of action the general positing which belongs to the essence of the natural attitude" (Basic, 65). This comprises both a recognition of one's own assumptions, and a commitment to withhold from general positing based on any claims that fall outside of one's experiential encounter with the world. This step is intended, in Husserl's idiom, to cut away the non-essential parts of our lived experience, to let the world as *Eidos* (essence) remain (Basic, 66). There are a number of procedures that a researcher may employ to arrive at these essential reductions of the phenomena. For example, von Eckartsberg suggests the collection of specific accounts of a phenomenon as it is encountered in daily experience, followed by a process of identifying commonalities among these accounts, and asking what aspects of these accounts are essential to the experience of the phenomenon being studied (62). Notably, the reduction's attempt to locate invariant structures does not entail a claim as to the finality or impermeability of a particular phenomenon. Spiegelberg, helpfully, suggests that the process of reduction consists of finding the common characteristics that remain consistent across expressions of a phenomenon (697). For my own part, I also find Langsdorf's advice to consider "how are entities present as meaningful . . . rather than, what are entities in themselves, outside of communicative interactivity" (7) to be helpful ground as a communication scholar investigating the lived meaningfulness of a phenomenon, and a useful summation of the reduction. In my work on ecovillages, I take up the notion of

essences under the (to my mind) less fraught label of “contingent foundations” a term employed by Brisini extending Butler’s work on postmodernism to encompass “a scenario wherein the constitution of subjects and bodies . . . is a historicized act, rooted in both the discursive reification via culture (discourse) and the corporeal and material conditions of worldly agency that circulate in both temporary and lasting assemblages of space/place/time” (“Mapping” 5). Brisini applies Butler’s term to agential nonhumans and matter, but I believe the term may also function in the spirit of a critical phenomenological troubling of the “essential” part of essential structures. Contingent foundation, as a term, helps to refocus the essential structures as those aspects of a phenomenon that are foundational or instrumental to the experience without implying a universality or fixedness that exists outside of historical or cultural conditions.

Free-Imaginative Variation

At the heart of Husserl’s original phenomenological project is a concern with the direction of natural science at the turn of the 20th century. Husserl lambasts the scientific establishments of his day for what he calls an inattention to the experience of the world, in favor of a “mathematization” of experience that traces back to the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century (Crisis 23). For Husserl, phenomenology is a call for researchers to attend to experience for the purposes of reassessing taken-for-granted axioms about scientific discovery. However, within this mission to establish a new kind of science, phenomenology also serves as an attempt to salvage human meaning-making as an ongoing process that takes place within lived history, rather than emerging out of a strict protocol based on inert and unchanging scientific laws. In order to achieve this insight into meaning as it is realized in experience, phenomenologists not only turn their attention to the rich description of phenomena, but work to uncover the relationships between the “essential structures” of a phenomenon through a process

of imaginative variation. To do this, the phenomenologist considers how an experience might appear otherwise in different circumstances and from different perspectives. Spiegelberg suggests that this takes place through attempting either to remove or replace certain components of a phenomena (intuited through the process of reduction) in order to discover whether these variations fundamentally change the gestalt or character of the phenomenon itself (700). Within my own work, the varying facets of ecovillage communities described by my co-researchers in interviews provide the different perspectives about the phenomena of community that I attempt to draw connections between.

Although Husserl's own practice of the phenomenological method was primarily applied to examinations of different modes of consciousness (i.e., internal time-consciousness, passive/active synthesis of ideas, and the experience of the world as an expanding horizon), the application of the phenomenological method to the external world poses new problems for the reduction. As Merleau-Ponty argues, the reduction is not a complete renunciation of our common-sense certainties. Rather, it is a temporary and always incomplete stepping away from certainties of scientific explanation (Phenomenology lxxvii).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Taking up the project of phenomenology, Maurice Merleau-Ponty extends the phenomenological process of description, reduction, and interpretation from Edmund Husserl and merges it with the attention to the world of intersubjective experience proffered by Heidegger's exploration of Being. Merleau-Ponty offers a particularly generative use of phenomenology for the purposes of environmental scholarship through his attention to the body as it interacts with the world that it is enmeshed within and is a part of. Merleau-Ponty notes the impossibility of a complete phenomenological reduction, and argues that because we are "in and

toward the world,” there is no process that can remove us from our thoughts about the world (lxxvii-iii). While Husserl’s phenomenological writings largely centered on the intentional consciousness of a person, Merleau-Ponty locates the phenomenologist as an embodied part of a world, engaged in sensing as “living communication with the world” (53). This attention to the body frames the phenomenological project as not strictly limited to the individual experience of the world, but in a space that is always already interhuman and more-than-human. The body is not “primarily in space, but is rather *of* space” (149). For Merleau-Ponty, the individual person is not the primary locus of the world, but is one actor among many that exist within a shared and mutually collaborative physical space. The world is not merely the stage upon which human action is conducted. Rather, the world is something we are each in communication with throughout our lives. Though its character may change, it remains the same “single being, an immense individual from which my experiences are drawn, and who remains on the horizon of my life” (Phenomenology 343). For Merleau-Ponty, perception is not a passive reception of exterior sense-data, but is rather an active participation in the world through both the body and through language in their capacities as interpretive apparatuses. Humans co-participate in the world with other humans and non-human others (i.e. non-human animals, plants, landscapes, weather, etc.) through their role as the “flesh” of the world.

Within the context of my project, I look to Merleau-Ponty as an exemplar of a phenomenologist who attends to the lived process of engaging the world through a corporeal, temporal existence. Whereas Husserl’s account of human experience favors cognitive explanations that center the role of consciousness in coming to make sense of experience, Merleau-Ponty places experience as an ongoing interaction between embodied figures that mutually create one another’s experience of the world. This is an ideal frame for looking at the

experience of communities, especially for communities where the people present have often made conscious choices about their participation.

Phenomenologies of Climate Change and Community

Climate change poses an interesting problem for phenomenology, as do people's responses to climate change. Timothy Morton coins the term hyperobject to refer to ecological concepts and objects that are so widely distributed across time and space, that they are difficult to conceptualize as a single phenomenon (130). This conception of climate change (arguably any conception that thinks beyond individual weather events) may be difficult to square with phenomenology, as it potentially risks sublimating climate change into an abstract category that is unknowable at the level of the natural attitude. I will discuss the role of theoretical postulation as it relates to phenomenology in further detail in chapter four. For now, I note that the abstract quality of a hyperobject like climate change may be less a result of its failure to present itself in daily lived experience, and more a result of the concerted efforts of political movements hoping to bar deliberation about climate change from the discursive realm. Such shunting of concerns that are not directly experienced may result, for instance, in the presentation of a snowball in a seat of government as "evidence" for the nonexistence of global climate change.⁶ How naïve do we understand our pre-reflective experience to be?

This impasse between the level of everyday experience and quasi-transcendental social structures presents a challenge for a phenomenologist wishing to explore ecovillages as a contextual response to ongoing climate change. Some writers have sought to present phenomenological accounts of aspects of climate change. Ted Toadvine argues that part of the

6. I refer, of course, to Senator James Inhofe's (R-OK) presentation of a snowball on the floor of the U.S. senate in 2015 as supposed evidence for the falsity of global climate change (Barrett, n.p.).

difficulty in recognizing climate catastrophe as a result of climate change lies in our narratives of eschatology, which frame catastrophic events as bound in singular moments, stymying an understanding of catastrophe that unfolds over decades or centuries through gradual heating (133). Others have looked at climate change through the lens of responsibility and agency, considering to what degree individual choices carry weight in wider discussions about global climate change (Peeters et al. 47).

Phenomenological writers have frequently taken up the study of community as a phenomenon that is experienced by individuals as part of collective human action. Certain phenomenological explications of community emphasize the spiritual dimension of cooperative human action. Expanding on the work of sociologists like Emile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies, Edith Stein remarks that community (in contrast to association) begins “where a subject accepts the other *as a subject* and does not confront him but rather *lives with him* and is determined by the stirrings of his life [sic]” (130). Later phenomenologists, such as David Abram, Alphonso Lingis, and Tim Ingold pay special attention to the role of the more-than-human world in our development of language, perception, and community. Lingis argues that specific communities are necessarily discursive, entered into through a reconstruction of the reasons that motivate their creation. This ongoing creation is carried out through a production of the environment in which a community subsists by community members (7). Beyond this construction of specific communities, Lingis argues that we enter into broader communities “not by affirming oneself and one’s forces but by exposing oneself to expenditure at a loss, to sacrifice” (12). The acceptance of living in a community may entail some degree of acceding one’s decision-making, preferences, or habits to the will of others. However, this change may often be lateral rather than progressive or regressive. For some, the expectations placed on a

person coming to a community by choice may be a much easier set of expectations to abide by than those they had encountered in previous groups. With respect to ecovillages, I think Lingis's attention to the discursive construction of the environment in conjunction with the vulnerability that arises out of disparate individuals coming together around a common purpose is a vital idea for a phenomenological project that seeks to understand what creates a sense of solidarity and common purpose. During my fieldwork, I spoke with some people who had moved between several different ecovillages in search of a community that suited their desires, beliefs, and lifestyle, some of whom thought that they may continue to search until they had found a place that better suited them. Along this track, I think it is worth considering the ways that community is often deployed as an idealized end-goal, rather than an ongoing series of collaborative habitus through which we weave our way daily, feeling more enmeshed some days and more detached others.

Sarah Ahmed considers community in a number of ways in her works. Writing alongside Anne-Marie Fortier, the two argue that “community promises to deliver modes of ‘being together’ and ‘having together’ that are grounded in sameness, reciprocity, mutual responsibility and a form of mutual connectedness and attachment” (252). Ahmed and Fortier further note the ways that this standard of community as premised on sameness ties into claims about the promise of dialogue, and that beneath this claim of togetherness, calls for community, especially once applied to entire nations “may work not as a constative or even as a performative, but as an imperative” that threatens punishment pending a failure to conform (253). Returning to the subject in *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed remarks on the temporal character of communitarian calls, describing community as a formative idea that allows individuals to generate “‘shared attributes,’ which are then *retrospectively* taken up as evidence of community” (122).

Tim Ingold's writings on the perception of the environment also inform my understanding about ecovillages, which have often only been founded during the not-too-distant past, and are regularly in the process of being built upon and rebuilt as new climatological conditions require. Ingold argues that our senses of coming to know the world emerge through life in common purpose with others alongside the proximate environment.

Bracketing

The process of bracketing is a key component of phenomenological research. Because phenomenology aims to understand the shades of a phenomenon as it is lived by the people who experience it, the process of bracketing serves as a call for reflexivity on the part of the phenomenologist. This reflexive process involves an appreciation on the researcher's part of their own assumptions and taken-for-granted statements that are to be put out of play for the purposes of committing to description and analysis that attempts to see an experience as it is described, and as it might otherwise be. Per Merleau-Ponty, I recognize that a complete bracketing—or even a complete accounting—of my prior understandings and commitments to existing theory is not possible. I cannot wave a wand and know all of my own biases, nor can I merely declare that I have put these prior assumptions out of play and have it be so. Rather, I take bracketing to be an ongoing process that asks phenomenologists to consider prior assumptions as possibilities, but to forego claims as to their finality in the analysis of the lived experience. Indeed, phenomenology as a methodological approach seeks to keep analysis available for further exploration of a phenomenon as it is experienced in different contexts.

Following Salamon's call for the world of the phenomenologist to enter into an account of their bracketing, I will now attempt to give a basic introduction of some of the assumptions I bring to the study of ecovillages. In doing so, I mark these as my own taken-for-granted ideas

about the world that may enter into my analysis about the development of ecovillages as a movement in sustainable living efforts. I do not claim to rid myself of these ideas simply by my noting them. Rather, I hope that by acknowledging these assumptions and hypotheses, I introduce avenues of analysis that may appear later in my interpretations of villagers' experiences.

Firstly, I take it as a given that global climate change is real, is anthropogenic, and is usefully considered as a hyperobject. This conviction deeply informs my interest in ecovillages as an area of study. While communal living and intentional communities have existed for centuries, and have often contained some tenet of ecological stewardship, the ecovillage as a specific iteration of this tendency seems to be inextricably intertwined with the contemporary environmental movement appearing in part as a response to the effects of and public concern with global climate change. The degree to which ecovillages may serve as a possible model for communal adaptation in the face of global climate change is something that I am interested in, but that I feel is beyond the scope of this project. I am interested in how the social and communicative aspects of life in an ecovillage might provide a sort of prism through which to compare communication habits in other non-intentional community settings. In bracketing this general stance towards climate change, I aim to put out of play all references to global climate change that do not originate in the words of the ecovillagers that I interviewed.

Secondly, I grew up in the United States of America and recognize that country as an expansionist settler colonial empire that continues to exist on land that has been occupied and stolen. Ecovillages located in this country, by virtue of such location, are to some degree incapable of fully embodying a sustainable "solution" to climate change, as they continue to benefit from the same expropriative and exploitative series of philosophies and practices that

have fostered the present climate crisis (i.e., industrial agriculture, fossil fuel extraction, industrial-scale carbon emissions, and an ontology that views non-human others as unknowable, and therefore exploitable objects). While ecovillage communities may sometimes be home to political radicals, may make efforts to live in a manner that does not engage in excessive consumption, and may even adopt logics, vocabularies, and philosophies that seek to eschew the deleterious efforts of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, they are not necessarily able to extricate themselves from the influence of the colonial history of European presence in the western hemisphere. While I think of the ecovillage as a *more* sustainable model for social living relative to industrialized urban living, I cannot shake the impression that these settlements may merely turn away from the problems that have contributed to our present crisis, rather than escape them.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2022 summary for policymakers, efforts at minimizing the role of anthropogenic climate change to stay within a temperature change of 1.5° C must involve physical adaptation, and social cooperation on the part of human communities working alongside governmental and indigenous powers to more sustainable modes of living (Summary 21). While longitudinal studies like that undertaken by Daly have shown that ecovillages are often able to live up to their goals of more sustainable consumption habits, and lower environmental and carbon footprints, the literature on social arrangements in ecovillages is much more varied in its findings (1369). However, while this understanding about climate change and new social formations is common within ecovillages, I do not mean to characterize it as the only orientation present among ecovillagers regarding community.

I cannot list every bias that I identify in myself, and doing so is unnecessary for the purpose of phenomenological bracketing. I discuss these initial ruminations on some taken-for-granted parts of my outlook as a jumping-off point for the style of bracketing that I engage in during the process of interpretative imaginative variation in chapter four. Therein, I seek to investigate my taken-for-granted views on the world in conjunction with the accounts of ecovillager's lives in these settlements.

Throughout the interviews I conducted with ecovillagers living in ecovillages, and the observations I made during fieldwork, numerous quasi-transcendental structures provided background context for the lives of village members. Among these structures, I identify anthropogenic climate change, the politics and ethics of ecological conservation, the politics of land stewardship and ownership in a settler-colonial context, the interplay between rhythms of life in rural settings juxtaposed with urban centers, and the construction of whiteness. However, I refrain from discussing these structures in the context of my investigation into the lived understanding of community in ecovillages when those structures were not discussed by the ecovillagers themselves.

With these beliefs under consistent consideration, I attempt below to engage a phenomenological description of the lived experiences of people coming to and maintaining their lives in ecovillages. My analysis cannot prove or disprove the efficacy of ecovillages as a model for combatting climate change. Rather, my hope is that through the description of different ecovillagers' lived experience, the identification of common structures, and the interpretation of these structures, I may be able to present an idea of what this style of living affords the people who choose to undertake it.

Application

In some respects, ecovillages present a distinctive alteration to the notion of the natural attitude. Many of the taken-for-granted amenities and behaviors of contemporary technological society are eschewed in these settlements for the purposes of adhering to a set of ecological ethics. These ethical commitments, while negotiated on the part of the members of a given village, take place within several intersecting quasi-transcendental structures. Such behaviors position ecovillages as communities that attend to habitual modes of engaging in the world for the purposes of producing novel efforts of conducting life.

To explore community phenomenologically is to acknowledge that our experience of community is always intentional—always related to a specific, situated community that exists in a particular context and living world that shares some characteristics with other communities. Simultaneously, each community will be situated in a unique setting that distinguishes it from other similar arrangements. Phenomenological interviews and interpretation are useful methods for examining community, as the invariant structures of the community reveal themselves through people's narrated accounts of their lived experience. These narratives emerge from people's accounts of their experiences coming to, living in, and leaving (or seeing others leave) a community, and often involve ruminations on or examples of moments of communal recognition, challenge, or transformation.

In applying phenomenology to ecovillages, my aim is to examine these settlements and the sense of community that members may experience living in them. To this end, I avoid evaluating ecovillages through a set of criteria for sustainability, social involvement, or ecological stewardship that is imposed from without. While criticisms of ecovillages offered by

members of these settlements do play a role in my study, I reserve discussion of perspectives that did not emerge in my interviews for my concluding chapter.

Research Procedure

My procedure for selecting ecovillages and recruiting interviewees was premised upon several considerations from my own experience with members of the ecovillage movement, and from my reading of the literature on the subject. The exact criteria of what constitutes an ecovillage is malleable. A commonly cited definition originates from astrophysicist and ecovillage advocate Robert Gilman, who said that ecovillages are “human-scale, full-featured settlements in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future” (10). The Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) lists 110 registered ecovillages in the U.S. at the time of this writing. However, this initial number is somewhat misleading as to the actual prevalence of ecovillages in a given setting. Firstly, although GEN represents over 400 ecovillages around the world, the organization adopts a very broad definition of an ecovillage, fitting several different kinds of institutions and settings under the rubric of the term. Organizations such as individually-owned farms dedicated to public environmental education, traditional villages that maintain agrarian lifestyles, local conservation projects, and co-housing collectives are all listed among GEN’s member groups. Secondly, GEN allows any registered member to submit an ecovillage project for inclusion, meaning that settlements that exist primarily on paper may also be included among their number. For this reason, I supplement my use of GEN with the intentional communities directory website ic.org. While arguably more expansive in scope than GEN, I found that cross-referencing details listed across these websites helped me to gain a more thorough account of the size, longevity, founding ideologies, and

population of communities around the U.S. For this project, I undertook an initial process of regional filtering to limit my scope to ecovillages that operated in the United States.

In addition to a concern for access, my decision to limit my study to the United States was primarily made to narrow the scope of my study to a particular phenomenon borne out of specific community histories in the United States. While the U.S. ecovillage movement has antecedents in a number of countries (i.e., Findhorn village in Scotland, Sólheimar in Iceland, the Kibbutzim in Palestine), they also bear a resemblance to the many utopian religious settlements founded since the beginning of European colonization of North America in the 17th century. A number of religious communities have taken root in the United States that live in a manner consistent with sustainable living practices. Religious groups like the Amish, Quakers, and Mennonites each maintain different forms of intentional community, and several notable communities that have been built in the U.S. over the centuries have morphed, over time, into everyday communities that no longer have grounding in intentional design (i.e., Amana, New Harmony, or Oneida).

Beyond this geographical limitation, I further limited my selections by focusing on intentional communities that opted to self-designate as ecovillages in their name. Ecovillage is a slippery term, and there is no solid dividing line latent in the term that would distinguish an intentional community that grows its own food on-site from say a suburban neighborhood that undertakes recycling initiatives. Even Gilman's definition contains loose terms like "harmlessly integrated," "natural world," and "healthy human development" that leave room for widely varying interpretations (10). Each of these concepts might be understood differently between settlements and even within a single location. Christine Oravec and Tracylee Clarke write about how the discourse of naming is viewed within environmental communication contexts as more

than a means of persuasion. Names “indicate an orientation toward the environment” and “act to guide our behavior within the environment” (3). My selection and attention to the use of the word “ecovillage” in a settlement’s name is meant to focus my study on a particular orientation to sustainable living that is consciously adopted by the members of a community. The contents and character of this orientation to the environment are, at this point, not as important as the recognition such an orientation exists. By focusing on this act of self-designation, my intent was to find communities whose members were aware of the term and may have had specific opinions about ecological living as an action that took place within a wider socioecological context. However, as a result of this selection filter, a number of intentional communities that might otherwise easily fall within this category (e.g., The Farm, Arco Santi, Twin Oaks Community, etc.) were excluded from the research pool.

Following these initial steps, I developed several further criteria for inclusion in my project. Firstly, I wanted to speak to communities that had been active for more than five years. While I picked this number arbitrarily, I wanted to designate a baseline number of active years to be considered for inclusion. Many attempts at ecovillage creation run aground in their initial years, and I wished to avoid the possibility of interviewing members of a community that might fall apart in the months following our encounter. Secondly, I wanted to reach out to communities that had at least ten adult members, and consisted of more than two family units in their populations. Part of my rationale for this decision was to find communities that had developed around some ability to bring people from multiple unrelated backgrounds together around a common enterprise.

After implementing these criteria, I sent emails to 12 different communities (see Appendix C for a copy of this email), and began conducting interviews with members of those

communities that I heard back from. During the course of my talks, I was invited by several to come and visit. I took two up on this offer, visiting Signs of Rain Ecovillage in North Carolina in the summer of 2020 for a guided tour, and Rice and Salt ecovillage in Missouri in the autumn of 2021, and again in 2022 for several days of on-site interviews. While I would have liked to visit some of the other villages with which I had made contact, the strictures of the COVID pandemic and personal finances limited my ability to travel. In total, I conducted 20 interviews with 16 communards at five different ecovillages. Further, I supplemented these interviews with several instances of more informal conversation, participant-observation, and community involvement during my field visits. From these interviews, I transcribed and thematized relevant issues surrounding performance of community that interviewees found relevant to their experience of living in these settings.

The interviews I conducted consisted of several standardized questions, as well as individualized follow-up questions based on the responses given to the enumerated prompts (see Appendix A for the interview questions). Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and often precipitated contact with new people who would themselves allow me to interview them for this research.

Following these interviews, I undertake a process of phenomenological interpretation in chapter four. I introduce recurring motifs that ecovillagers used to frame their experience living in ecovillages, in order to tease out the situated structure of the phenomenon of community in ecovillages. To do this, I select interview excerpts that are emblematic of the different nuances that might together coalesce into an overall motif. I explore these excerpts in tandem with Eckartsberg's two guiding phenomenological questions: how are these individual experiences revelatory of the meaning of the phenomenon, and what do the situated structures revealed

through these experiences reveal about the phenomenon in its generality (28). I then identify three contingent foundations that recur across the interviewees' accounts of ecovillage living. For each of these foundations, I include references to the discussions outlined in motifs, and include further interview quotes that I connect to other scholarly literature, suggesting areas that future researchers may wish to explore.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of phenomenology as a philosophy and methodology that is concerned with the experience of the world as it is felt, interpreted, and lived by individual actors. In the following chapters, I make use of phenomenological reduction and interpretation as my primary means for analyzing the descriptions of lived experiences of community in ecovillages. Though my account of the phenomenological movement in this chapter has focused on its application within a particular range of experiences that center human interaction with the more-than-human environment, my aim has not been so much to capture the multitude of nuances running through the phenomenological tradition as it has been to identify a particular current surrounding the question of critical engagement within the phenomenological outlook—namely its relationship between human actors, their more-than-human surrounding, and the force that this surrounding exerts on human agency. I outline Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's contributions to the philosophy, and note the ways in which their writings foreshadow the critical phenomenology that has been taken up in the past decade as a means of adapting the phenomenological project to engage with the multiple worldly crises that people confront today. I also highlight notable contributions to the phenomenology of environment and community. In chapter four, I pursue this phenomenological approach in examining the accounts of ecovillagers' experiences living in these kinds of intentional communities. In chapter three,

meanwhile, I provide a narrative account of my interviews and visits to several different ecovillages, providing additional environmental details that contextualize some of the responses that I consider in chapter four.

CHAPTER 3

A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT OF TWO ECOVILLAGES

In the previous chapter, I made the case for a phenomenological exploration of ecovillages as a useful method for the exploration of community in these settings. I delved into some of the discussions that have culminated with the critical phenomenology trend in recent years. I then went through some of the grounding epistemological outlooks that uphold the phenomenological enterprise, and traced some of the basic steps (description, reduction, interpretation) that make up the phenomenological enterprise. I then discussed some of the extant phenomenological discussions about the environment, and about community before discussing how I would apply the method in my research.

In this chapter, I recount my fieldwork, at once describing my own engagement with ecovillage communities, and the interviews that I conducted with people on-site. I provide details about some of the interviews that I conducted, and make observations that help to contextualize some of the analysis I engage in chapter four.

Fieldwork

In addition to these interviews, I made efforts where possible to seek out and conduct my work in person. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this was not always possible. Many communities made note on their websites, and many communards discussed in interviews, how they were no longer accepting visitors for the duration of the pandemic. While these restrictions have not always remained consistent—occasionally being lifted only to be reinstated with new surges of the virus—I was able to visit two ecovillages in person during the course of my research. The first, a settlement located in the mountains of western North Carolina that I pseudonymize Signs of Rain Ecovillage, for a single day, taking a guided tour with one of the

members of the community, and attending a communal dinner before departing. I visited the second ecovillage, pseudonymized Rice and Salt Ecovillage, twice—once for two days and three nights, and again for four days and nights—each time camping under a shade of trees within the village.⁷ During each of these visits, I conducted interviews and generally attempted to take part in community life during my time there. Below, I provide a narrative account of my engagements at these communities, interspersed with short excerpts and notes about the motifs that I will take up for further examination in this chapter and the next.

Signs of Rain Ecovillage

I had read about Signs of Rain Ecovillage several times in existing literature on ecovillages. Karen Litfin's book on the subject discusses the dispute that emerged in 2012 around the question of digging wells for water as an example of a disagreement that nearly fractured the community (20). I had further read about them in several academic journals that qualified them as an exemplary ecovillage for the study of energy efficiency in ecovillage settings (Sherry and Ormsby). I reached out via their public email in the hopes of potentially arranging a visit, and was met with a positive answer. I explained my research briefly, noting that I was interested in the social dynamics of ecovillage communities, and was told that while I could only receive a limited tour due to pandemic precautions, I would still be able to come out for an afternoon.

7. I am ambivalent about the need to provide pseudonyms for the communities in this section. On the one hand, I understand the need for protecting the confidentiality of the ecovillagers I spoke with during my research. On the other hand, some ecovillages like Rice and Salt Ecovillage often tout public outreach as a community value, and in that respect the use of pseudonyms seems to go against the community's wishes. Per the advice of the Human Subjects Committee at SIUC, I have opted to provide pseudonyms, pending any express demand to do otherwise from the communities. The pseudonyms I have chosen for these communities are references to environmental science fiction literature.

Upon arriving, my then-partner and I were met by our guide, a communitarian named Mountain Moth, who showed us around the village. Signs of Rain was broken into several different “neighborhoods” that each followed a separate organizational structure in their design. For instance, one neighborhood consisted of several communal yurts that were inhabited by multiple unrelated people. Another neighborhood consisted of pre-constructed eco-friendly houses that had been bought by separate families. Still another consisted of a community-constructed multi-story apartment building adjoined by a large grazing field that housed several cows and chickens.

Throughout our tour, Mountain Moth showed us what she could do with the outdoor buildings and structures. As we were visiting in the summer of 2020, the village had only agreed to my visit on the proviso that I would not be allowed to enter any of the buildings. Despite this limitation, I felt that we were being generously greeted and was surprised that we were invited to take part in a dinner. Some of the observations Mountain Moth made were consistent with those made by ecovillagers in subsequent interviews. Among these, Mountain Moth noted that the location of the village—deep within a forest tucked into the North Carolina mountains, informed much of their ability to undertake new projects. To paraphrase, she said that if they wanted to build any fields for animals, it was a difficult undertaking as it first required the removal of trees, and then the construction/tilling of the land for the field itself. Similarly, trees were obstacles to solar power panels, and required energy in the form of either physical labor or power tools and vehicles to remove. Mountain Moth suggested that the lesson learned from these difficulties was that the efforts made by the villagers should have gone towards building the village in a way that more effectively made use of and cooperated with the existing landscape, such that the construction of desired infrastructure could be more easily handled.

While the animal fields and solar panels at Signs of Rain were described as examples of places where the forest had made construction difficult, an example of a place that the land had cooperated with the community was the series of hydro-powered generators I was shown. By harnessing the flow of a creek that ran through the community, Signs of Rain was able to capture and store electrical power for usage by the community in several generators that converted the electricity into batteries that would be used by the community. While the electrical output from this was not large, it was more sustainable, and Mountain Moth seemed to express some pride in its construction and operation.

I remember being surprised during our tour when Mountain Moth asked that we not wave to any communards who did not first attempt to speak with us. Mountain Moth explained that because we were “strangers” in people’s “backyards” that it might feel like a breach of privacy for the communards to be hailed by us. I spoke with Mountain Moth about this, noting that it seemed fairly unusual, given that the structure of the community seemed in many places to force encounters between people thanks to the open spaces of many of the outdoors areas between buildings. Mountain Moth agreed, but said that a number of other ecovillages held stricter policies regarding contact. She described one in Virginia that held a policy whereby new members were advised not to speak to existing members without first being approached by these senior members.

After our tour, we attended a brief dinner under a community awning. Every Friday, we were told, the community liked to hold these dinners as an appreciation of the sabbath. While Signs of Rain Ecovillage was not explicitly Jewish in its denomination, the community, I was told, liked to borrow different customs as occasions for holding community functions. The

dinner was a potluck wherein each person offered a statement of gratitude in addition to their food. After the dinner, my partner and I left and returned to our lodging in a nearby city.

I had originally planned to interview members of Signs of Rain Ecovillage, but upon reaching out with the details of the project, I was informed that the members would be too busy to interview me without some form of financial or work-exchange compensation. Due to my own financial limitations, I could not provide them with this kind of a guarantee, and our negotiations quickly fell through. I moved on to conduct interviews with members of other communities. Several people at ecovillages in the northeast offered to facilitate visits for me once the pandemic restrictions had abated, provided I was able to make my own way out to these locales. I deeply appreciate the hospitality these ecovillagers displayed, even though I was unable to make these trips due to my own financial restraints on long-distance travel. In the end, the ecovillage that I spent the most time at was located a short drive off in northeast Missouri— Rice and Salt Ecovillage.

Rice and Salt Ecovillage

I arrived at Rice and Salt Ecovillage, located in rural northeast Missouri, late on a Thursday evening in September of 2021. I had already spoken with a few members of this ecovillage via interviews over Zoom, and was graciously invited to come and spend a weekend in order to conduct further interviews and see how village life looked firsthand. I set up my tent along a pathway by a small stone marking the grave of one of the first members who had died in the village in 2010. While my experience at Signs of Rain Ecovillage was closely guided by Mountain Moth, my liaison at Rice and Salt Ecovillage, Pamela, would accompany me on walks in the mornings, but otherwise left me to my own devices as I met communards, arranged and conducted interviews, and generally took in the community.

Immediately upon arrival, I noticed that Rice and Salt Ecovillage was both much more compact in its layout, and much more open in its affect than Signs of Rain Ecovillage had been during my visit. I think that some of this was due to the moment of time that I visited, arriving at Rice and Salt Ecovillage in the early autumn of 2021, after the first waves of COVID had passed and communities were becoming more open about their admission of outsiders. Pamela and several other communards warmly greeted me as I pulled in off the country road, following the wooden sign that marked the village. I parked my car in the visitor lot and made my way along the dirt paths. I arrived on a Thursday evening beneath gray skies, occasionally drizzling rain. Pamela guided me to my campsite, and let me know that I was likely to run into villagers at any point, and that they might be naked at points beyond the opening stretch of the village. Pamela let me know that the community did not consider nudity to be a sexual matter, and so to be aware of that as I moved through the place. Disappointed that I had not arrived early enough to receive a tour, Pamela escorted me to Copper Canyon, one of the kitchen co-operatives at Rice and Salt Ecovillage. While the community center located near the entrance to the village often had a number of people making meals within its kitchen, I was informed that a number of communards had formed their own co-ops over the years. These small groups often contributed their own money or labor to have meals for more specialized palates in some of the buildings around the village.

Copper Canyon was a small kitchen set into a stone and clay house nestled within the green trails of Rice and Salt Ecovillage. About six or seven people comprised the kitchen, and their meals seemed to mostly be vegetarian or vegan foraged foods. Homemade teas, cheeses, and vegetable dishes were common, and the dinner took place around a small central table that covered much of the floor-space of the relatively small kitchen. Before dinner, the members of

the kitchen and I held hands, and in unison they began to sing a short tune as a kind of pre-meal ritual

Wood, stone, feather and bone, roaring of the thunder bring us home.

Wood, stone, feather and bone, roaring of the thunder bring us home.

(chorus)

Angels sing, angels sing, in my soul, in my soul.

(verse 2)

River, sea, redwood tree, howling of the wind gonna set us free.

River, sea, redwood tree, howling of the wind gonna set us free.

(chorus)

I asked them about the lyrics, and one of the members told me that it was one of several songs they would sometimes sing before a meal as a means of offering thanks and ritualizing the occasion. I later learned that the lyrics were written by a singer-songwriter named Joules Graves, one of several poets whose works were regularly sung during my time at Rice and Salt Ecovillage.

After dinner, I turned in early as it seemed that the village was not going to be as active due to the rainy weather. The next morning, I went on a walk with Pamela, who introduced me to the prairie that comprised the bulk of Rice and Salt Ecovillage's 280-acre expanse. The actual human habitation took up only 40 acres, and housed roughly 60 people in a variety of different house-layouts. In addition to the actual living quarters that made up the "city-style" living section, several other buildings—a community center, several greenhouses, a trading post, and a town mercantile that had previously functioned as a kind of small restaurant before COVID—also occupied the relatively compact living section of the village. Beyond this, a series of

prairies stretched out to encompass the remaining 240 acres of land. Pamela informed me that the village was afforded an annual grant from the federal government to keep the land as an arable prairie for use as farmland in the event of a disaster. Walking along the trail that had been cut through the tall prairie grass, we visited the swimming pond that villagers used on hot days, and also visited a small group of goats that were regularly moved around the property in order to graze any overgrown plants into order.

After our walk, Pamela and I visited the morning's maker's circle. This weekly event consisted of several members sitting outside in a circle, talking and working on individual craft projects. One villager stitched extra material into a quilt, another stuffed cotton into small star decorations. Conversation centered around one person—Black Cat Blossom—who had just returned from a visit to another community in southeastern Missouri with her partner. Black Cat Blossom spoke of how that community consisted largely of twenty and thirty-somethings who lived together and operated a nut mill as a means of generating income for the village. I had heard of this settlement before and asked her what she thought about it—she spoke about how the culture involved more drinking than was common at Rice and Salt Ecovillage, and how the overall aesthetic was more “crust punk”⁸ than Rice and Salt Ecovillage. One member of the maker's circle—Miles—expressed an interest in talking with me, and after the circle concluded, I walked with her to the common house she and her partner were staying in.

Miles and her partner worked as educators and archaeological researchers who had lived for several years in American expat communities in central Asia while on archaeology projects

8. I understand “crust punk” as Black Cat Blossom uses it to refer to a cultural expression of certain parts of the punk subculture. However, in the spirit of punk expression, I will eschew a strict definition, and invite the reader to come to their own ideas about what may constitute a “crust punk.”

sponsored by foreign universities. We spoke about the study of archaeology as it related to the material lives of ecovillages—habits of consumption, waste disposal, and resource usage comprised much of what Miles studied, and the ways that these practices merged into the life of the community was something I found very interesting. Miles described the study of archaeology as a process of looking through “a culture’s garbage.” Expounding on this, Miles discussed the ways that a culture’s habits of use regarding consumable items was often considered a valuable piece of data for archaeologists learning about both present-day and historical populations.

Following my interview with Miles, I went and explored the community center. The building consisted of a large meeting room with a piano, a seating room for community meetings, and other instruments stored away for music-making occasions. The central meeting room connected to a hallway that coiled around the area of the building—numerous pieces of artwork, photographs of old members, and commemorations of past celebrations and events lined the walls of the hallway. The community center also contained two libraries, a wi-fi room, a village office, two shower rooms, a washing machine, a common-use kitchen, and two rooms with buckets that acted as toilets.

As an aside, I found (in my talks with communards at Rice and Salt Ecovillage and elsewhere) that the matter of waste disposal was often a hinge-point around which people oriented their decisions to live in an ecovillage. Moving to a place “where you poop in a bucket” was often framed as a decisive step into a new form of lifestyle distinct from more “modern” civil infrastructure.⁹ To me, this signifies a more overt concern with material consumption and waste than is often factored into wider civil society. While my interview with Miles involved a

9. I use quotation marks throughout this narrative to indicate phrases and idioms that were either repeatedly brought up in casual conversation outside of interviews, or for phrases that recurred across multiple interviews.

discussion of one form of material waste, it is worth remarking that this other form of waste consideration--the operation of a regular waste management schedule, and the decision to use buckets, sawdust, and manure composting as a means of management—signals another kind of conspicuous ritual activity that speaks to communal concern with ecological sustainability.

During my interview with Miles, several people filed through the house, some of whom I would also go on to interview. While I knew that the community's quiet hours spanned from 10 pm to 7 am, I still found it interesting that outside of those hours people would regularly visit at and conduct business at one another's houses. No interview I did on-site was free from some form of interruption by the arrival of some other person coming to ask the interviewee a question or complete some kind of small errand. To be clear, I am not saying that the villagers were rude, merely that the pace of life at this village seemed to involve a lot of coming and going between communards carrying on the business of their days. The community members seemed heavily involved in one another's lives. I wondered about the role of the community center, and whether or not that would have served as a more convenient place for this kind of business. It was intimated in conversations that since the COVID-19 pandemic began, usage of the community center had fallen by the wayside in favor of individual meetings at houses or meetings conducted outdoors.

In the early afternoon, I made my way over to Luke's house. I had been told that Luke would be a good source to talk to about cultural expression at Rice and Salt Ecovillage—that he served on a number of the village councils, and was interested in the performing arts. I entered Luke's living room where he was at work on the computer. He beckoned me to sit on his couch while he finished his work. I settled in and pet his friendly poodle-haired dog Gadget, a mistake I would not precisely regret, but that would color the interview as Gadget insisted I continue

petting her throughout. Luke is a software engineer originally from the northeast US, who moved to Rice and Salt Ecovillage in the mid-2000s. The father of three grown children, Luke's youngest, an 18-year-old woman, still lived at home at the time of the interview. Luke and I spoke about the role of jobs within the community. He was involved with managing the community non-profit, a learning-based residency that taught sustainable building and food techniques to interns who paid a sum to come live and work at Rice and Salt Ecovillage. Luke seemed to express some reticence about his own and other people's involvement in village councils and committees,

We've perhaps unintentionally created a culture that makes it uncomfortable to be- to step into a leadership role. And it is easier to sit on the sidelines and criticize than it is to be part of the solution. So, you know, we're no different from any other group of people in that regard. But as, I mean, there are a handful of us who are kind of grokking that 'oh, wait, our last founders have left, we've managed to transition beyond that, beyond the way of the last founders successfully. We're doing great, we're even struggling, even with dealing with COVID. But yeah, I think there's a way in which, like it or not, we need to step up. And that's coming into conflict with my increased awareness of privilege and perpetuating that.

In addition to speaking about the challenges of daily governance, Luke directly addressed several rituals that had occurred during his time in the community, specifically holidays and funerary observances, and several more routinized events that were slowly returning after having been largely put on hold due to the COVID pandemic (e.g., weekly potlucks, daily happy hours, and weekend song circles).

Yeah, and Charlie—from the time he realized he was sick to the time he died was very fast. Maybe about a year. And they were almost done finishing their house. They did it entirely by hand! No mechanical implements for their labor. Yeah, so the community coming together and digging the graves, processing with the body, and there's something very intimate and powerful about doing that—burying someone you've worked with and cared for.

...

Because we're not based in any particular religion or faith practice, we have a lot of different ones. And the idea is that if there's something that's important to you and you want to share it, you can make it happen and we'll pitch in and we'll get involved. So we've all held seders off and on over the years. You know, Christmas potlucks. Every year I host a dessert potluck on Christmas Eve. I listen to the simulcast service from my old church and pastor. Traditions, things that bring the warm fuzzies. There was a woman who lived here for a number of years who off and on did a Day of the Dead in winter where people would come and hang out. There are full moon circles for equinoxes, for solstice, what have you. Oh, and on Easter- Easter Sunday, is when the portal opens between the dimensions and Ostrichtron can come visit and exchanges rocks—you, you give Ostrichtron rocks. Ostrichtron comes from an environment severely lacking in rocks, apparently. And you will get some fruit, in exchange.

Here, Luke touches on the syncretic approach to celebrations and faiths that I heard expressed by many different comunards across ecovillages. Every interviewee that spoke about rituals mentioned how their village held some kind of event during equinoxes and solstices, and

members of both Rice and Salt Ecovillage and Signs of Rain Ecovillage mentioned this approach of blending different faith practices in their celebrations. I will return to this idea in more detail later, but I wish to introduce at this point the free-form approach to community ritual that I think signifies a kind of continuing life-experimentation on the part of the ecovillagers.

Luke and I concluded our interview, and I made my way to the village happy hour. A semi-circle of folding chairs sat out on the front lawn beside the village mercantile and community center. Midway into the hour, a group of people from Rice and Salt Ecovillage, and a few people from the neighboring intentional communities, Shai-hulud Community and Mars Trilogy Farms, began a game of ultimate frisbee in the large nearby field. I joined them, and noticed that the group contained a number of younger villagers. While the research parameters of my project focused on the experiences of adults who live at ecovillages—a population that largely have come from non-ecovillage communities and made a conscious decision to move to these settlements, I have met a growing population of young people who were born and raised in ecovillages. These young people may, at times, come along with families seeking to adopt an ecovillage as a home. However, there is a small population I have encountered that have only lived in ecovillage communities, and I leave it to future research to explore the difference in perspective afforded by a life lived in these communities since birth.

After the ultimate frisbee game, the players and I moved to the swimming pond for a short dip before dinner at Brutus's Bungalow. We arrived after a short walk downhill from the main bulk of Rice and Salt Ecovillage's collection of houses, and I noted the wooden sign at the edge of the pond warning that no lifeguards were on duty, and that one should always swim with a partner. The other swimmers remove their clothes and hop in nude. Not wanting to lose the experience of participation, I strip and join them as well.

I pause here to note my own interpretation of this moment. Anthropologist Marcia Rego has written on the multiple conflicts involved with nudity during participant-observation fieldwork. The researcher, in conducting participant-observation work, is at once asked to maintain a critical distance from the communities they research, while simultaneously negotiating and learning an embodied knowledge of a community's practices, norms, and habits (31). While the bulk of my discussion in this and the following chapter will be based on the observations made by my interviewees during our talks, I think Rego's call for the researcher to engage the world alongside the members of the communities they investigate factored into my practices as I ate, cooked, worked, swam, and sang with the people at Rice and Salt Ecovillage during my time there.

After our short swim, the communards and I made our way to Brutus's Bungalow. In contrast to the other indoor kitchen co-operatives at Rice and Salt Ecovillage, Brutus's Bungalow was an outdoor kitchen where the food was cooked in wood-fired ovens or stoves. It also abutted a farm whose occupants attended to the vast majority of Rice and Salt Ecovillage's animal husbandry. In addition to the goats I encountered earlier, Rice and Salt Ecovillage keeps populations of turkeys, chickens, ducks, and, occasionally, pigs. When we arrived at the long wooden tables sheltered beneath the wooden awning of Brutus's, I noticed a large white dog—maybe a Pyrenees—lounging beneath the table. I was told her name was Gabrielle, and that she was a retired herd dog. The conversation and mood were different at Brutus's compared to Copper Canyon. Whereas Canyon was nestled into a small building and only hosted five or six regular diners when I visited, Brutus's long picnic tables held somewhere between 8 to 15 people per meal. Our meal was a simple rice and vegetable dish, and at the end of the dinner—the sky now dark, I moved with some people to the night's song circle.

Some ten meters from my tent was a fire pit surrounded by logs, benches, and chairs. I was told that roughly once a week (excepting some off weeks, and during the opening months of the pandemic) there was some kind of a song or story circle that took place around the fire. Several people brought guitars or ukuleles, and after some 15 or so people arrived, the singing slowly began. The songs were a mix of numerous genres and styles. Scout songs like “The Quartermaster’s Store,” pop songs like Britney Spears’ “Toxic,” and several songs that I learned originated from an annual gathering called Song Village. The lyrics to these songs—usually only a few lines, sung in rounds, seemed to me to reiterate some of the common ethical or environmental concerns of the villagers. For example,

I believed in solid ground
Until I saw the Earth in motion.
In the winds of steady change,
And in the ever-rolling ocean.
All moves on, in perfect, perfect motion
All is change and ever-rolling ocean (Zylstra).

The lyrics, in my opinion, seem to convey an orientation to the world as a fluctuating set of different forces, organisms, and ideas—irreducible to any one model of understanding that might set its strictures upon the constantly-changing experience of life.

The song circle lasted several hours into the night, with each person being invited to contribute a song. For my part, I attempted to launch into Cocorosie’s “Fairy Paradise,” an attempt that, unfortunately, ran somewhat aground on the song’s uneven rhythm and my own lung capacity. At about 10:30, I decided to return to my tent to get some sleep.

On my final full day at Rice and Salt Ecovillage, I was left largely to my own devices, as the village was scheduled to hold both a council meeting, and a consensus-based decision-making workshop. Pamela and I took Luke's dog Gadget on a morning walk to the edge of the property. Beyond the well-trod paths cut between the tall meadow-grass, the trail petered into a more unkempt path through trees and native bushes. During my time at Rice and Salt Ecovillage, I discovered I had a ragweed allergy that made walking through the cool autumn mornings somewhat more watery than I would have preferred. However, I found the small floating seeds to be enchanting in the way they provided an ambling white rain across the fields. At the furthest extent of our walk, Pamela and I arrived at a large dead tree that stood alone in a small grove. Pamela informed me that this was the tree that the community used to mark its extent, and also the tree around which the communards held their annual land day ritual (a founding anniversary celebration). Land day, I was informed, was a week away, and I had the good fortune to be present for some of the planning that went into it.

After our walk, Pamela and I went our separate ways and I met up with and interviewed Mack in Heavenly Hollow, a common-use boarding house near the entrance of the village. Mack was a retired farmer who grew up in the Midwest, and had lived between several different intentional communities over the course of his life before spending the past four years at Rice and Salt Ecovillage. A friend of his was also present at Rice and Salt Ecovillage during my visit, and helped me during the morning to compile notes about the songs sung at the circle the previous night. During the course of our conversation, Mack spoke about several moments of tension that had emerged in the community over the years. Rice and Salt Ecovillage, like most ecovillages, has a process of accepting new members that spans a time of trial membership, as well as some degree of social expectation surrounding different commitments to the

environment. However, even with this distinction between members—who often work to co-own the land—and non-members, it is worth noting that ecovillages like Rice and Salt Ecovillage or Signs of Rain Ecovillage host populations of non-member interns, trial members, guests (both long and short-term), and family members at any given time.

One thing that struck me about Rice and Salt Ecovillage, in this respect, was the culture of soft sobriety I observed. At the community happy hour I had gone to the previous day, most of the members were adults in their 40s or older. In addition to Mack—in his 60s—I noticed that many of the members who were willing to speak to me were people who had lived in non-ecovillage settings, and had come to ecovillages as members after professional retirement, although this is not necessarily related to age. I spent some time with Black Cat Blossom, an artist in her early 30s, who informed me that a fair number of the people who came to Rice and Salt Ecovillage as non-members had dealt with some form of addiction or material hardship in the past. I remembered my friend Annie, who works in a variety of seasonal forestry services in eastern Oregon, and how often the population of seasonal workers, itinerant farmers, and other non-rooted members of communities, are frequently glossed over in discussions about labor in intentional and non-intentional communities.

This distinction made itself present in Mack’s discussions about the members who had left over the years. He spoke of a time when the village had a “fellow” who attempted suicide, and how the community wasn’t sure whether or not they had adequate resources to help him through his struggles—how the discussion turned to questions of what efforts the community should take in assisting in its members’ health concerns. Along similar lines, Mack spoke about some of the difficulties that arose in the village as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. He mentioned how, over the years, a number of people had come for periods of time who tried to

live in their own preferred manner, regardless of the wishes of the community. During my walks with Pamela, she had brought up similar instances—for example, a time when a man wanted to build his own homestead in the 240 open acres, and was prevented from doing so due to the norms of the community insisting that people live in the 40-acre residential area. The idea, Pamela said, was that if you wanted to live at Rice and Salt Ecovillage, you were supposed to be a part of the community. If a person did not want to live in accordance with these norms, there were other communities they could go to instead.

After the interview with Mack, I joined Jasper and another community visitor, Meadow, to prepare lunch at Brutus's Bungalow. I attempted to interview Jasper during this time, but we both found the process of preparing the lunch (stir-fry taco mix) difficult and loud enough to postpone the interview. During the meal, I spoke with several communards about the nature of my research. I explained that the subfield of communication studies I most identify with—performance studies—was interested in all manner of stylized actions taken by people in communication with others. I sensed a familiar uncertainty with the two communards I was speaking with, as they quickly began asking what I meant by performance. I explained that identifying a practice as a performance does not necessarily mean that that practice is fake or unserious. I had heard the subject of recycling discussed at several points already in a pejorative sense, and so argued that the continued action of recycling on the part of the ecovillagers suggested a cultural performance oriented around the recognition of it as a valuable affirmation of a shared ethos.¹⁰ Thinking on this moment now, I am reminded of what Jonas Barish calls the

10. While recycling waste materials is not a harmful practice in itself, the wider infrastructure involved in the processing, cleaning, and repurposing of recycled goods in the U.S., particularly plastic items, is insufficient to the task of mitigating the amount of waste products that end up in landfills, the ocean, or other non-viable resting places. Columbia professor Stephanie Kersten-Johnston, quoted in an article by Renee Cho, warns that “without dedicated investment, recycling

anti-theatrical prejudice—a longstanding conflation of performance with notions of artifice, unseriousness, and inauthenticity that often vexes performance scholars’ examinations of everyday performative practices. Had I had the presence of mind to mention it in the moment, I would have likely cited how numerous ecovillagers I met remarked that conspicuous performance events like the song circle I had attended were often the most beloved by community members.

Following this lunch, I attended an afternoon community council session. Out in the public field beside the mercantile, a large number of the full-member communards gathered in a large circle in lawn chairs, benches, and other seats. There was not much in the way of special business discussed at the meeting, but I was interested enough in the planning for the next week’s land day that I joined a group of about five communards who gathered near the frisbee pitch to discuss the events. The session reminded me of a fall festival planning meeting, as those involved discussed possible games that could be assembled for the village children to play (even better if they were games like Osage bowling, that helped to rid the village of the abundant Osage oranges that covered the ground). They also discussed the overall schedule for the days’ events—a trek to and ceremony at the community tree, several different potlucks, and the no-talent show that anyone could sign up for.

The rest of the day went by fairly uneventfully—I attempted to attend the consensus discussion group, but was told that because I hadn’t attended the first session, and because the sessions were programmed with a certain number of people in mind, that I wouldn’t be able to participate too easily. Instead, I took more time to walk through the grounds and make small

infrastructure won’t be sufficient. . . . when it’s cheap to landfill, recycling won’t be ‘worthwhile’” (n.p.).

observations and sketches of the things I saw there. In the evening, I had dinner at a third kitchen co-operative, Therian's. Whereas Copper Canyon was intimate and rustic, and Brutus's was naturalistic and ordered for its size, Therian's eminded me most of the home I had grown up in—part of a family house with one long counter with a sink, a stove/oven, and cupboards lining the walls, a wine cabinet at one end, and a dining room table sitting catty-corner to the whole arrangement.

The evening went by quietly. After spending some time speaking with Luke, I went to the common house and spent some more time chatting with Mack and his visiting friend. Afterwards, I returned to my tent and slept through my final night at Rice and Salt Ecovillage. In the morning, I had my final breakfast visit with Pamela, who thanked me for coming out and expressed her happiness that I had been able to come and visit. I packed up my car, but had one final interview before leaving. This interview, conducted with Goldie, was very interesting. Not only was Goldie one of the members of Rice and Salt Ecovillage who had been in the village since just after its founding, but Goldie voiced several critiques of ecovillages that I had not heard voiced by members prior to this point. Namely, that for all of the effort that the ecovillage put into living sustainably, it did not address the main contributor to climate change, corporate emissions.

You can call yourself an ecovillage, but how eco- are you, really? What is eco-? I thought I would live here and become really wise, but there's so much grey area. . . . I mean, I don't think you have to live in a cave and be uncomfortable. I don't know what the answer is, I don't know what sustainability is. I think what we really need to do is have reform of corporations because they do a lot more polluting than individuals.

I asked her at one point what she would like to have happen to make her feel more comfortable with the current situation of the ecovillage, and was met with a very interesting response.

I'd like to have conversations about, what can we do about, how can we stop pipelines? What can we be doing on a bigger picture? Instead of arguing about cats or wasting time having meetings about people who don't want to get vaccinated. Or having meetings about having opportunities to drive our own cars. . . . we've been having all these stupid conversations for twenty-three years. Because there's so much turnover . . . there's less and less continuity and less and less people who hold the story of why we do different things, or where a decision came from, or what has been tried. Every visitor, almost every visitor sometimes goes 'oh, you know what you should do is this.' And you know, you've been here twenty-four hours, so maybe give some things a try. And there are amazing ideas that come up, and people bring great energy and skills and I'm really glad when people join. But when they leave it's like they take this chunk of Rice and Salt Ecovillage—this knowledge and these skills. We've lost people who know how to facilitate meetings. We've lost people who know how to mediate conflicts. All those people have left and it makes it really hard to keep those agreements, to do the things we want to do

Goldie's commentary stood out to me as the most overtly critical accounting of ecovillage living among any of the communards I spoke with. It remains one of the more poignant reflections on the enterprise of ecovillage living that I have encountered.

Following my interview with Goldie, I returned to Carbondale to resume teaching, maintaining contact with many of the communards at Rice and Salt Ecovillage via Facebook in the months since. One year later, I visited again to conduct several new interviews and follow-up conversations with the people in the community. Much had changed there in the intervening time—Brutus’s Bungalow suffered a major fire in November of 2021, and the community has been attempting to rebuild it since. Black Cat Blossom and Mack both moved to different communities, and several people who had previously been visitors during my first visit had become full-time residents. A dispute over the presence of an invasive plant species had caused some disagreements in the community that seemed to still be somewhat fresh, although I was only able to glean some sparse details about the matter. My second visit was longer, lasting from Saturday September 24th to the morning of Wednesday September 28th in 2022. During this time, I once again ate with the members of the community, joining in at the weekly potluck during my final night in the village. I played ultimate frisbee, attended a consensus decision-making training workshop, organized parts of the community library during the Sunday cleaning party, conducted follow-up interviews with the people I spoke with on my first visit, and conducted new with several more people—among them Jasper, Carlos, and Lydia—all of whom I cite below.

I have attempted here to provide a thorough account of my visits to two ecovillage communities, wherein I conducted several of my interviews and got to experience a very small taste of the daily rhythms in ecovillage life. In the remainder of this chapter, I will introduce several other interviewees who spoke about aspects of ecovillages that I would come to identify as major phenomenological themes for this study. After this introduction of the communards that

I interviewed electronically, (i.e., via Zoom or recorded telephone conversation), I move to the reduction and interpretation portions of my study, both of which I undertake in chapter four.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have given an account of the fieldwork I conducted in the course of my research. I highlighted the guided tour I took of Signs of Rain Ecovillage, and the different visits I made to Rice and Salt Ecovillage, as well as the interviews I conducted there. In the following chapter, I begin a process of reduction and interpretation of the interviewees' responses to my questions about their time living in ecovillages. I introduce several motifs that recurred across the interviews, and cite excerpts from the interviews as ways of discussing these motifs. I expand on each of these areas, quoting salient passages from the interviews that express different modes through which these ideas are given over in experience. After elaborating on these motifs, I identify three contingent foundations that these motifs express. I expand on these foundations, discussing how they tie in to existing literature in performance and environmental communication, attempting to come to a more holistic description of community as a phenomenon in ecovillage settings. I then begin a discussion of what these foundations suggest about ecovillage communities generally, and how these observations align and depart from existing discourses about ecovillages.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWEES' ACCOUNTS OF THEIR LIVES

In chapter three, I recounted my investigative procedures undertaken to examine community as it is experienced by ecovillage communards. I gave a detailed narrative of my field visits to two ecovillage communities, providing descriptions of the villages that are often major reference points for the interviewees during our discussions. I provided several excerpts from interviews that I return to in greater detail in this chapter, and I commented on some of the concerns

In this chapter, I take up the steps of phenomenological reduction and interpretation regarding the interviews I conducted. I introduce several recurring motifs that ran through the interviews I conducted among villagers in different ecovillage communities, and provide excerpts from these interviews as ways of exploring these motifs. I then highlight several contingent foundations of the phenomenon of community that these motifs indicate. I explore these contingent foundations, connecting each of them to bodies of academic literature that extend the observations of the ecovillagers. I conclude this chapter by positing several impressions about the subject of community in ecovillages as it aligns and diverges from some of the literature considered in chapter one.

Motifs

Following my interviews with ecovillagers, and my fieldwork at Rice and Salt Ecovillage, I transcribed the various encounters and set about exploring the responses through a phenomenological lens. This involved laying out the different interviews to look for passages that resonated with one another, identifying common topics that recurred across interviewees' responses, and looking for elements that structured these motifs. This procedure takes inspiration

from Spiegelberg's instruction to observe how "certain groups of phenomena cluster around cores that stand out as nodal points or vertices in the sequence of phenomena. Such are, for instance, the pure colors. The surrounding shades of color 'belong together' in distinct groups according to their affinity to the pure colors" (698). These subject areas, linked together, serve as a canvas upon which certain eddies of agreement appear. By identifying the common traits shared between these situated accounts, overarching themes can become clear. I took an inclusive approach when sorting these comments into different categories. For instance, if an interviewee's comments could fit into both the *Happenings* motif, and the *Community* motif, I included it in both.

Motif 1: Intentional Design

By intentional design, I refer to all parts of ecovillage design that are purposefully created by members to more effectively live according to an ethos, or to manage specific aspects of community life. I placed discussions about land use, physical upkeep, and permaculture under this heading.

One of the clearest examples of intentional design that Pamela and Goldie remarked upon, and that I encountered firsthand, were the pathways at Rice and Salt Ecovillage. Although Rice and Salt Ecovillage's total property stretches over 280 acres, all sixty-seventy members (it varies from season to season, depending on the number of interns) live on a 40-acre parcel of the land that was built with paths weaving between the buildings and providing walkways that frequently took people close to one another's living spaces. Goldie explained that this decision was made early on in Rice and Salt Ecovillage's history, and was favored in lieu of lawns, so that encounters between people would be more likely to occur. Connor described his ecovillage's

plans to construct a “permaculture beltway that will provide a way for the wildlife to transit around the built community without having to march through our gardens to get some place.”

These decisions about land design often unfold over time and serve as venues for decisions on the part of the ecovillagers. Selene, in something of a variation on Connor’s description of a permaculture beltway, remarked on a situation in her village that involved “fencing out the deer, and some folks ask ‘why?’ why don’t we design our property so wildlife can use it, too?”

In addition to decisions about the land, some discussions that I placed in this heading involved discussions about how power was allocated, and how governance systems were implemented at first. Many of the comments of this variety also occurred in the *Happenings* motif. However, as I explore these discussions here, I pay attention to those aspects of the comments that concern the initial decisions about governance, and to what degree these governance systems promote a given philosophy about living together or distributing power. Something Cool speaks to this point explicitly

Dealing with power is, I think, one of the biggest challenges in this kind of community. It gets frustrating, because it feels as if what we say we are isn’t fully what we are, sometimes. We revert. Everyone here grew up in an American capitalist hierarchical system that’s very punishment-based, and it’s hard to unlearn that. For any community, even traditional ones, they need to be aware of that—be intentional with how power is held.

Also within this motif were several comments about how ecovillage design butts up against state and federal regulations regarding community spaces. One thing I noticed in my discussions with villagers was the difference in interactions with local governments between

regions. Several of the ecovillages I spoke to and read about on the eastern seaboard of the U.S. expressed feelings of frustration with local governing bodies regarding laws surrounding town design. For example, Connor describes a moment when

We had built our community and lived here for a decade, according to the plans that had been submitted to the town. The town came back and said ‘we don’t accept the entrance to your community, because we don’t believe that an emergency vehicle could get into the community in the event of a flood. So you have to build a bridge.’ And we said ‘okay.’ ‘You have to build a bridge without shutting down the existing access. Otherwise, everyone needs to move out until the bridge is done.’ ‘Okay.’ ‘You have to build a bridge based on these new hydrology assessments that were done after your community was built.’ ‘Okay.’ ‘You have to do it by this date.’

Pamela iterated on this theme by remarking that the Midwest is “a magnet for intentional communities” due to a relatively lax attitude on the part of local governments surrounding building codes.

I also place discussions about the physical labor involved in building an ecovillage under this motif. Many of the people who visit Rice and Salt Ecovillage each year come to participate in natural building workshops.¹¹ These visitors also include work-exchangers who comprise a regular workforce not only at Rice and Salt Ecovillage, but in many ecovillages and organic

11. Ecovillages are comprised of a wide variety of different kinds of buildings. During my research, I saw houses that were pre-fabricated to be more environmentally sustainable, yurts, tents, and buildings made from wood, cob, stone, corrugated steel, and clay. Often, natural material was used for insulation.

farms.¹² I spoke with one of these workers, Lydia, who had been involved in several organic farms through the Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms organization (WWOOF). Lydia worked with a dairy co-operative operating out of an on-site farm at Rice and Salt Ecovillage, and speculated about the role of wex'ers in the community.

All the wex'ers that I've hung out with who have been here while I've been here have had a great time, and have felt very connected. But I think some just know they're only gonna be here for six weeks, and they're interested in the experience, but they're not – they're interested in taking bits and pieces, but they're not maybe quite as interested in understanding the nuances of the community. I think inherently if you're only here for a short time, there's so many people that come through here, and people aren't going to invest in you and you're not going to invest in the place the way you would if you were here longer, or if you were more seriously interested in it as a longer-term option.

Collectively, these comments about the intentional design of ecovillages showcase the role of decisions about land, labor, and governance as part of the establishment of a community in accordance with an overriding ethos or philosophy. These choices often become areas of stress over time, as decisions made in one context are re-evaluated as new challenges emerge. Despite these challenges, however, the ecovillagers I spoke with usually seemed to agree with the initial decisions and ethos that had grounded the village in the first place, as it is often the ethos of a village that attracts new members in the first place, rather than location.

12. Work exchange volunteers and people who had volunteered through Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) were collectively known as either “wex'ers” (pronounced weck-sur) or “WWOOFers,” (pronounced woofers) depending on their affiliation.

Motif 2: Happenings

This broad motif comprises three related sub-categories: singular events, special ceremonies, and standardized practices. Each of these sub-categories refer to the kinds of events and community-wide performative behaviors that give each ecovillage its unique character and history.

By singular events, I refer to any anecdotes about moments that marked a significant point in time for individual members, or for the village as a whole. For instance, actions taken to address the presence of invasive plant species, illnesses that sweep through a village, or a village coming together to assist a member after a significant personal loss. These events serve as inflection points around which the village may begin to undertake a new project, or begin a new discussion. As an example, Jay describes a restorative justice ceremony that took place several days before we spoke

One of our residents, he's an 18-years old. He's got autism. He's disabled, and he was adopted by his aunt, and he had a falling out with her, and he stole some money from interns, and his auntie. And he confessed to doing it, reluctantly, because- we knew it was him, because he bought a computer game. And this kid is addicted to the computer, to video games. We had a restorative justice circle, where the factions were represented, and the community basically gave this resident an ultimatum. If he wants to stay in the community, he has to conform to certain things. It worked, so far. It was about three days ago.

...

people just spoke up and said what was on their mind. There were two circles: one was an inner circle of the people who were intimately involved, and there was an

outer circle involving witnesses and the community. And so everybody in the inner circle spoke about how they were impacted and what they wanted as an outcome.

This narrative broadly aligns with Turner's conception of a social drama, comprising a breach (the theft), a crisis (the recognition of the theft), a redress (the justice circle), and a reintegration (the successful conclusion of the justice circle) (34-5). Indeed, many of these singular events can be understood through Turner's schemata. In addition to moments of breach at the hands of a human actor, several of these events involved natural phenomena either through the presence of a disease such as chickenpox or COVID, or an invasive species such as wild parsnip or lespedeza.

Juxtaposed with these singular events that live in the memories of villagers, I place comments about conspicuous occasions that involve a ritual gathering by the members of the ecovillage under a secondary sub-heading of special ceremonies. Birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, regular work parties, clubs, song circles, weddings, funerals, or other kinds of semi-regular events that involve some degree of ritualized structure fall into this sub-heading. Sometimes these moments also mark points of connection between the villagers. Something Cool describes how these rituals can bind the community together.

We have celebrations for each solstice and equinox. We have a stone circle in the woods and there's a planning committee that puts that together. We go and we meditate, and we sing together, and we set our intentions or reflect on the past season. I like those times, and I feel really connected to people then.

Ecovillagers often celebrate a similar itinerary of holidays to people in the wider U.S. culture, but one difference seemed to be the role of improvisation in devising how these

occasions were observed. As quoted earlier, Luke discusses the myriad forms that holiday celebrations have taken over the years

Because we're not based in any particular religion or faith practice, we have a lot of different ones. And the idea is that if there's something that's important to you and you want to share it, you can make it happen and we'll pitch in and we'll get involved. So we've all held seders off and on over the years. You know, Christmas potlucks. Every year I host a dessert potluck on Christmas Eve. I listen to the simulcast service from my old church and pastor. Traditions, things that bring the warm fuzzies. There was a woman who lived here for a number of years who off and on did a Day of the Dead in winter where people would come and hang out. There are full moon circles for equinoxes, for solstice, what have you. Oh, and on Easter- Easter Sunday, is when the portal opens between the dimensions and Ostrichtron can come visit and exchanges rocks—you, you give Ostrichtron rocks. Ostrichtron comes from an environment severely lacking in rocks, apparently. And you will get some fruit, in exchange.

This kind of improvisational observance was remarked upon by ecovillagers in multiple settlements. Something Cool described a Russian “forest-fairy themed” wedding between two members of her village. As Luke indicates, celebrations are often collaborative, sometimes stemming from the desire of a person or group to put together an event in concert with the rest of the village. In addition to seasonal holidays and special occasions, many of the events that ecovillages celebrate happen on a frequent enough schedule (i.e., weekly song circles, work parties, potlucks, dance parties, jam sessions, bonfires, etc.) that improvisation and a degree of casual attitude may be key in keeping the events fresh. During my visits to Rice and Salt

Ecovillage, events like song circles or potucks, while featuring regularly enough to be considered a part of village life, would sometimes be skipped by the villagers on a given week if a given person wasn't feeling up to attending.

Thirdly, I place discussions about resistance to particular rituals in this special ceremonies sub-category. In several interviews, members drew attention to the occasional conflation between intentional communities and religious cults that is sometimes expressed by people in the wider public. At least one ecovillager speculated that their village had worked to put less emphasis on formalized welcoming rituals over the years as part of an effort to distance the ecovillage from any accusations of cult-like behavior.

Finally, I develop a sub-category that I term standardized practices. I placed all comments about governance, decision-making, meetings, and Rice and Salt Ecovillage's kitchen co-operatives under this heading. Often, ecovillages employ forms of governance that seek to include and involve all members of a given population. All but one of the villages I spoke with used some form of consensus-based decision-making alongside a number of different committees and councils that were tasked with attending to specific details of the village's operation. This ecovillage, home to Selene, had only moved away from consensus-based decision-making two months prior to my interview, in favor of a form of governance called sociocracy.¹³ This frustrated Selene, who observed that

Decisions seem to be based on personal preferences by people who've been here the longest. Apparently they call it 'Founder Syndrome.' The people who've been around, who know how things work, they feel entitled to have things go their

13. On paper, sociocracy is a form of consent-based governance organized around horizontal autonomous committees called "circles." However, Selene mentioned that the sociocracy practiced at her ecovillage fell far short of this goal.

way. And because there's no consequences, if someone does something and they didn't put it through the process, there's no—and we're still constructing our governance, so it's unclear a lot of times whether or not the process has been followed. Governance has been very stressful for me, because it's so fluid and undefined.

Indeed, ecovillagers' discussions about governance often seemed to tap into frustrations with moments where the decision-making processes, as they were described in principle, did not lead to favorable outcomes. Several people mentioned how the idea that the decision-making procedures followed a given principle did not seem to play out in practice.

Together, these three categories of comments describe the many kinds of actions that structure the daily lives of ecovillagers. I will return to this in more detail below, but one recurring point that I observed throughout my discussions was a characterization of some aspects of ecovillage life as improvisational. I think that this notion of improvisation is important as a factor in describing the phenomenological character of ecovillage living, as it signals a kind of in-the-moment attention to one's surroundings that serves to reinforce the intentional quality of life in these settlements.

Motif 3: Community

The subject of community, unsurprisingly, came up numerous times in my interviews. The word "community," while already broad in its everyday usage, was used frequently in the interviews to refer to a sense of connectedness, the style of intentional living practiced in ecovillages, individual settlements, and a sense of overall purpose reified through common participation. Although no one attempted to give a definition of community *qua* community, numerous people offered thoughts about what components of social life they felt were necessary

for a collective of people to be called a community, or about the necessity of community for human life. Pamela offers a provisional definition of intentional communities, outlining their difference from more mainstream U.S. American social arrangements

Intentional communities focus on the community aspect of your life. The idea is that the community will move on, with you or without you, and you want to interact with people in a way that fosters the interactivity and interconnectedness that we all share. We've had some people who've moved here recently during difficult times of COVID, and their integration was poor. And we asked how could we have done better, and their answer was "just leave us alone." Uh-uh. That is the antithesis of an intentional community.

Luke, meanwhile, provides a topology of what processes are necessary for a community to effectively function.

The community has to agree on how they're going to agree, how they're going to reach agreement. The community has to know and understand what its shared purpose and intent is, otherwise it's not an intentional community. There has to be a process of joining, there has to be a process for leaving ... not just voluntary leaving, but involuntary leaving.

This account offers a list of structural ingredients for a group of people to satisfy in order for the moniker of community to adequately apply. This structural conception, while important as an attempt to define what creates a community, was atypical in its attempt to provide a list of qualities that people undertake. Far more common were comments about community as a kind of remedy for feelings of social isolation and alienation. Something Cool recalls the isolation she felt living by herself prior to arriving at her ecovillage:

I lived by myself for two years and I hated it. It was horrible. I don't know why people aspire to that, but maybe that's just my own personality, or maybe it's human nature. I mean, I kind of think it's more human nature. We're a social species, we're basically meant to be sleeping in the same bed- like, all of us! Closeness is really important to me, and intimacy. Especially in the U.S., because other countries in the world, they are still living in community. Like, honestly, the majority of the world might still be living in community.

Jay provides a similar perspective to Something Cool when he expresses his belief that “there is no alternative. Especially given what's happening [the COVID-19 pandemic, in the context of our conversation], you've got to have a community. Everybody has to have a community. Human beings need a community, I believe. It's not optional.”

Comments like those offered by Jay and Something Cool portray community as a kind of socially-realized interpersonal state that is achieved through mutual collaboration on the part of parties that come together around a common sense of involvement. Expanding on these kinds of broad comments about community itself, community was often framed as a product of concerted effort. Explaining what he remembered about the early days of his ecovillage, Connor emphasized the amount of time the founding members spent on building feelings of community with one another.

There was a lot more focus on building community amongst the people early on than I think may be the case with some communities that are maybe more worried about where they're going to get the funding to put things together, and they're all worried about the business interests—and they have to be in today's economy! But they maybe lose the interpersonal connectivity. The thing that makes

somebody say “sure, I’ll hand you a check for a thousand dollars even,” and be okay with that. . . . that kind of connection made the community possible.

Taken together, these comments about community seem to share some common elements that construct a picture of community as it is understood by the people I spoke with. Community, for these ecovillagers, seems to be understood as an ongoing process that manifests through individual recognition of common values and interests shared across a population. This process is realized through the continued, concerted effort on the part of the members of a population to facilitate interactions that reinforce this shared recognition. This shared sense of community is still sometimes figured as absent but for this effort on the part of the population, though unlike more conservative calls for an imagined return to community, reclamation is construed not as the result of a singular remedial action, but more as a cumulative gestalt affected through mutual involvement.

While this focus on community is often seen as one of the most important elements that distinguishes an intentional community from a non-intentional social arrangement, it is frequently only one factor in the motivations that drive a person to live in an ecovillage. I expand on other such motivations below.

Motif 4: Motivations

During our discussions about their feelings regarding their ecovillages, I noticed a through-line of people identifying an unmet desire in themselves that they sought to fulfill by moving to an intentional community. For many communards, feelings of social isolation or alienation factored heavily into their decisions to seek out a new kind of living arrangement. However, several other general areas seemed to exist in tandem with the desire for belonging that

intentional communities offered. Among these were a desire to foster a personal transformation, and a desire to become more actively involved with the world.

Speaking to the former, the desire to affect an internal transformation was often tied up with a desire to feel a sense of belonging or community. I draw a distinction, however, between those who said that they knew they wanted to live in an intentional community from the outset, and those who only became aware of this yearning for belonging after becoming involved in such a settlement. For some of these people, a sort of narrative emerges wherein a person either feels something missing in their lives before they arrive at an ecovillage, or becomes aware of such an insufficiency after encountering an ecovillage in some incidental fashion. For instance, Luke discusses how his family did not originally have plans to move to any intentional community. After first arriving at Rice and Salt Ecovillage while accompanying a friend who was looking to move to an intentional community, Luke describes becoming enamored with the place,

The thing that really stood out to me about Rice and Salt Ecovillage was its outward-facing focus. It wasn't people trying to run away and hide or create their own separate utopia. It had a strong educational component . . . that is, they had an educational focus as part of their mission.

. . .

The way in which people here interacted, not just with each other, but with our children, was so different. I realize now it was a strong focus in nonviolent communication. And just the way that complete strangers treated our children as complete human beings who lacked life experience instead of annoyances to just be hushed or shooed off was huge.

Luke's narrative is similar to several other people who had not heard of intentional communities before coming to live at one. Pamela mentioned how, during her initial visit to Rice and Salt Ecovillage, she sat in on a men's group session that was open to the general population and

I sat there in a circle listening to 30, 40, 50-year old white men talk about patriarchy, rape culture, feminism, and I thought "sign me up!" I had never, never in my previous existence heard any man of my age or any age speak about these issues, but it's the elephant in the room that nobody talks about, but here they were having an open discussion about rape culture and I was like "What? Wow!" That was, like, mind-blowing. I thought, "This is great!"

Pamela later described how, despite being politically involved in her hometown before moving to an ecovillage, she had not been aware of this personal desire to live in a place where discussion of feminism was commonplace prior to her initial visit.

One other type of motivation for moving to ecovillages I noticed among the people I interviewed were desires that oriented around material action. For instance, Jasper originally became interested in ecovillage living from his prior interest in natural building practices.

So in my young twenties, I became interested in natural building. I got a lot of experience with that, a lot of positive experience with that, and so I knew I wanted to continue that course. And it can be hard to find avenues for that in the wider world, so I visited Rice and Salt Ecovillage and found a lot of synergy with that here. So that's what ultimately sort of brought me here.

In a similar story about motivations deriving from an already-existing interest or commitment, Selene was initially drawn to intentional communities as a matter of facilitating their political action.

I was a war tax resister, meaning that I didn't pay my war tax which is about 50% of the tax that we pay each year. You know, it varies but roughly around 50% goes to military expenses. I was a peace activist, so I didn't pay that portion for 7, 10 years. And, you know, it's hard to not pay your taxes, because the government can just take the money out of your bank account. But there was a workshop or gathering of intentional communities, and I heard that that was one way you could own property, or own a house, and the government couldn't take it from you if you own it collectively. So you could be a war tax resister in an intentional community, and they have no way of confiscating your property.

From these accounts of people describing the motivating factors that led to their arrival in intentional communities and ecovillages, a general picture emerges of ecovillages attracting people that feel some desire that is not fully consistent with their lives in the wider mainstream society. These motivations are often very personal or are inflected with existing concerns about contemporary U.S. American society that might be reconciled through the kind of lifestyle ecovillages allow. I think it is noteworthy, however, that by and large the decision to move to an ecovillage is not part of a greater political project. With the exception of Selene, Jasper, and Goldie, most people were motivated by either a longing for connection, or a sense of personal alienation. That said, while environmental and political concerns were often not motivating factors to move to ecovillages, political actions did frequently play a role in how ecovillagers understood their communities' goals, practices, and problems.

Motif 5: Political and Environmental Ethos

Although environmental concern wasn't a common motivating factor in people's decisions to live in ecovillages, most ecovillagers expressed some degree of environmental

concern in their worldview or politics. I did not ask anyone I interviewed about specific political issues, except when they brought up issues in the context of our conversations and I wanted to get more details about a particular statement. As a result, some of the discussions we had could be far-reaching in scope, with villagers expressing concern for “the environment” without dwelling on particulars beyond the immediate vicinity of their village. Still, most ecovillagers expressed relief that their fellow communards shared mutual concern for the state of the environment. To quote from Luke: “And I think it was also very appealing to be surrounded by people who shared ecological values and concerns and took it as normal that of course you recycle, of course you have a compost pile, of course you grow food, of course you do these things.” Similarly, Miles expresses how one of the appealing things about Rice and Salt Ecovillage for them was that, aside from a concern for the environment, there was no overriding ideology to which the village subscribed.

Indeed, much of the actions that communards discussed, rather than implicating national events, involved issues within the local environment. Connor expressed one such action involving the presence of invasive wild parsnip on the property,

We have a lot of weed growing here called wild parsnip. It has this very unpleasant property that if you get the juice on your skin and you get sun exposure, you will get second-degree burns. So half a dozen different community members stepped up and spent a good portion of the holiday weekend going around the property, cutting it down, cutting off the seed heads, culling it out, whatever, putting it in trash bags. Basically one subset of the community armed up to protect the other part of the community. Even if the arms were, you know, gloves and long sleeves.

In a similar situation, Carlos elaborates on the quandary that an invasive plant presented for Rice and Salt Ecovillage.

And they were requiring us, they were going to require us if there was lespedeza to spray herbicide on it to kill it, and that goes against one of our ecological covenants that we don't use chemical fertilizer or herbicides, pesticides, that kind of thing. And so we were trying to figure out and get information from the CRP¹⁴ program about what they would or wouldn't allow, and have the discussion amongst ourselves about, if they come along and say "yeah, there's a lot of lespedeza here, you're going to have to spray" are we going to spray and break our ecological covenant? Are we going to back out of the CRP program entirely and give up the income we get from it? Trying to hash all that out and figure out what the pros and cons, what's the path forward we might take.

Such scenarios speak to the tension that can sometimes arise between the realities of ecovillage life (the cost of maintaining the village), and the sustainability goals to which these villagers often aspire. This sometimes manifests as an uneasiness about the degree to which ecovillages are able to affect greater change. Carlos offered a statement that summarized several different components of this uneasiness when he began to speculate about the role that ecovillages might have in forming the basis for a wider social intervention against ongoing climate change.

Ecovillages have a lot of potential to be seeds of a new society or the next society, whatever that is. I feel like people don't always approach them that way, or there's ways in which people are sometimes like 'oh yeah, I just live here' and

14. Conservation Reserve Program, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

otherwise seem to live entirely within a kind of liberal capitalist mindset. When I'm feeling really cynical I call it the white guilt laundry. Because it's like, people who by all appearances seem to want to live the way they would in the mainstream world but they don't want to feel bad about it, they don't want to feel guilty, "oh but, I'm eco!" I don't know. I know that's really judgmental and that's definitely not the full story and that's me going on about my shit. But I look at movements like the Zapatistas or the Kurdish liberation folks, and they're doing community organizing, and they're figuring out how to do radical ecological stuff at scale, at a scale of tens or hundreds of thousands of people, and they have this very clear framework for why they're doing what they're doing. In the absence of that, sometimes it can feel like just a bunch of individual people crashing together, still operating in that very individualistic mindset we're all raised with. We all do it, I do it, too; it's what we're raised with. You don't just unlearn that by living in a community for a few years.

Goldie articulates a related critique that calls into question not just the present struggles of her village, but also the perhaps-overly ambitious aims of the village's founders twenty-four years after the founding.

I just want to talk about things other than petty little problems. I mean, I think our mission is a little grandiose. It was made up by twenty-one year olds who were just graduating college. So I don't expect us to change the world, but that is our mission! So what are we doing? We're having meetings where—I'd just like to see us do more. Or having—I don't know, raising money—I don't know. We have a few straw-bale houses and a few tightly built conventional houses and it's

a drop in a bucket. I have a few friends who live in St. Louis who share vehicles, who have organic gardens, who have native plants in their front yards and super tight houses. I mean, we don't really—Although, one thing that someone pointed out to me the other day one thing that's different about Rice and Salt Ecovillage is that we're all here all the time. We don't really have anyone that commutes and that's actually really cool. I wish we could just call ourselves an intentional community with an ecological bent. I feel like that'd be much more accurate than calling ourselves an ecovillage.

In addition to expressing concern for the feasibility of bringing about greater change within the lifestyle afforded by an ecovillage, Goldie also touches on a recurring theme I noticed when she expresses some discontent with the term *ecovillage* itself. Indeed, throughout the interviews I conducted, very few people preferred the term *ecovillage* over *intentional community* when describing the place where they lived.

Interpretation of Contingent Foundations

The five motifs presented above serve as subject areas that individually situated accounts of community in ecovillages would return to. Following this explication of these motifs, I delve into phenomenological interpretation, noting three contingent foundations that recur across these situated accounts. Firstly, I speak to a foundational *intention* expressed in the interviews. Across ecovillagers' statements, discussions about the role of purposive action and premeditated design in accordance with a principle seemed to be motivating structures for the development of community. This kind of intention not only serves as the theoretical ground that protends the existence of community, but also situates the notion of community as a temporal project, developing in tandem with theories about the actions that facilitate its existence. Secondly, I turn

to the topic of internal and external *boundaries* within the villages. These boundaries involve the communicative acts employed by villagers that draw lines around fellow membership, that involve the adaptation process on the part of people integrating into a village, and the happenings that constitute the ecovillage as itself (celebrations, meetings, etc.). Thirdly, I discuss *becoming*, a foundation that involves the role of ongoing adaptation, improvisation, and labor for the purposes of realizing the principles and goals laid out in planning stages of ecovillage development.

For each of these contingent foundations, I bring in further interview excerpts that exemplify aspects of the topic. I also connect these foundations with other bodies of literature for the purposes of highlighting avenues of inquiry that others interested in ecovillages might consider for further exploration. I conclude this section and this chapter by offering a provisional analysis of the general structure of community in ecovillages as it is expressed through the accounts of the people I interviewed

Foundation #1: Intention

One common thread in phenomenological research is to encourage interviewees to attend to “an experience” relayed via anecdote or narrative retelling of specific events. This attention to particular experiences allows phenomenologists to attend to the situated and essential structures that recur across the narratives proffered by interviewees. However, while many of the people I spoke with offered anecdotes about their experience in ecovillages, I also noticed times when the people I spoke with would slip between an anecdotal “I” and a reportage “we,” or otherwise employ explicitly speculative language about their villages and the ecovillage and environmental movements at large. This form of experiential reportage and theoretical speculation involves day-to-day acts of theorizing via hypothetical postulation, philosophical/ethical/moral

commitments that inform daily action, and anonymized accounts of specific actions that have taken place within the setting. I place all of these forms of indirect accounting of experience under the title of *intention* for the purposes of my phenomenological interpretation.

I argue that intention, so understood, is a type of vernacular theorizing that is not limited to a reflective form of communication. This theorizing-with-intention permeates our sensemaking communication about the world that we encounter. I explored in chapter two how theorizing is often characterized as a form of discourse that is to be excluded from the phenomenological project in order that rich, pre-reflective descriptions of the natural attitude through which people engage the world are able to emerge to the fore for analysis. As writers like Salamon have argued, such exclusions risk casting phenomenology into a presentist acceptance of the world as it appears to a putatively average, likely normative, and idealized person (14). Ecovillage communities, through their existence as critical islets on the horizons of (post-)industrialized society, often involve members partaking in an ongoing theoretical engagement with respect to the world, the local population, and the goals that undergird the formation of the settlement. Such theorizing is not necessarily removed from the natural attitude—as it informs the common conduct and understanding of action in a manner that can become habitual. Theory, so understood, is as much a part of our authentic living in the world as pre-reflective action.

I have already included some excerpts from interviews that indicate a degree of theorizing-with-intent about living in ecovillages. Goldie's questions about the purpose of such villages and whether or not they effectively change the world as they sometimes claim to, Luke's positing about the nature of local power and personal attachment, and Carlos's connecting the potential of ecovillages to liberation movements around the world all take part in theoretical

gestures. Borrowing from Houston Baker's deployment of the term *vernacular theory* in relation to the modes of knowledge developed among Black American blues artists, Thomas McLaughlin argues that this kind of everyday practice of theorizing is not distinct from the kind of theorizing that takes place in the academy, but that it is part of the same common activity only removed from the rigor, status, and style of academic theory (6). This indicates to me that the theorizing activities of ecovillagers do not merely act as founding doctrines that are posited at the outset of a village, but comprise part of a daily process of living with intention, and testing ways of living sustainably.

Because her content contains some of the most overt consideration regarding the role of ecovillages within the wider environmental movement, I reintroduce Goldie's portion of the interview where she expresses frustration over newer residents' flirtations with abandoning the village's covenants by posing the question "you can call yourself an ecovillage, but how eco are you, really? What is eco-?" This stood out to me as an interesting remark that speaks to some of the broader concerns of environmental activists about the future of the environmental movement. Goldie expresses concern that her village has become "pretty much like a suburban neighborhood" through the gradual introduction of outsourced foodstuffs, a reliance on free labor from interns, a reticence on the part of some members to become involved in village committees, and wider discussions about political activism for the environment.

Following the thread of her concerns, I asked Goldie if she could elaborate on what she envisioned a kind of environmentally sustainable living could look like. While many of her responses indicated uncertainty on the matter, she did express frustration with the difficulty in locating an answer in specific actions. For instance:

I don't even have an answer anymore. Because it's a moving target and it changes. I mean, ten years ago I would have said 'recycling,' and now we know that recycling is a joke. . . . I mean, if every community put solar panels on their roofs, then maybe we could take a nuclear power plant offline. That would be sustainability to me. But I also think, we're such small potatoes. The big money, the corporations, and war, and those are the things we need to be looking at. Legislation. I don't have any power to do that. I don't have any desire to do that. I wish I had more money to support—you know, why aren't billionaires paying taxes?

On the question of power's role in maintaining sustainability

I think to be really sustainable you have to be able to make a difference. I don't know, I look at—there's a couple, lived in Maine. They were the first people to do the back-to-the-land thing in the..seventies? Anyways, they just built a little hut in the woods and lived there and didn't use anything, and that was their contribution to sustainability. I don't know what that accomplishes. . . . do we have a responsibility to the wider culture and the world, or do we just have our own private sustainability? I don't know. I mean, most people don't have sustainable lives. The ones who are doing all the political work—that's horrible! That's awful! That's really not sustainable.

Goldie's questions speak to many of the longstanding concerns of environmental activism, and questions over what—if any—lifestyle adaptations can contribute to ecological sustainability while still allowing for some of the comforts of contemporary U.S. American society. More

acutely, I note how Goldie's experience in the ecovillage is tied in with wider political, philosophical, and ethical concerns that suffuse daily life with intentional theoretical activity.

Goldie's concerns trouble the notion of theoretical bracketing for phenomenological research. One possible response might be to place her remarks under a heading such as "wishes" or "challenges" that would include instances of uncertainty in people's considerations of their communities. However, such a gesture could risk discarding the content of these concerns in a way that might diminish the specificity of these concerns within a particular community context. I argue that Goldie's worries detail the ways in which intention and reflection become a part of experience such that our reflections are not only part of our experience, but a fundamental step in our meaning-making about the world we inhabit.

For further examples of theorizing-with-intention presented in people's descriptions of ecovillage life, I turn to my interview with Something Cool. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Something Cool had been on assignment with the Peace Corps in Namibia, and after being recalled at the beginning of the pandemic, made her way to an ecovillage in New England. During our interview, she spoke of her hopes that more young people would come, if not to ecovillages directly, then to more communitarian forms of living that could work to achieve wider social ends.

I really hope that young people learn the value of community earlier on—I guess just for my sake, but also because it's so healing and it's so supportive to- I mean, seriously, it's been transformational for me to live here and, I don't know, I've just overcome certain challenges that I've had personally and spiritually that I just was not able to overcome on my own. And to just have people witnessing you, it—it can be really intense, but sometimes that intensity is needed to transform.

Yeah, I, I don't even think I have a good picture, really. It's just been a year. Sometimes I think young people are really focused on themselves and on their own goals, and I don't think there's anything wrong with that but community has just been really important to me the past few years of my life, and I'm glad I realized it at this age in my life when I can really plant some roots and *have* community. I don't know why anybody would want to live another way. I just can't—I would not be happy living, well, I did, I lived by myself for two years and I hated it, it was horrible. I don't know why people aspire to that, but—I don't know how much of that is just my own personality or just human nature. I mean, I kind of think it's human nature! We're a social species, we're meant to be sleeping in the same bed, like all of us! Closeness is really important to me, and intimacy. Especially in the U.S., because other countries in the world, they are still living in community. Like, honestly, the majority of the world might still be living in community.

Something Cool echoes a fundamental theme in community studies in her hopes. Ferdinand Tönnies writes that “living together is a primal fact of nature; it is isolation, not co-operation, that needs to be explained” (38). Something Cool reiterates this with her observation about her own desire for closeness and intimacy, and in her identifying more communitarian living as a more common practice outside of the U.S. and other cultures that highly value individualism.

While one could posit that coming to live in an ecovillage describes a form of societal critique, as Wallmeier does in his own study of intentional communities, I think it would be premature to claim that all people living in intentional communities are doing so as part of a conscious attempt to embody a theory of human togetherness. Although I did not speak to many

people for whom this was the case, several ecovillagers described people who had come to live in their village as part of a more isolationist gesture. Pamela and Goldie both mentioned that they did not understand such thinking, but mentioned that there were plenty of other settlements where a more individualist D.I.Y. style of living was the norm. I also wonder to what degree such intentional theorizing may be absent in people who were raised in more communitarian forms of life. For instance, those born and raised in ecovillages or more communal societies may not display the same theorizing about the nature of community that Something Cool observes in her rumination about the tensive relationship between individualized and collective living. During my fieldwork, several interviewees and others brought up how the children were—in some senses—raised by the village as a whole. It seems possible to me that, for these children, the efforts at living in a communal setting may not be a matter of conscious deliberation, but a matter-of-fact circumstance of their lives.

This macro-level observation about the habits of framing that ecovillagers undertake in considering their day-to-day activities provides an interesting starting point for the consideration of ecovillage living as a phenomenon. I would venture to say that as a result of this ongoing presence of intentional theorization, community in ecovillage living involves a *cultivation* of values upon which village life is predicated. Put another way, the *intention* in intentional community remains present not only in a village's ethos and formation, but in the decisions of the people to live there, to behave in certain ways, and to remain reflexive about their motivations and habits in adopting this form of living. One way that this intentional theorization is made manifest, I think, is through individual ecovillages' construction of internal and external social, political, and geographic boundaries.

Foundation #2: Boundaries

Every phenomenon comes with an implicit set of boundaries designated and codified over time by the people who experience it. These boundaries, commonly called horizons in phenomenological literature, constitute the perceptual limits that mark a phenomenon as its own kind of discrete experience. With respect to *community*, extant sociological and anthropological literature, such as George Hillery's survey of rural people's understandings of the idea, note the limited areas of agreement that exist in outlining the concept—eventually arriving at the idea that a community is a mutually-involved population whose members understand themselves as comprising a community (118). Conquergood reminds us that location, in addition to being understood as a fixed point in space, can be taken up as an “itinerary” construction, encompassing “the historical, dynamic, often traumatic, movements of people, ideas, images, commodities, and capital” (“Performance” 32). This reminder to consider location as itinerant opens up a space for inquiry into how place becomes understood in lived experience. In the first foundation (Intention), I considered how the work of everyday theorizing allows communards to locate their everyday activities within a broader ideological and environmental context. In examining my second foundation, I narrow my focus to the ways that communards understand and experience their specific villages within the context of their local environments. While I do not necessarily wish to circumscribe community to requiring physical presence for consideration, I will detail how—across several of the interviews and observations I took from fieldwork—location often works in its own way to constitute the community of the people involved. The non-human parts of the environment such as native plant life, migratory birds, or water sources each make their own contribution to the character of the village, and often (in conjunction with governmental regulations) form the physical boundaries of particular ecovillage settlements.

Connor speaks to the possibility of community boundaries emerging in the planning stages of ecovillage development. In discussing when he first felt accepted as a member of the community, he spoke of a meeting prior to the construction of the physical settlement:

The very first time my friends and I showed up to a meeting for the community, and the group was sitting around in someone's living room—the founder's living room. And it wasn't a community on the ground, just a bunch of land and a bunch of ideas. There were lots of difficult and complex questions and decisions to be made, and they went around the circle and they asked what they thought and they listened! They cared! We showed up and our opinions mattered, and that felt remarkably different than my experiences. You know, even just visiting another community in town where we were visitors--guests, I mean paying guests. And I felt like people were walking up to us and saying 'who are you and why are you here?' So it was incredibly easy to feel like we had a role and were valued members even when we were not in any legal sense members. That's how it started and it's only got more connected since.

For Connor, the community first emerges in the acts of listening and caring between the people at the initial founders' meeting. He mentions a sense of feeling out of place during visits to other communities and towns as a visitor, and how this was not the case during the founders' meeting that presaged the formation of his ecovillage community. Notably, Connor also mentions the distinction between the legal establishment of the village and the sense of community that forms irrespective of that legal foundation.

Luke similarly noted a sense of being an “outlier” prior to arriving in an ecovillage. However, where Connor notes a feeling of acceptance that emerged at the first planning meeting, Luke elaborates on how the process of coming to feel community took longer.

In the first years here everyone was very friendly, don’t get me wrong, they were very friendly. But there was no sense of deep connection with people until at some magic point, more and more of the people who were here before I was felt confident that I wasn’t leaving. That we were actually staying. Then, those- some of those barriers, and that artificial distance kind of evaporated, and we were quote-unquote *let in* more deeply into people’s lives than we had been.

Miles, meanwhile, describes the actual material process of obtaining a residency in an ecovillage, speaking to the tiered system of visitors, residents, and members that circulate at Rice and Salt Ecovillage.

To become a resident, the way it happens is you come and you write a statement. And then this committee called M-A-R-C or Marcy.¹⁵ So they do the interview with you. They type it out and then they send it out over the email, and it goes out and they ask everyone to fill out a survey about you. Like, ‘have you met them?’ ‘Do you have any worries?’ ‘What can you tell me about them?’ And so one of the answers is like ‘no, I haven’t met them but I’ve heard about them.’ And even before you have the interview, a certain percentage of on-farm people who are currently here have to respond to the survey. So if no one responds to the survey, it meant you have no connection with anyone. And we were really worried because when we were here we found out that someone that had recently gone

15. Membership and Residency Committee

through the survey hadn't had enough responses. And so when we were here we were trying to meet and talk to as many people as possible because we knew we wanted to come. So these people would say "yeah we've met them" or "we know who they are." And so we got our twenty-four sponsors and we sort of made a point when we saw people on a path we'd try to talk to them. Though, we were told that the polite thing to do was to ask "oh, do you have a minute? Can I ask you a question?" And some people would say "no, I don't have time," which is fine.

Luke indicates an interesting dynamic within ecovillages that I have mentioned elsewhere—the presence of many non-members that live in the ecovillage for smaller stints of time before moving on to other locations. While these people are fundamentally a part of the community—often providing labor for the building or farming projects that maintain the settlement—their status as members can be somewhat murky. Luke goes on to describe his own transition from feeling like a member who had not been fully accepted, to one who understands this posture of holding some distance between committed communards and those who may only be temporary dwellers.

I've come to realize that it's really hard to develop deep friendships with people that you like and then after two years they realize that this isn't the place for them, and maybe they meet someone and they leave or, I mean, people leave Rice and Salt Ecovillage for all of the same reasons that they leave other towns and cities. Whether it's a job, or a relationship, or they get into school, or they're not settled yet. And so I realized that for the people who've been here longer there is some

degree of self-protection against getting too close to some people until you're sure they're going to stay. Then it's safer investing in that relationship.

Lydia's comments about the relative lack of investment on the part of some wex'ers fits into this foundation, as well.

One interesting consideration that fits alongside this understanding of memberships as investment was expressed by Goldie during our interview. Goldie mentions the circulation of knowledge that comes and goes from the village as a result of people moving to and away from the community, and how such movement often means not only the loss of a person, but of a skillset that helped the village to operate more smoothly. Interestingly, the skills that Goldie highlights as substantial losses in this excerpt are both communication competencies, reiterating the importance of these skills for the continuation of community life.

Every visitor, almost every visitor sometimes goes 'oh, you know what you should do is this.' And you know, you've been here twenty-four hours, so maybe give some things a try. And there are amazing ideas that come up, and people bring great energy and skills and I'm really glad when people join. But when they leave it's like they take this chunk of Rice and Salt Ecovillage—this knowledge and these skills. We've lost people who know how to facilitate meetings. We've lost people who know how to mediate conflicts. All those people have left and it makes it really hard to keep those agreements, to do the things we want to do

At Rice and Salt Ecovillage, the community is not only founded in a particular location (rural Missouri), but the community covenants act as additional ways of delineating community membership through the proscription of certain consumer habits. Goldie expresses, in this excerpt, not only how the covenants act as a means of defining membership, but how such

covenants can act as both performance of commitment, and as gates to sluice those who may not fit in with the existing community.

We've had to turn down many people who were very cool because they didn't want to get rid of their car. And so what's going on now is a little ridiculous—people wanting to come here and keep their car. The first covenant says I agree not to have a car here. Everyone has to agree with that, and I don't understand why you have a car in the parking lot. It makes me rather unpopular. People want what they want, and they don't want to live any differently, and they arrive here now and it looks pretty bougie. People lived in tents when I first got here. . . . I don't really understand the thinking. I've had many conversations trying to understand why some people are keeping their cars, and why they say they're being just as ecological because they share their car or something. To me, it's a covenant, and it's what we agreed on, and it's one of the few things that makes us different than other ecovillages.

Goldie expresses something of a frustration a number of ecovillagers mentioned regarding the desire of some to live in these communities while making no changes in their consumption habits or ecological values. Carlos reinforced this idea by remarking how, for some, ecovillage living could be adopted more as a kind of consumer identity in order to make one feel better about their consumption habits. The use of the term *covenant* at Rice and Salt Ecovillage to describe the commitments members must be willing to adopt intentionally invokes religious language. In my discussions around the covenants, it came out that only one exception had been made to the first covenant that forbade the ownership of a personal vehicle—a woman at Rice and Salt Ecovillage who worked as a midwife for the ecovillage and the surrounding settlements. Even so, some

people had found workarounds to the covenant—such as maintaining ownership of a vehicle that was stored off-site.

In all of these cases, inclusion in the community is largely figured around a commitment to similar behaviors surrounding ecological stewardship, communication, and material consumption. For Connor, the community first manifests in his feelings of inclusion in the conversations surrounding its eventual construction. Meanwhile, for Goldie, community is tested through the insistence of some people trying to live in the ecovillage while not obeying the covenants that the community is founded upon. These observations orient us to the performative character of community boundaries. Community is constructed and reaffirmed through commonly meaningful performances, and a common understanding about the meaning of those performances.

Noteworthy in these descriptions of boundaries, I think, is the lack of description of the land itself. I do not think this is necessarily due to a lack of awareness of the land or of the non-human actors that inhabit the land that the settlement engages with. Indeed, I note more discussion of the land and non-human agents in the *becoming* foundation. As far as boundaries are concerned, I notice a resonance with Adrian Parr's observation that ecovillages primarily differ from gated communities in their commitments to particular forms of socialized behavior (61). U.S. ecovillages, in the present moment, seem largely populated by emigres from wider society making their way into more intimate settings that work to develop their own senses of community alongside one another.¹⁶

16. As I have alluded to above, I was able to meet a few such children during my field visits to Rice and Salt Ecovillage and Signs of Rain Ecovillage. My interview protocol limited the scope of my investigation to adult members of ecovillages, but I find the perspective of these young people who have been born in ecovillages to be a fascinating area of inquiry that future researchers might wish to consider.

One element of boundary formation that I think might be troubled through an investigation of ecovillages is the notion of discrete initiation rites that distinguish one person as a member of the community and one person as not. As I have mentioned, some of the ecovillages I came into contact with had sizeable populations of non-member residents that lived on or near the official property of the village itself. Additionally, villagers at Rice and Salt Ecovillage describe their village as being one of three sister communities each located in rural Missouri. These settlements, though not all designated with the title of ecovillage, could be viewed as a form of greater regional society, as each consists largely of émigré residents that arrive to homestead and work in common cause for the benefit of their particular organization. One idea I heard repeatedly that exists in tandem with this concern for membership was a cognizance about the perception that intentional communities are sometimes popularly conflated with cults in the popular imagination. As mentioned earlier, Carlos suggested to me that while a new member of Rice and Salt Ecovillage could try to arrange some form of welcoming ritual if they chose to do so, the community may have made a conscious decision to forego such formalized activities as a matter of managing their public image.

Beyond this notion of porous community memberships, I think it is noteworthy that the ecovillagers I spoke with often took an interest in the role of the local environment in which their villages are enmeshed. In addition to the animal husbandry and crop cultivation that takes place within these settlements, I noticed an awareness of permaculture as a philosophy for building and arranging the villages, as well as some resistance around certain aspects of permaculture's division of community life into discrete spheres. Coined in the 1970s, David Holmgren writes that permaculture involves "consciously designed landscapes which mimic the patterns and

relationships found in nature, while yielding an abundance of food, fiber and energy for provision of local needs” (xix).

In her comparative essay discussing ecovillages and gated communities, Adrian Parr suggests that while both forms of intentional community share a principle of exclusion from mainstream society, ecovillages often differ in their social ethos. For Parr, ecovillages embody “an experimental and creative response to the question of how sociality works, as well as a direct challenge to the militaristic principles underpinning the organization of social life” (61). The militaristic principles that Parr identifies in the gated communities of contemporary America occupy an odd space in the daily practice of ecovillages. On the one hand, the ecovillages I interviewed exist within the territorial boundaries of the United States, and in some cases are supported by federal grants that afford them much of their operating funds. However, this form of alignment is not exclusive to ecovillages, and their inability to wholly live up to certain ideals of environmental stewardship may be counterposed with the efforts of some villages to become more intimately involved in the social environment of their surrounding region.

Together, these reflections on the role of boundaries in ecovillagers’ discourses about their homes suggests to me that ecovillages are involved in ongoing assessments about their role within their local settings, the sense of togetherness and common identity among their members, and the degree to which different levels of social involvement come together to shape a sense of community. Alongside the previous discussion of intention, the sense of community as it is experienced by ecovillagers seems to have something to do with a social identity that is sought out by the members through ongoing interpersonal involvement and adherence to a village’s norms.

Foundation #3: Becoming

Discussions of ecovillages as discrete entities often came up in the interviews through past-tense accounts of coming to live in these communities from another social setting. In addition to disclosures that theorized the internal and external communication patterns of these settlements, community was sometimes figured through attention to ongoing practices that sought to involve the human community members more thoroughly with one another and with the surrounding environment. These excerpts often showcase an attention to the community as an as-yet unsettled group that exists in tension with a not-too-distant foundation period, and the present trials that ecovillagers attempt to meet through their governance and social practices.

In terms of governance, ecovillages often employ different forms of governing structures, and as I learned through my interview with Selene, sometimes shift governing styles to meet the interests of communards, sometimes to mixed results:

When I got here, they decided consensus wasn't working, and within months of when I joined, they decided to try sociocracy or dynamic governance. It's been weird living in a community where there's been one history of making decisions that's shifting to a new one. It's important to me to have a structure that I understand.

And later,

On paper, [sociocracy] sounds like a lot of accountability and communication, but at our ecovillage there's no accountability. It's a real issue where people can do things—not with poor intent—not intentionally. Just a lot of independence, and that's a holdover problem from consensus. You may have agreement in theory, but then people do whatever they want regardless. Really different from what I

was expecting where decisions were made together and it was presented very differently at Permaculture Convergence, where they said decisions weren't based on personal preference, but on values.¹⁷

Jay describes a moment where he took part in a practice of village governance that had not occurred frequently—a restorative justice hearing convened to address the situation of an 18-year-old community member who had stolen money from an intern and his aunt (also a communitarian). Upon uncovering the theft, the community held a ceremony that Jay described as follows:

The factions were represented and the community basically gave this resident an ultimatum—if he wants to stay in the community, he has to conform to certain things . . . people just spoke up and said what was on their mind. There were two circles: one was an inner circle of the people who were intimately involved, and there was an outer circle involving witnesses and the community. And so everybody in the inner circle spoke about how they were impacted and what they wanted as an outcome.

Speaking to his own role in the outer circle, Jay discussed that he had never participated in a procedure of this kind, and that his role as a member of the outer circle was primarily one of witnessing the ceremony, and affirming the decisions, or offering detractions on behalf of the community if he felt so inclined.

17. While there are several events that use the name Permaculture Convergence, the term generally refers to one of several annual gatherings in the western United States. To quote the website of the Northwest Permaculture Convergence, the event “brings together a remarkable diversity of people to share their creative approaches for designing living environments, economic systems, and culture practices that thrive within ecologically sustainable limits” (Northwest, n.p.).

Another regular form of community building at Rice and Salt Ecovillage involved the operation of kitchen cooperatives—small groups that would host their own meals for lunch and dinner each day, operating out of some of the different buildings in the ecovillage. Luke describes the creation of one such cooperative that he came to host, precipitated by his own family’s kitchen pipes freezing during the winter.

We decided to join Sunflower kitchen which is in the common house. So we ate all out meals there. Minimally over here [in his house], mostly there. And that was a shift from me doing most of the cooking to me only cooking once a week. And if the kids didn’t like it, well, you know where the peanut butter and jelly is. You can make yourself a sandwich. And they started eating more food, different food. And there was something about it .. it decoupled .. if they didn’t like dinner, it wasn’t because I’d done something wrong. And I was able to be more level-headed, not take it personally, and become better at being more self-sufficient. Suddenly, I had all these hours every day that I wasn’t cooking and cleaning, and so I could do different things, which I liked. And so when our kitchen came back online and we moved back over here—sunflower kitchen was very full, a lot of people. So we just put the call out and said if a couple of people want to eat over here with us instead, and so Frank joined us, and a couple other people. We’ve done it that way ever since.

On the more day-to-day level of adaptation and becoming, Miles speaks to their time adapting to life at Rice and Salt Ecovillage. An archaeologist who had recently arrived in the US after researching abroad, Miles notes a specific instance of adapting to their ecovillage’s norms around hygiene—specifically the restrictions around showers and the use of “humies” or human-

manure systems. These plastic buckets filled with sawdust functioned as the primary waste-management system for feces in the village, and their management occupied a regular part of village life.¹⁸

Also, water. When we first got here it was super hot in August, and I hate going to bed really hot and sticky. So I had this worry like, you'll see over at the common house you'll see all these signs by the showers saying don't shower at night because the pump, and the energy, and you're not on solar. And now we've been tied into the grid and the idea is to back feed to the grid two times as much as we use but even though we're tied into the grid they want to buy the green energy and guarantee it, but you know, get the state to purchase more green energy. But you never know. So you're not using green energy at night, for sure. But we're all using energy at night. So you should shower during the day, but it's 95 degrees in August and I don't want to crawl into bed hot and sweaty, so I was feeling really guilty about it. And like I was going to be judged. And like, I was really struggling with this. But then, talking to people like, even people who've been here a long time, it comes out 'when it's that hot and I've been working all day, I shower at night.' But other people are really hardcore, and are like 'no, it doesn't bother me. I just get hot, sticky, and smelly.' So like, the water, of all the eco-things, that is the thing I'm working the most intentionally on and struggling with.

18. A short description about the rules surrounding "humies" is worth noting. Humies, located in the common house at Rice and Salt Ecovillage, are typically reserved for defecation. Urination is discouraged in the humies due to the build-up of nitrogen that occurs, and because it makes the humies much heavier for those who have to clean them. At Rice and Salt Ecovillage, barring plumbing apparatuses located in individual homes, it is generally encouraged for people to urinate outdoors in some place that people are unlikely to be walking.

Still other interviewees described various rituals that their villages undertake during the course of a year. From my own observations and limited participation, it seems that many of these rituals follow Luke's dictum that "if there's something that's important to you, and you want to share it, you can make it happen and we'll all pitch in and we'll get involved." Many moments of song—songs at meals, song circles on the weekends, songs while working the land—would seem to fall into this form of cementing a sense of community through repeated practice.

One common theme I noticed involved regular celebrations for the solstices and equinoxes. Selene, Luke, Something Cool, and Jay each mentioned some kind of solstice or equinox ritual in their village. Typically, interviewees noted the use of ritual to mark these occasions involving a gathering at a chosen spot in the village that was reserved for this purpose (a stone circle, a tree marking the boundaries of the property, a grove, etc.).

A common concern across some of these interviews was an anxiety over the extent to which coming to live in an ecovillage could be considered as a form of political action for the purposes of protesting wider cultural and environmental issues. Wallmeier offers some consideration on the act of absenting oneself from wider society as a form of critique, and the degree to which this can be understood as having an impact on social issues. Wallmeier notes the invective which some social scientists levy against those who conceptualize absenting oneself as a form of social activism, saying that this form of absenting, through its emergence as individual choice, "are not cases of critique but rather of insanity or pathology, which could be better addressed by psychoanalysis" (150). Against this individualistic understanding of absenting oneself, Wallmeier posits the formation of communes as a "communal critique" that appraises silence as a valid response to indignation, in a similar manner to people experiencing interpersonal abuse who have their methods of objection foreclosed by a hostile social order

(151). I think Wallmeier offers an interesting counterpoint to those who might criticize ecovillages as a means of escapism by individuals unwilling to advocate for change in more mainstream society. Against the crushing degradations of imperialist neoliberal white-supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy, symbolic protest—even when collective—may feel inadequate for affecting change when it is confined to circumscribed spaces and times, and not followed up with ongoing change in one’s everyday existence. Although I am not sure that Wallmeier’s assessment is valid in all cases, I think he provides a worthwhile offering on the question of escapism as it relates to intentional communities.

Put together, the common efforts of people in ecovillages at transforming their living spaces into arenas for conscientious interactivity between the human and more-than-human actors in an environment calls to mind Tim Ingold’s notion of the dwelling perspective within environmental perception. To dwell in an environment is to recognize the environment as a constitutive part of the embodied person’s lived experience. However, rather than viewing the environment purely as an inert tool that is there to act as an instrument to the fulfillment of one’s aims, the agent-in-an-environment becomes the focus of study, as the two mutually bring one another into being through their actions upon each other (171).

This notion of dwelling in a space as a means of acting alongside it and constructing a radical redefinition of one’s location brought into being through performance suggests the potential ecovillages have as laboratories for environmental activism. In casting aside many of the conveniences afforded by contemporary (post)industrialized consumer society in favor of a localized communitarian social system, the ecovillager may be viewed as a kind radical activist in the vein of deep green ecological figures. However, in other respects, considering ecovillages as a kind of activism brushes up against problems when members of these spaces cloister

themselves away from discussions about the environment beyond a local setting. While activism need not only manifest through direct actions such as attacking pipelines or opposing the destruction of native forests, a problem can emerge when the local is framed as a world apart from the greater assemblage of human and more-than-human ecosystems that are interwoven together. Daily commitments to live in houses made from sustainable materials, to eat from local gardens, and to eschew some of the extravagancies of city living may afford a greater sense of agency with respect to environmental activism for some, and for these people the ecovillage may present an appealing option for action. a greater sense of agency with respect to environmental living.

Insights

Taken together, these three foundations offer some suggestions about the basic understanding ecovillagers have about community in their settlements. Community, it seems, is figured as an ongoing, purposeful act of relating between the different human and more-than-human actors in a space. This act is cultivated through an attention to clearly articulated guiding principles that are consciously implemented in a village's physical, civil, and social structures, reproduced through collective manual and communicative action, and reaffirmed through mutual witnessing and a shared recognition of and commitment to the articulated guiding principles. Such an understanding of community presents some interesting perspective that complements existing phenomenological discourses. Ahmed's identification of community discourse as a retrospective affirmation undertaken for the identification of shared values is somewhat inverted in this notion of community expressed by ecovillagers (122). For ecovillagers, community is figured as an aspirational immanence brought into existence through mutual collaboration. It is

contingent upon active engagement and labor, and is not so much reclaimed as it is made and remade each day.

For communication scholars, particularly those interested in performance and in environmental communication, I think that these discussions have several implications. As a first consideration, I hope that new forms of temporary and itinerant social assemblages and the communication practices that unfold in these gatherings become a focal point for future research. Secondly, I think that performance studies scholars may find unique insights in attending to the kinds of improvisational, impromptu productions of performances that emerge not only in ecovillage settings, but in a wide variety of different communal spaces. Thirdly, I hope that the study of lifestyles and intentional communities features more thoroughly in environmental communication scholarship.

I had expected, in entering into this study, to locate within ecovillages a series of conspicuous aesthetic performances that ecovillagers practiced for the purposes of initiation, dismissal, and the myriad life-events that would transpire regardless of membership in the village. While these forms of more specific performance were occasionally alluded to throughout the interviews and fieldwork, the events that became more evident were more everyday forms of conspicuous performance that were not bounded by strictly ritualized beginnings and endings. However, while the forms of performance I encountered were largely more everyday, I again am reminded of Conquergood's claim that "issues and attitudes are expressed and contested in dance, music, food, ritual artifact, symbolic action, as well as words" ("Rethinking" 94-5). Though in many places no space that was ritualized as theatre appeared, I noticed the ways in which the village often worked by temporarily theatricalizing a space, which would go on to serve other functions once the performative moment had passed through it.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have recounted several of the themes that emerged across the interviews I conducted with ecovillage communards. I began by identifying clusters of agreement from my interviews that I termed motifs. Following an exploration of these different motifs as situated understandings of community in ecovillages, I identified three contingent foundations that echoed across ecovillagers accounts of their lives in ecovillages. I undertook an explication of these foundations, noting places where they were evident in the interviews, before moving into discussions about how each one contributed to an overall gestalt of ecovillagers' understandings of community in their settlements. I related each foundation to existing bodies of literature, and noted opportunities for future scholarship on the subject of ecovillages.

In the fifth and final chapter of this dissertation, I will reflect on the overall progress of my study. I consider implications, as well as several topics that were not discussed in my interviews. I consider the limitations of my study, and suggest future directions that other researchers may want to undertake in considering ecovillages as sites of environmental activism. I will also reflect on my own interest in extending this research moving forward. Finally, I will conclude this dissertation by reflecting on the potential I see in the ecovillage movement, and the characteristics within it that I would like to see adopted by people who wish to live in a manner that could more widely reflect ecologically sustainable values.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

In this final chapter of my dissertation study on the experience of community in ecovillage settlements, I reflect on the implications that my analysis suggests for future research into ecovillages. I begin with a reflection on previous chapters, noting how each chapter contributed to my overall project. I consider the limitations of my research before suggesting avenues of inquiry that future communication scholars may wish to explore. I then introduce some of my own plans to continue exploring these community arrangements moving forward, before concluding with some final thoughts about my own hopes about what ecovillages might be able to contribute to our understanding of community adaptation to global climate change.

Implications

One aspect of ecovillages that has been underexplored is the degree to which popular depictions of intentional communities, and particularly a popular perception of such social arrangements as “cult-like” may influence the behavior of members of these communities. In many of the interviews I conducted, respondents answered the question “what would you like people to know about ecovillages?” with some variation of an assurance that they were not cults. Carlos spoke to the possible connection between the avoidance of initiation rituals at Rice and Salt Ecovillage and a desire to avoid connotations of cult-like behavior. I believe that this interplay between mediated images of intentional communities and the behavior of communards in conversation with such images provides fertile ground for discussions of how community-as-such and intentional communities more specifically are popularly understood. To what extent might the depiction of intentional communities in horror and thriller texts (i.e., *The Wicker*

Man's SummerIsle, the eponymous village in *The Village*, or *Midsommar's* the Hårga) impact the willingness of ecovillagers to meet the public eye?

Taken another way, the varying reactions around the subject of rituals within intentional communities may speak to a more generalized aversion to performance, so understood, that is shared with wider culture. I recall the discomfort I sensed when I mentioned, in the course of my fieldwork, that my area of specialization was performance studies. I was reminded of what Dr. Randy Auxier said at my prospectus defense for this project, that many people in intentional communities did not consider what they were doing to be performance. Indeed, they may have considered what “we” in wider society were doing to be more performative, while their own manner of living was more authentic. I have attempted to abstain from this discussion during the analysis portions of my project, limiting my observations to what was given over in interviews by the ecovillagers. However, I think that the misunderstanding surrounding performance as somehow false or unserious is an important idea to grapple with when considering both the implications of and future directions for this project. Cultures, perhaps especially U.S. American culture, with the rhetorical emphasis given by political figures on embodying certain ideals as foundational parts of the society, are imbricated with performances. I reflect on Goldie's concern about people moving to the ecovillage as a means of escaping community involvement, and think to the role that collective performances of community, be it in song circles, community development, ecological stewardship, or aesthetic productions have in fostering a sense of mutual investment and care for members of a community. This is important for performance scholars interested in considering the collective forms of performance undertaken by communities hoping to affect political change through concerted public action.

Another facet of the wider conversation about ecovillages' interactions with a broader public might open up questions about spiritual practice in ecovillage settings. While many of the ecovillagers I spoke with expressed some ambivalence about the role of explicitly spiritual practices in their villages, almost all acknowledged that they did observe the equinox and solstice in some measure. In addition to these more paganistic practices, the literature seems to corroborate the idea that occasionally emerged in my interviews that some ecovillagers practice syncretic forms of religious practice. This, too, gestures at an even more far-reaching conversation about the political realities of ecovillage settlements that exist on stolen land possessed in a settler colonial society. One person I spoke with mentioned that at their ecovillage some discussion had taken place about the possibility of reaching out to the indigenous communities that had once inhabited the land to offer some sort of reparation or restoration. The plan had been dropped, I was told, because no members of the ecovillage could think of a way to contact this community. This was a disappointing thing for me to learn, as it felt like a potentially transformative though thorny conversation well-suited to an ecovillage had been rejected in favor of a less prickly though still problematic community quiet.

The discussion I would most like to foster through my research on ecovillages is an open question about the goals and practices of environmental activists. As I detailed in the previous chapter, ecovillagers generally orient to their village around a shared commitment to environmental sustainability, but the scope and motivations of this commitment are often deeply personal. Throughout my research, I noticed a general distinction between what I call a monastic and an evangelist temperament regarding ecovillages. For some, ecovillages were "their home" and did not play a part in a sense of wider social or political action outside of altering one's own daily practices. By contrast, it seemed like there were some people who wanted to evangelize

about the benefits and potential that this kind of community arrangement offered those alienated by capitalist society, and those seeking to live more sustainably. Both approaches signal a kind of performance—whether it is the public-facing, audience-seeking performance of the evangelist spreading the word through deed and messaging, or the deeply personal, though still highly committed performance of a kind of monk.

This division speaks to an ongoing dilemma in environmental communication regarding the challenge of drawing action from awareness. Environmental communication scholars like Alice Fonseca and Paula Castro have engaged rhetorical analyses of Greta Thunberg's construction of a capable environmental citizenship that must be mobilized for change to be affected (235). Meanwhile, Luis Hestres advocates for an emphasis on deeply-involved local action as an inflection point that online advocates of environmental action might effectively center in their persuasive messages (476-7). When I spoke with Goldie during my second visit to Rice and Salt Ecovillage about the possibility of establishing an internship program with regional universities, I described how most people I spoke to were still largely unaware of intentional communities or ecovillages. Goldie seemed frustrated by this, as Rice and Salt Ecovillage has gone to great lengths to make public education a tenet of their practice. However, I think that one problem is that Rice and Salt Ecovillage cannot do the work of popularizing the ecovillage movement on its own, and that its concerted publicity efforts were relatively unique among the ecovillages I contacted. For some, an ecovillage may present a promise that is compromised by an insufficient ability to live up to the aims of transformative environmental relations. As long as the village is a residence that a member commutes to work from, and returns to at the end of the day to live in an apartment or room that they rent from a landlord who may not even live in the

village, it may continue to resemble what Carlos called an example of “white guilt laundry” for some.

This disparity between the goals of some ecovillagers who wish to affect greater political change through their participation in intentional community settings, and those who wish to secure their own fortunes and lives without commensurate effort in public advocacy or outreach makes me worry for the future of ecovillages. While, on the one hand, I see great potential for a different mode of relation between people, their environments, and their communities, I think that this potential still struggles to manifest against the existing conditions that stymie collective change in other political arenas. When I went to Signs of Rain Ecovillage, my friend who came with me, a black gender-nonconforming queer person, asked whether the village had any black members. Our guide mentioned they had trouble retaining black community members. They speculated that the members probably felt unwelcome in a location so far removed from another black population center, and abutting communities that still flew the confederate flag. Although our guide seemed to express understanding and regret about this situation, they mentioned that the village maintained friendly relations with these confederate-supporting neighbors. This veers into an historical structure of dispossession and social degradation that conversations about material and social sustainability, lacking a critique of the conditions of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy, will not be able to address.

I do not think Signs of Rain Ecovillage is exceptional in this regard. Writing for *Scientific American*, professor Sarah Jaquette Ray remarks on the problematic conception of climate change as the “greatest existential threat of our time,” noting how, for numerous marginalized people, there are far more immediate, historically unaddressed, yet equally deadly threats posed by slavery, police brutality, and colonialism (n.p.). The histories of settler-colonialism and white

supremacy are latent in much of the U.S. ecovillage movement. I did not interview any people of color during my project and only met several during my visits to Rice and Salt Ecovillage and Signs of Rain Ecovillage. Although, like Carlos, I think that the lifestyle offered by ecovillages holds great potential for wider social justice and climate justice movements, the occasional framing of ecovillages as a kind of refuge from the effects of climate collapse veers into problematic territory that was not addressed in much detail during my visits. Some authors from within the movement, such as Hummel, advocate for people wanting to build ecovillages to transform their existing communities into ecologically-sustainable settlements (171). However, I would venture to append this statement by encouraging those living in ecovillages to embrace outreach and advocacy opportunities in settings that are not already part of the related permaculture or intentional community movements—to broaden their audience and embrace, to some degree, the curious enquiries of interested people who may have never heard of ecovillages or any other form of intentional community.

I believe that these attempts at embodying communitarian ethos and spreading the availability of sustainable living practices have space within the field of performance studies more generally. Performance studies scholars have long attended to the communitarian elements of performance spaces, as well as the performative elements of popular political action. Wallace Heim, in his consideration of the social practice art installation *HOMELAND*, suggests the power of performances to shift our understanding of what is politically possible, and to do so through the dialogue a work might foster (187-8). Likewise, Fuoss's attention to the ways that cultural performance inscribes community through conscious self-representation and enact community through the negotiation of internal and external relationships is important not only for those looking to build solidarity within and across community lines, but also for those who may

become alienated from the possibilities afforded by communal action (*Striking* 121-3). I sometimes heard, in speaking with ecovillagers that chafed at the notion of overtly performative rituals, that events like communal dinners, dance parties, or song circles were some of the most affecting moments in their daily lives. While the greater emphasis on ecological sustainability and local environments may provide enough of an appeal on their own for those looking to live in a manner consistent with an environmentalist ethic, I also think that this joy felt in the moments of connection is a potent part of the ecovillage appeal that should not be overlooked. To that end, I think a focus on community play could prove fruitful for performance scholars seeking to understand the affective ties that bring disparate people together around a shared ethos.

A final implication I would like to consider is the relationship that ecovillagers identified between the physical and operational design of an ecovillage and the sense of social cohesion and belonging that this attention to structure afforded these settlements. Ecovillages, for all their faults, do seem to offer a unique mode of relation (at least within a U.S. context) between individual people, their local populations, and more-than-human ecosystems that may prove vital for any necessary adaptation in people's involvement with the more-than-human world. Broadening this idea of the relationship between organizational structure and social identity beyond the bounds of ecovillages, I begin to wonder about how other progressive and activist organizations might intervene in their own structure and guidelines to better realize their values. For example, consensus-based decision-making seems like a governance dynamic that would be helpful in many organizations where membership is voluntary and mutual understanding and agreement vis-à-vis organizational goals are essential.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations to my study that qualify the sorts of claims I have been able to make about ecovillages in general, and the ecovillages that I studied in particular. While some of these limitations were inherent to the scope of the study I conducted, others emerged through the process of the interviews, and still more were limitations felt by everyone who has lived through the past several years.

Beginning with the wide-scale, the COVID-19 pandemic proved a significant limitation in a number of respects. I began working on my study in the early months of 2020, and had originally intended to orient my study as a deep-dive into a single ecovillage community that I could reside in for an extended period of time. When the pandemic began, this quickly proved unfeasible. Along with the vast majority of U.S. society, ecovillage communities took to social distancing and limiting contact between individuals. As a part of this protocol, many ecovillages placed new restrictions on visitors during the initial COVID months. While phenomenological studies often seek to make claims about the essence of a phenomenon reported through first-person anecdotes, I found that the subject of community—especially community in settlements that were explicitly-oriented toward the physical environment—necessitated a physical presence and familiarity with the materiality of the ecovillages themselves. The interviews and fieldwork I was able to conduct only provided me with snapshots of these settlements. Community, however construed, takes place over time, socially, and within the day-to-day rhythms of life. A project that unfolds over the span of months is ideal for the purposes of exploring one community—let alone community *qua* community.

Additionally, while I stand by my selection criteria around the term ecovillage, I was surprised at the amount of people living in ecovillages that chafed at the term. It seems to me that

the use of the term ecovillage enjoyed a surge in usage in the 1990s and early 2000s, following the publication of Gilman's article on the subject. Many of the villages whose residents I spoke with were founded during this time period, and a sizable portion of the people who attempted to define their villages preferred to use the more all-encompassing phrase *intentional community* over *ecovillage*. Ecovillage, it seems to me, is an aspirational term for a village that has transcended the material consumption and sustainability issues that contribute to present-day ecological crises. There are hundreds of intentional communities in the U.S. that adhere to some form of ecological sustainability as a founding tenet, that do not title themselves an ecovillage. Beyond the borders of the U.S., likewise, there are communities that adopt the ecovillage moniker and intentional communities that eschew this title in favor of other terms. I think of my choice to focus on self-titled ecovillages less as a limitation, and more as a self-imposed limit on the scope of this project.

Possibilities for Future Research

I have framed my study throughout as a kind of introductory observation about ecovillages in communication studies. Ecovillages and intentional communities have been the subject of research in numerous other social science and humanities fields for some time, but communication studies lags behind somewhat in approaching these kinds of social configurations. I think that some of this paucity in the research may be due to a lack of access to these settlements. They are often located in remote areas, and while some communards were happy to speak with me and contribute to this project, others remained silent, or skeptical about my intentions. Still, I think that a focus on communities that are created with an ongoing and specific purpose—especially a purpose that relates to ecological sustainability—provides fertile

ground for members in the discipline to explore the opportunities, accomplishments, and limitations of such collectives.

A more involved ethnographic project situated within one or several different ecovillage communities seems to be the clearest path forward for a more thorough exploration of the different performances, discussions, and challenges that ecovillage settlements grapple with in their sometimes-unsteady lifespans. Such a project would likely involve a researcher becoming a regular member of a community and living on-site for an extended period of time. This would allow the researcher to follow the progress of individual projects from planning to discussion, to fruition over time. It could also allow the researcher to observe the changes in village life as the cycle of the seasons changes the frequency and character of everyday work and interactions.

Outside of ethnographic projects, other avenues for research on the subject of ecovillages abound under the aegis of communication studies. Family communication scholars may be interested in the communication habits of those people who have grown up in ecovillage settings. Many of the respondents to my interviews spoke of the challenges of coming to ecovillages from a culture that did not stress sustainability practices as a matter of course. I think that talking to people who have grown up in ecovillages, or to families attempting to raise children in an ecovillage setting may offer valuable insights about the ways that cultural values are reproduced or changed from generation to generation.

Structurally, I think that work investigating ecovillages at different stages of development would be interesting to juxtapose with studies of ecovillages that have so-far proven successful. Many ecovillages and intentional communities do not move past the planning stages, so speaking to people at different points of community development could provide valuable insight into how

certain practices are adapted from philosophical discussions into real-world practice, and whether and how these practices contribute to the viability of such communities.

One feature of ecovillages that I had not considered before beginning my study was the role played by WWOOF'ers and Wex'ers in supplying some of the manual labor and critical knowledge needed to achieve village building or agriculture projects. These two groups of people interest me, as my experience with AmeriCorps put me into some initial contact with people who have lived some kind of semi-migrant lifestyle organized around seasonal labor involving ecological stewardship. While WWOOFing has been the subject of some articles in tourism studies, I think that other areas of communication studies could generate interesting research by speaking with people who adopt this lifestyle.

As I discussed above, and as several other ecovillagers intimated, the broader movement of intentional communities in the U.S. seems overwhelmingly white. Although there are a few communities that attempt to specifically address this issue—for instance, the settlement of Freedom in Wilkinson County, Georgia—many of these are recent efforts and are understudied. Intercultural scholars may be interested in the role of whiteness in the existing ecovillage movement, or the efforts by some members of marginalized identities to forge their own communities as a means of surviving in a white supremacist society. Additionally, scholars interested in decolonial studies or indigenous studies could be well-equipped to study the role of Native American thought, histories, and present-day existence in relation to ecovillages. Curnow and Helferty call on environmental activists to adopt an ethic of cross-racial solidarity that remains aware of the paradoxical power relations implicit in such coalitions, the unreconcilability of these histories, and to pursue justice regardless (155-6). Ecovillagers I spoke with often expressed some degree of discomfort or disagreement with predominant capitalist

forms of land ownership, and I think Curnow and Helferty's advice would be to exist within that discomfort, to not run from it or imagine that it might be alleviated, while still working to address it. U.S. ecovillages are already situated within a settler-colonialist context where the land being "reclaimed" or "rewilded" may have been part of cultures that pre-existed the U.S., and was never "wild" to begin with, but this must not be the end of the discussion regarding the potential these settlements illuminate.

For my own part, I am interested in pursuing ethnographic work with ecovillages and other intentional communities in the future. I have been attracted to aspects of communitarian living for some time now, stemming from my experience in AmeriCorps and proceeding through my own ideas about establishing a communitarian setting for myself and my loved ones. When people have asked me about my dissertation work, I often joked that I was "researching my exit strategy" should the institution of American academia (or mainstream American living, for that matter) become untenable in the future. This was only a half-true quip, for while I am interested in ecovillage or communitarian life for myself, I am still interested in academic pursuits, in the role of pedagogy within community settings, and in writing about the broader ecovillage and environmentalist movements. During my second visit to Rice and Salt Ecovillage, I spoke with Goldie about the possibilities of establishing some kind of internship or alternative course program between the ecovillage and nearby universities. I've often heard my students express wishes to become more involved in the environment, to live in closer contact with their friends and family, and to live in sustainable ways. With this in mind, I think that my research and involvement with ecovillages is likely to continue in the future as I seek to explore the possible connections between higher education and ecovillage living as a potential vector for new forms of learning and engagement in environmental activism and sustainable living.

Conclusion

Ecovillages remain fascinating yet puzzling for me. I admit that I am drawn to the innovative infrastructures that attempt to integrate human activity into the more-than-human environment. I am drawn to life in a mutually-coordinated arrangement where people align around a common sense of social justice and environmental action. I have been exposed to different rhythms and paces of life not only in ecovillages, but among my friends in the forest service, and know that the rise-and-grind, nine-to-five, two weeks of vacation, no healthcare social arrangement is not only unsustainable, but is historically unique and unnecessary for a happy life.

That being said, I cannot envision myself living in an ecovillage isolated from the wider world. The notion of a local environment, while personally helpful when I consider my own sense of communal involvement and investment, cannot be considered in isolation from the global network of environments that are merely collections of countless localities intertwined with one another across human-rendered time and space. Communities change over time, and I have often wondered, during the course of this project, at what point an intentional community ceases to be intentional and becomes just another settlement in the world. New Harmony's founder, Robert Owen, ended his social experiment in 1827, two years after beginning his utopian plans. Despite this, the town continued to house people who had lived there. According to William Wilson, thirty-four of the original families remained in 1890, and numerous descendants continued to live there when he wrote about the city in 1964 (180). I have remarked on the aspirational bent in the term *ecovillage* in this paper, and to that end I wonder if the usage of the term as it was coined by George Ramsey might prove to be a bright avenue for the movement in the future.

In his novel *After the Revolution*, Robert Evans depicts an American continent torn asunder after decades of civil war and climate catastrophe in the mid-21st century. Christofascist militias battle independent republics carved out of the former U.S.A., and people of all political persuasions attempt to eke out whatever life they can in the midst of war. The tone of the novel can, at times, be sardonic and grim about the prospects of living a comfortable bourgeois life in the future. However, within the war-torn continent, Evans imagines a series of communities that come together to attempt to find better ways of living amidst the chaos. It is this theme of survival and community innovation and experimentation that I foreground in my April 2023 adaptation of the novel for the Kleinau Theatre. One such community is the Richardson Autonomous Project. Arguably closer in view to Ramsey’s converted shopping centers than present-day ecovillages, Evans describes the Project as a “twenty-two-year-old experiment in sustainable urban living” carved out of an abandoned Walmart store.

Sleeping arrangements in the Project were broadly communal. The bulk of the old Walmart had been converted into an indoor meadow with grow-lights hanging from the rafters and a wide, lush field of native grass sprawling across most of the inhabited space. Fruit trees, bushes full of berries, cannabis plants, and copses of bamboo lined the edges of the space. The center of the field was dominated by a large, circular kitchen surrounded by a handsome oaken bar. Tables, gazebos, and sundry personal structures dotted the field, along with a pair of dance floors (10).

Although Evans’ novel also contains far more fantastical communities, the Project speaks to me on a personal level. During my time in AmeriCorps, a number of teams were housed for a time in an abandoned Sam’s Club facility in Denver, Colorado. I visited the massive, emptied-out store on a few occasions, and witnessed what felt like a skeletal version of Evans’ Project.

People had set up tents and constructed improvised shelters out of shipping palettes. To travel between these makeshift barracks and the restrooms, people rode on skateboards that echoed throughout the sparsely populated expanse. Because the people living there had no control over the lights or the speaker system, a culture of headlamps, blindfolds, and earplugs had emerged. Although the Sam's Club living situation was far from ideal, the sheer volume of the space made it easy to imagine numerous ways that the Club could be changed, could be made more livable and even adapted into something nice. Per Ramsey, I can imagine how places like this Sam's Club could easily be converted into new community-oriented spaces, and I think that the participants in the present-day ecovillage movement would make ideal teachers in realizing such transformative ambitions.

I return to the sense of synchronicity I first felt when I came into personal contact with the limits of federal disaster relief, and saw the possibilities of sustainable design. In retrospect, 2013 was not my first introduction to the impacts of natural disasters. In late 2005 and early 2006, a cohort of new students arrived in my high school having fled New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. When I worked with FEMA, it was a common refrain in the offices not to bring up Katrina. The agency viewed the response as a failure, and whenever we got a call from someone requesting Katrina assistance, we were instructed to send them to a specialized department. The FEMA agents I met often seemed frustrated with the state responses to the disasters they worked, and that frustration was infectious at some level. My teammate Annie quit AmeriCorps after our first deployment, feeling that our mostly-clerical work was not impactful enough for the communities affected by disasters. I wonder, if the people working for FEMA's phone bank had the autonomy to make these kinds of decisions, whether they would pursue more

direct forms of disaster relief, and encourage sustainable development options in addition to relief and rebuilding of existing infrastructure.

I have lived—for different stints of time—in the dining room of a ten-person house, in the barracks of a federal law enforcement training center, in an extended-stay hotel, in the cabins of a privately-operated Methodist summer camp, in a church meeting room, out of my 1998 Toyota Avalon, and in a variety of different apartment units. While I would not recommend these living situations in all cases, these situations have instilled a sense of my own ability to adapt in me. When some people say to me that they could never live in an ecovillage, I wonder what aspects of their life they imagine they would be giving up if they were to move to one of these settlements, and what they consider their minimum standards to be. I do not begrudge people living in unsustainable means their comforts. Rather, I think that part of the fascinating aspect about ecovillages is the degree to which people living in them go to lengths to ensure their comforts while attempting to live in more sustainable ways. Every ecovillage I spoke with had some kind of web presence, and some kind of means for residents to access the internet, even if they lived in tents. Like Parr, I think that one of the most pronounced differences between ecovillages and non-ecovillage communities lies in the attention to a particular kind of social relationship, a decision to consciously advocate for a mode of life that insists upon communal involvement, and attention to life as part of a weave of interconnected actors, human and beyond.

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APPENDIX A

PROTOCOL DESCRIPTIONS

The purpose of the study is to gather accounts of the lived experiences of people living in sustainable communities (particularly ecovillages), obtaining narrative accounts of people's experiences via interviews. I hope to develop a better understanding of what attracts people to this style of living arrangement.

My subject pool comprises people of at least 19 years of age presently residing at self-titled ecovillages in the U.S. I will identify these ecovillages using a combination of two directories – the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) and ic.org. My parameters for inclusion are that a village use the term *ecovillage* in their name, host a population of at least ten unrelated adult persons, and have been active in a physical location for at least five years. This selection criteria is intended to filter out those communities that are in their planning and development stages, along with communities that have only just begun and may not last until the end of the project.

After identifying ecovillages using the aforementioned criteria, I will send an email detailing my research and soliciting interviews from interested members (Appendix C). Upon receiving interested responses from residents, I will work alongside them to establish a time to conduct an interview. The interview may take place in-person as possible, or via Zoom or other electronic medium as necessary. Should the interviewing process lead me to make an on-site visit, I will conduct interviews with interested parties, using a mixture of voluntary selection (i.e., being approached by an interested villager) and snowball recruitment (i.e., being referred by one interviewee to seek out another person).

Upon beginning the interview process, I will provide the participant with an informed consent form (Appendix D). Upon beginning recording, I will also relay a verbal consent script at the beginning of the interview. Upon acquiring verbal and written consent, I will talk with the interviewee about their experiences living in their current ecovillages, as well as other ecovillages they may have lived in during their lives. The following will be my main questions during these interviews:

1. How would you describe yourself?
2. How would you describe where you live?
3. How would you describe ecovillages to someone who was unfamiliar with them?
4. Can you describe how you learned about ecovillages?
5. How did you come to live here?
6. Could you tell me about a time where you felt like you had been accepted as a member of your community?
7. Could you think of an adaptation you have had to make in coming to live here?
8. Could you describe a time when the community came together to address an issue?
9. Can you describe some social events (celebrations, rituals, etc.) that have taken place within your village?
10. Could you walk me through a recent day that stood out to you?
11. What would you like people who do not live in ecovillages to know about this style of living?
12. Can you think of any questions I have not asked that you think I should?

At the conclusion of the interview, I will deliver the following post-script and answer any questions before stopping the recording.

Post-script:

Alright, thank you for speaking with me. So, just to go over a few details here at the end, I'm going to stop recording now, and this record will be kept in an encrypted folder on my PC. From there, I'm going to transcribe this interview into writing, where you'll be given a pseudonym. From that point, I may cite your interview as I'm writing up about my research. If, in the future, you want to add any more information to what we already talked about today, or if you'd like your interview to not be used in my report, or if you just have any questions, you can always contact me at alexlockwood@siu.edu, or call or text me at 678-294-1494. Thank you again, so much, for helping me out with this interview. Do you have any questions before I stop recording?

After our interview, I will provide digital copies of the signed consent forms to the participants, and proffer typed copies of the interview transcripts upon request.

APPENDIX B

HSC APPROVAL



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE
WOODY HALL - MAIL CODE 4344
900 SOUTH NORMAL AVENUE
CARBONDALE, ILLINOIS 62901

siuhsc@siu.edu
618/453-4533
FAX 618/453-4573

To: Alex Lockwood

From: M. Daniel Becque
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Date: April 19, 2021

Title: *Cultivating Community: Performances of Belonging in an Ecovillage Settlement*

Protocol Number: 21055

The above referenced study has been approved by the SIUC Institutional Review Board. The study is determined to be exempt according to 45 CFR 46.101(b)2. This approval does not have an expiration date. However, any future modifications to your protocol must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to their implementation.

Best wishes for a successful study.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the USDHHS Office of Human Research Protection. The Assurance number is FWA00005334.

MDB;jh

cc: Jonathan Gray

To: Alex Lockwood

From: M. Daniel Becque
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Date: June 9, 2021

Subject: *Cultivating Community: Performances of Belonging in an Ecovillage Settlement*

Protocol Number: 21055

The SIUC Institutional Review Board has approved the modification to add recruitment locations to your study. You may begin.

Thank you for helping us keep your file up-to-date.

MDB:jh

cc: Jonathan Gray

APPENDIX C

INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

Hello,

My name is Alex Lockwood, and I'm a PhD candidate in the Department of Communication Studies at Southern Illinois University. I'm reaching out in order to inquire about the possibility of conducting research for my doctoral dissertation with members of your community. The purpose of the research I'm doing is to gather information about the lived experiences of those living in sustainable communities to more fully appreciate the array of different responses being taken to live in and address global climate change. For this initial stage, I'd like to briefly mention the scope and focus of the project, and talk to you about what might be feasible for conducting interviews with anyone at your community who is willing to speak to me, provided your community would be interested in assisting this research project.

I'd like to conduct this research with willing members of your community by conducting interviews with them. These interviews would be voluntary and would only be conducted with people at least 19 years of age. I am flexible as to how these interviews may be conducted, and want to defer to the wishes of your community in doing this. If in-person/on-site interviews are possible, I could visit and conduct interviews while camping nearby. Alternatively, if you would be willing to assist, we could coordinate distanced interviews to be conducted either over the phone, over Zoom or Skype, or via email or written correspondence.

If you have any questions about this email or any of the research I'm hoping to conduct, you can get in contact with me either at this email: alexlockwood@siu.edu, by phone at 678-294-1494, or by mail at 410 N. Springer St. #1, Carbondale IL, 62901. Alternatively, you may also

contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Jonny Gray, by email at jmgray@siu.edu, by phone at 618-453-7570, or by mail at Communications Building, Mail Code 6605, Carbondale IL, 62901.

I look forward to speaking with you sometime soon, and I hope you have been doing well over this past year.

-Alex Lockwood

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Hello, my name is Alex Lockwood. I am a PhD candidate in the Department of Communication Studies at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale Illinois. I am presenting you with this form today in order to attain your consent for participation in my dissertation research on life within ecovillage communities. The purpose of this study is to gather information and accounts of the lived experiences people living in ecovillages have of their communities and of their relationship to sustainability practices and messaging more broadly. I do not anticipate any risks to come from this research process.

In agreeing to help with this research, I agree to be participant to one interview session with Alex regarding my experiences coming to live in, and living within ecovillage communities. I understand that this interview may take between one and two hours, and will be recorded for usage in Alex's dissertation research. I may refuse to have my voice recorded, and should I do so, I understand that Alex may ask to jot down notes of our interview. Additionally, I understand that I may skip any question in the interview should I not wish to answer. I further understand that I may withdraw my responses at any time, at no penalty, in which case my answers will not be used in the research process. Should I choose to withdraw, I may do so by contact either Alex or Dr. Gray via the information provided below. In this event, my interview recordings and transcripts will be deleted, and will not be used in the dissertation that will come from this research process.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, and affirm that I am at least 19 years of age. I understand that I may pick a pseudonym for my participation in this research, and that this pseudonym will be used in order to protect my confidentiality. Additionally, I will attempt to not

use names of non-participants during my interview, in order to protect their identities. Alex and Dr. Gray affirm that they will take all reasonable steps to protect my identity. If I have any questions, I may reach out to Alex Lockwood via phone at 678-294-1494, via email at alexlockwood@siu.edu, or by mail at 410 N. Springer St. #1, Carbondale, IL, 62901. Additionally, I may contact Alex's advisor, Dr. Jonny Gray, by phone at 618-453-7570, or by email at jmgray@siu.edu.

I agree to be quoted via pseudonym in any research produced following my interview with Alex.

I do not agree to be quoted via pseudonym in any research produced following my interview with Alex.

I agree to have my interview with Alex recorded in audio form.

I do not agree to have my interview with Alex recorded in audio form.

_____ **X. Signature.**

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Institutional Review Board. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the committee chairperson, Office of Research Compliance, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901 Phone (618)453-4534. E-mail: siuhsc@siu.edu.

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEWEE PSEUDONYMS, SELF-DESCRIPTIONS, AND SYNOPSES OF
DISCUSSIONS

- Connor

Connor was one of the first people that I interviewed. An engineer living in an ecovillage in the northeast United States, Connor was a founding member of his community and had been living on-site for over a decade when we spoke. Much of what we discussed involved the day-to-day happenings of ecovillage life, and some of the engineering concerns that went into planning the village both at conception and in response to newer concerns that arose over the years.

- Pamela

Pamela was a person who I spoke extensively with over the course of my project. Originally from California, she now resides in Rice and Salt Ecovillage. Though not a founding member of Rice and Salt Ecovillage, Pamela sat on several councils and acted as the village's public relations liaison. We spoke several times not only about her own life, but about the affairs of her village as well as the unique relationship it had with the wider local community and the federal government. Pamela also served as my contact person during my first visit to Rice and Salt Ecovillage—I went on daily morning walks with her, and ate breakfast in her house where she would advise me on who I might want to talk to during my time there.

- Selene

Hailing from an ecovillage in the pacific northwest, Selene has been involved in intentional communities for over thirty years. Though they initially became involved with intentional communities as a matter of facilitating their tax protesting, they later shifted towards environmentally-oriented sustainable communities based on permaculture after viewing the film

version of *An Inconvenient Truth*. I spoke with Selene during the summer of 2021, and we discussed the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had had on the life of their ecovillage, the difficulties of entering into an ecovillage as an older person, and the different forms of governance that their ecovillage community had begun to test out in the months before we spoke.

- Something Cool

A newly arrived member of an ecovillage in New England, Something Cool discussed the healing effects she felt from coming to live in a communal setting. She spoke of the differences she noticed between her life growing up and working in a major city and the rural mountain ecovillage that she had come to call home. She also indicated some of the difficulties she saw in her community as it attempted to integrate more equitable living arrangements for its members.

- Jasper

A member of Rice and Salt Ecovillage who arrived in 2010, Jasper and I spoke about his time coming to live at Rice and Salt Ecovillage, and his involvement with natural building workshops. Jasper provided deep reflections about his personal beliefs about the interconnectedness of life as a major motivator for his arrival at Rice and Salt Ecovillage, and also offered some interesting challenges and critiques to my project that I explore below.

- Carlos

A member of Rice and Salt Ecovillage since 2019, Carlos spoke about the different kinds of political affiliations that were involved in ecovillages. Identifying as a communist, he spoke about his efforts at building a space where communards interested in radical political action could organize in the community. He also helped to give me some character about a conflict that had arisen at Rice and Salt Ecovillage between my first and second visit surrounding the CRP

land and the presence of an invasive plant species (*Lespedeza cuneata*) that evolved into a quandary surrounding the tenets of the village.

- Lydia

A work-exchange intern who had been living at Rice and Salt Ecovillage for several months when I spoke to her. I approached Lydia for the purposes of gaining some degree of insight about the role of interns in ecovillage communities. Several members of ecovillages had spoken about the role of interns, work-exchangers, and WWOOFers in providing labor for their settlements, and so I thought it important to speak with at least one person in this role for my project. Lydia had traveled around to several different organic farms and ecologically-oriented communities before arriving at Rice and Salt Ecovillage to spend a summer there. We spoke about her tasks and projects, what she felt her role in the community was, and how Rice and Salt Ecovillage compared to other organizations she had worked with.

- Jay

A retired lawyer and cancer survivor who lived in an ecovillage in New England since 2021. Jay spoke about his arrival in the ecovillage, and his life as a person with a disability in an intentional community. He was effusive about the help he was afforded by living “in community” with others, and also spoke of an instance of restorative justice that had taken place in the ecovillage several days before our interview.

- Luke

A man who moved to Rice and Salt Ecovillage in the early-mid 00s with his family to raise his children in a manner that was more consistent with their values. Luke spoke with me about his increasing involvement with village committees, and the different kinds of structural challenges that the village had been meeting over the past few years and decades.

- Goldie

A member of the “founding generation” of Rice and Salt Ecovillage who had lived there since the 90s. Goldie and I discussed politics, the networks of care and community involvement that grow and diminish in a village over time, the potential of the ecovillage movement to impact societal behaviors, and possibilities for outreach and expanding the ecovillage movement.

- Miles

A relatively recent arrival to Rice and Salt Ecovillage. Miles and her husband Jack discussed the process of becoming members of an ecovillage, the adaptations and considerations they had to make when moving back to the U.S. after having lived abroad, and the development of a project to address plastic consumption and waste management within Rice and Salt Ecovillage.

- Mack

A retired farmer who had been living at Rice and Salt Ecovillage for four years when I interviewed him. Mack discussed some of the projects that had flourished and foundered within the community, some of the people who had been asked to leave over the years, as well as the difficulties that were associated with the community’s attempts to adapt to the COVID pandemic.

APPENDIX F

EMAIL TO INTERVIEWEES RETURNING THE RESEARCH

Per the requests of my respondents, I intend to email copies of this completed dissertation at the same time as I send it to my committee. The following email will accompany the completed study.

Dear _____,

Thank you for your participation in the research for my doctoral dissertation, *Cultivating Community: Investigating Performances of Community in Ecovillage Settlements*. I am deeply appreciative of your willingness to discuss your personal lives, ethical commitments, and for inviting me to gain some insight into your communities.

Please find my completed dissertation attached to this email for your review and reading. I hope you enjoy the work, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you notice something that should be adjusted.

Sincerely,

Alex Lockwood

VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Alexander B. Lockwood

alexblockwood@gmail.com

Georgia College & State University
Bachelor of Arts, Rhetoric, December 2012

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Ronald Pelias Excellence in Graduate Student Service Award, May 2022

Dissertation Paper Title:

Cultivating Community: Investigating Performances of Community in Ecovillage
Settlements

Major Professor: Jonathan M. Gray

Publications:

Lockwood, Alex. "Contest and Concordance: HEWILLNOTDIVIDE.US and Challenges
to Resistant Discourses in Performance Art." *Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative
Communication Research*, vol. 16, 2017, pp. 71-9.