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Intentional Communities, Counterculture, and Alternative Living: America'sReturn to Communal Living

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INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES, COUNTERCULTURE, AND ALTERNATIVE LIVING: AMERICA'S RETURN TO COMMUNAL LIVING

A Study of Modern Intentional Communities in Hyde Park, Chicago

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how communal living and practice exists in America's contemporary contexts. It is particularly interested in how these moments exist within urban settings, paying close attention to the many ways that communal lifestyles can integrate directly into society. The research seeks to identify spaces where traditions of communal living intersect with communal practice in both the United States and architectural history, and to document the diverse ways in which they manifest. This investigation focuses on four case study communities located in Hyde Park, Chicago. Three of the four communities were researched and identified through publicly available information listed on the online database, the Foundation for Intentional Community (ic.org). The fourth community was brought to our attention by one of the communities we were already in contact with. Interviews were conducted with members at each community, transcribed, coded for themes, and ultimately translated into a zine format to share our findings. To share our research findings, seventy-five zines were printed and bound for display and distributed as part of a two-day exhibition in Slocum Hall, home of the School of Architecture at Syracuse University. The uniqueness of each community revealed in this research demonstrates flexibility in the communal living model. Communal living can occur at various levels of space sharing and commitment, whether urban or rural, it can involve few people or many. Living communally does not stifle individuality and personal freedom, on the contrary, it can enhance it. Architects, designers, and other adjacent creative leaders need to consider unique and creative ways that people live, organize, and occupy space to better design for a future where Americans can lead autonomous, sustainable, and meaningful lives.

KEYWORDS: Intentional Community, Co-Living, Counterculture, Housing, Chicago, Urbanity

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research investigated intentional communities in the U.S. and architecture's historical and potential impact on creative ways that people can live, organize, and occupy space. Specifically, we experientially investigated four intentional communities in the Chicago area. This research also consisted of taking an academic course covering intentional communities, academic research, and qualitative analysis of interviews with members of each of the Chicago communities we visited. It further involved creating a zine of our research findings and sponsoring a community gathering of peers, academics, and public thinking and working in these spaces. Our research correlates with other findings in pointing to both anthropological and archaeology historical findings that there was greater diversity and flourishing of ways of physically living together for most of human history that can lead to more autonomous, sustainable, and meaningful lives.

This thesis reviews the historical background of intentional communities and these communities demonstrating its relevance to mitigation of modern era problems of community and habitation within architectural concerns. Chapter one explores the roots of shared living in America dating back to the 1700s, the influence of 1960s counterculture communities, and contemporary manifestos. It provides the foundation for current implications of intentional communities and their alternative underpinnings. Chapter three illustrates the research methods that were implemented. This includes prior interests and exposure, qualitative methods of visits and interviews, and the production of zines. Chapter three outlines four case study communities that were visited and the conversations that were had with community members that provide context for the diverse ways in which intentional communities manifest in modern day, as well as the different ways in which they organize their structure and spaces. Chapter four reflects on the many lessons and themes that were prevalent within the Chicago communities that were visited, and what can be said about contemporary the American living style – both alternative and mainstream. Chapter five captures the methods in which this research was disseminated

amongst the architecture faculty and student body of Syracuse University, and the conversations and connections that were created through the production of zines, and the creation of a space for gathering.

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CHAPTER ONE - CONTEXTUALIZING INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY IN AMERICA

INTRODUCTION

For much of human history, creating the layout, structure, and social arrangements of dwellings occupied a significant portion of human activities. Designing how one lives is a fundamental freedom involving the experimentation and creation of ever-diverse social realities of living together. These social realities were instrumental in the evolution of human society and some of the innovative solutions allowed us to prosper and grow. Architecture has long been at the forefront of organizing how humans live together. Despite the prominent role of architecture as a way of diversifying human potential in terms of community, space, and culture, current architectural pedagogy seems reluctant to look towards the past for inspiration. Instead, it seems distracted to cater toward individual gratification, neoliberalism, and technical solutions that don't require questioning of existing social structures. While forms of social freedom expressed in ways of living together existed most notably in America through such movements as the Shaker communities in the 1700s and various movements during the 1960s (a decade of cultural revolution that saw the rise of social, political, and creative movements nationwide) they still exist today in diverse forms of intentional communities whose potential are typically overlooked. Intentional communities, defined in this paper as "…a group of cooperating nonrelated humans, living by their own choice on one piece of land or in one house, for reasons which go beyond mere convenience" (*Matt Bojanovich, ic.org),* exist across the United States in a variety of forms. Some communities are urban, some are rural, some are smaller in size and some are large. They "go beyond mere convenience" by being committed to a variety of guiding ideologies including political activism, mental health support, intergenerational living, sustainability, spirituality, art, and creativity. Though uncommon in the US today, communal

living is by no means new to human dwelling, and by examining how people live together successfully in modern intentional communities, new knowledge could be acquired to inform and foster innovative design for better living regarding affordability, living intergenerationally, fighting mental stress and burnout, and fostering politically active citizens. This zine explores the personal investigation of four intentional communities in the Chicago area. It provides qualitative data from our visit which included tours of each community, partaking in shared meals, spending an overnight in one community, and conducting interviews with one or more members at each home. These interviews guided community members to share with us their reasons for living communally, what brought them to the lifestyle, how they utilized space in their daily lives, and much more. Through this experience and data collection, we were further able to reconcile our own educational experiences in architecture with our beliefs that architecture could expand its pedagogy to include the growing concern of how we can diversify human potential when it comes to our social structures.

ROOTS OF SHARED LIVING IN AMERICA

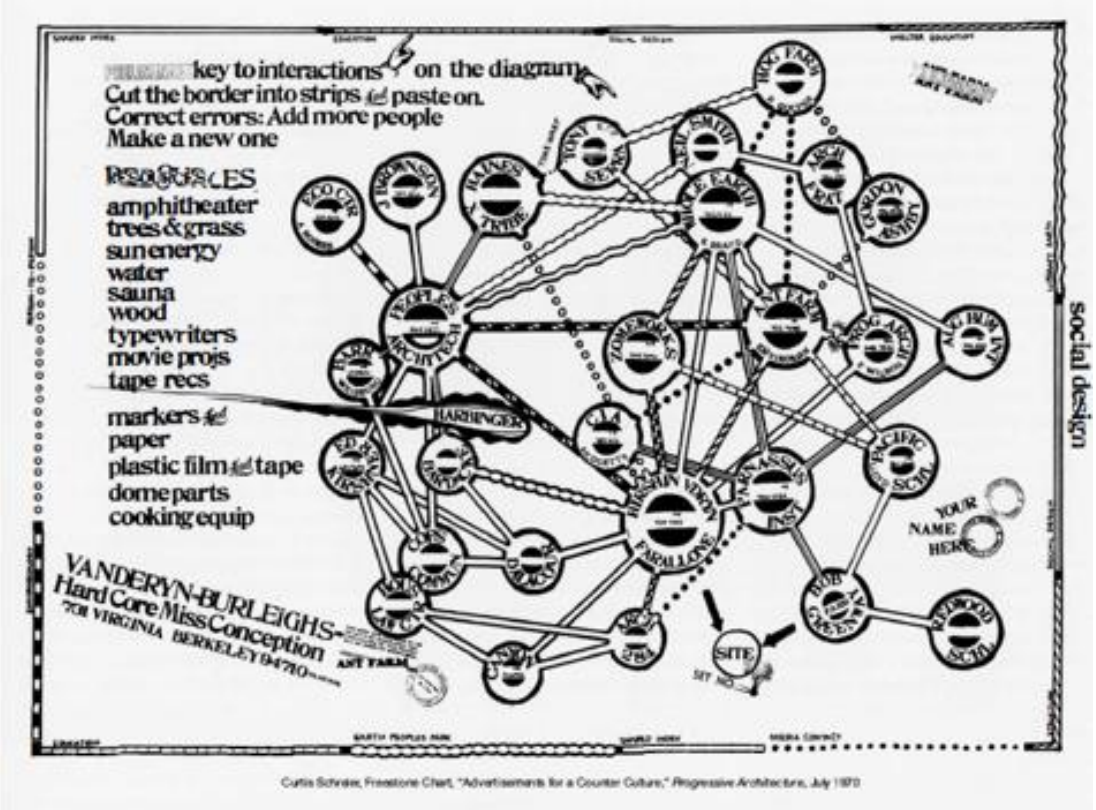
As early as the late seventeenth century, many religious sects would establish communes in the American landscape, often fleeing persecution for religious or cultural beliefs. One of the most famous and perhaps most successful of these American communal sects was the Shakers, who would establish nearly 20 Shaker Villages with the first being founded in 1787. Individual property ownership and conventional marriage were not practices observed by Shakers and upon entry into full membership, members would turn over all property to the commune. Friedrich Engels famously referred to the Shakers as proof that communism could work. Though relatively successful, especially in comparison to other comparably extreme commune experiments with two Shaker villages remaining active as late as the 1980s, Shaker culture was both extremely religious and required members to sever all external ties upon entry. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many more tolerant and secular communes were

established. Many would fail, in part because they attracted too high of a ratio of intellectuals to workers making it difficult to achieve self-sufficiency. One group that has remained intact is that of the Catholic Worker movement. Established in 1933, one of the movement's guiding principles is hospitality towards those on the margins of society. The communal living aspect takes the form of Catholic Worker houses which exist in urban and rural areas and serve populations ranging from the homeless and hungry to immigrants or trafficked people and are ultimately devoted to resisting war and injustice. There are currently approximately 174 Catholic Worker communities in the U.S. and 29 internationally. One of the four intentional communities interviewed for this project strongly aligns itself with this movement as well as that of The Franciscan tradition and new monasticism.

1960s COUNTERCULTURE

The 1960s was a decade of cultural revolution that saw the rise of social, political, and creative movements nationwide. The experiments and counterculture movements were numerous and varied in style from utopic rural communities such as Drop City to experiments in reimaging form-making and built structures for living like Whiz-Bang Quick City and the inflatable works of Ant Farm. This also included a rise in American urban communes, such as the Kaliflower commune in San Francisco, that engaged alternative lifestyles as their primary terrain. While there were many specialized offshoots of the counterculture movement, a shared zeitgeist can be understood as freedom (personal, economic, creative, sexual, etc.) as an organizing concept. Freedom, in this context, can be understood as the ability and desire to create a new reality by rejecting the seemingly self-evident logic of the dominant culture (Peariso, 2015). While negative stereotypes of this era have endured in American media, the most worrying in this context being the sensationalized image of the brainwashed cultist cut off from society, its origins are rooted in ancient human cultural significance and social progress requiring strong participation and personal responsibility. Member of the Digger movement,

Peter Coyote, claimed that “the goal was to enable one to ‘do something that you wanted to do, for your own reasons. If you want[ed] to live in a world with free food, then create it and participate in it. Feeding people was not an act of charity, but an act of responsibility to a personal vision" (Peariso, 2015). Another prevailing stereotype of this era regarding experiments in living is the image of a reclusive, extremist cult cut off from the world, anti-technology, and run by a guru-style leader. While some communes from this era did face challenges of corrupt leadership, many more operated successfully using various democratic structures. Numerous urban collectives shattered the stereotypes of hippie communes as remote, backwater outposts and developed interconnectivity between communal collectives which became an important part of knowledge sharing and production. (See Schreier’s interactive diagram about interconnectivity and resources of live/work cooperatives below)



Curtis Schreier, Freestone Chart, “Advertisements for a Counter Culture,” Progressive Architecture, Jul 7 1970

CONTEMPORARY MANIFESTATIONS

While the historical roots of communal living in America are largely religious, secular communes and intentional communities have become far more prevalent in recent years. In a study conducted in 2000, more than half of American intentional communities were secular (Bader, 2006). In this same study, approximately 40 percent of the intentional communities researched were identified as urban. It is important to note that collecting data about intentional communities is particularly difficult with many not documenting their existence in any formal way. That being said, there is clearly a substantial culture of communal living taking place in modern-day America. Referring to the Foundation for International Community website, their database lists 853 intentional communities worldwide with 693 located in North America. Out of the four communities interviewed for this research, one was not listed in this directory, so there are likely many more out there that do not advertise themselves for a variety of reasons (one potential reason being to target a local applicant pool rather than advertising globally through the directory). Despite these substantial numbers, there does not seem to be a large body of existing discourse on this movement. When researching intentional communities and American communes for this research, journal articles were predominantly written during and before the 1980s. The creative alternatives for living that critically understanding this movement presents are also largely absent from the current pedagogy of architecture. Our exploration seeks to push this research by visiting several intentional communities to get a sense of what living in these spaces is like and interview the residents and get a sense of their daily routines and personal motivations.

MODERN IMPLICATIONS

What can learning about these historical communal living presidents and modern intentional communities mean for how we think about and understand living in America today?

First and foremost, learning about alternative modes of living will expand the mind to new possibilities. Learning about creative cultures can inform key decisions the next time you prepare for a crit, open rhino, conduct research, put together a syllabus, or converse with someone living in a situation outside of that dictated by the dominant culture. There are aspects of alternative living arrangements that experiment with spatial implications that are widely applicable to different design challenges. This includes ideas of private vs shared space in the home, the size/ratio of these spaces, spaces that are used for different purposes over time, and more (explored through diagrams in the four communities studied). There is much to be learned in unexpected places and from lesser-heard experiences. Greg Castillo, writer, and professor of architecture at UC Berkley recounts how, “A Berkeley anthropology course on Native Americans inspired Cliff Humphrey, a former Army roads engineer, to found Ecology Action, a commune of community organizers that pioneered now-familiar recycling and energy conservation practices.” (Castillo, 2015) There is much to be re-pioneered regarding the state of how we live in America today, and architects, designers, and other adjacent creative leaders can guide these changes. We are in the midst of an isolation epidemic with Americans feeling estranged from their families, friends, and coworkers. The cost of housing is soaring across the country and issues of gentrification and displacement (which disproportionately affects vulnerable populations) are only becoming more pressing. Could lessons from intentional communities inspire the changes needed to turn these tides? The following will consider interviews conducted while visiting four intentional communities in Hyde Park Chicago and examine how people are defining space, socially organizing, and committing to guiding values by living together in modern America.

CHAPTER TWO – RESEARCH METHODS

During the Spring semester of our fourth year as architecture students, we got the opportunity to take an architecture course focusing on design and architectural moments within the 1960s counterculture movement. This semester followed our time abroad in London where our interests in ideas of communal living began taking shape after being exposed to several social housing projects across Europe as well as radical political beliefs of housing being a human right. However, we were unaware of similar movements ever having taken place within the borders of the United States. It was during the 1960s counterculture course that we realized that traditions of communal living within the U.S. have always been considered inherently countercultural. The 1960s was known for its boom in communes, traveling pop-up festivals and communities, and experimentations in urban design. This piqued our interest into learning as much as we could about the existence of communal living both in American history, as well as how it manifests within the U.S. today. What became immediately obvious was how, both in American historical and contemporary society, ideas and practices of communal living have always been seen as a radical alternative lifestyle, -- oftentimes with very negative connotations. However, for most of human history, groups of people have lived in a communal, or at least less isolated, manner. And yet, it seems like a century of American planning and culture has sought to go in the opposite direction of human history, favoring an individualistic, privatized, and territorial perception of space and lifestyle.

We then became dedicated to investigating in a more rigorous manner how moments of communal living and practice exist in America's contemporary contexts. We were particularly interested in how these moments existed within urban settings, paying close attention to the many ways that communal lifestyles can integrate directly into society rather than becoming isolated entities amid rural vastness. We sought to identify and experience spaces where

traditions of communal living exist with the context of communal practice in both American as well as architectural history, and to document the diverse ways in which it manifests. This landed us with the opportunity of visiting and speaking with four different communities within Chicago.

This research focuses on four case study communities located in Hyde Park, Chicago. This site was appropriate for our interest in urban intentional communities as opposed to rural communities or eco villages. One of our research questions asked whether intentional communities are socially connected to larger communities in which they are located such as the neighborhood or borough. Hyde Park Chicago provided a perfect setting to investigate this question. Other research questions asked how different age groups live in intentional community and for what reasons. For this, Hyde Park provided diversity by being home to many intentional communities in high concentration.

We identified and reached out to three out of the four communities we researched through publicly available information listed on the online database, the Foundation for Intentional Community (ic.org). The fourth community was made known to us by one of the communities we were already in contact with. This community member provided the email of a resident whom they were friends with and informed us that their community was not listed on the ic.org website. We ended up organizing 6 hour-long interviews in total which were conducted using a standardized set of questions to gain a more nuanced understanding of the complexities and context surrounding intentional community members' daily lives and aspirations. Interviews were held with two members of Qumbya, two members of the Fireplace Community, one member of the Sohpia Community, and one of the Covenantal Community Cooperative of Woodlawn. These interviews took place in the homes of interviewees and were often complimented by other experiences within the home. We received house tours of each intentional community which informed a series of section drawings and space sharing diagrams.

We partook in a shared dinner with two communities and stayed the night as guests in another. The dinners and the overnight stay enhanced our understanding of the casual habits and atmospheres of each community. During one dinner we were able to have casual conversations over a meal eaten on the front porch of one community, in a relaxed but somewhat unorganized manner. During dinner at a different community, we gathered around a backyard picnic table and started the meal with the reading of a poem by the person who had cooked the meal for the day. In another intentional community, we slept in a peaceful and tidy guestroom in a clean and quiet house. These experiences greatly helped to further our understanding of the values, interests, and unique characteristics of each community.

The interviews were transcribed, coded for themes, and ultimately translated into a zine format. To share our research findings, we printed and bound 75 zines to be displayed and distributed as part of a two-day exhibition in Slocum Hall, home of the School of Architecture at Syracuse University, with the hopes of sharing our findings with fellow design students and professors. One or both researchers remained stationed at the exhibition during both days to field questions, distribute zines, and facilitate discussion. A “reception book” was also put out during the exhibition to collect reaction data and feedback. Anyone who wanted to take a zine home with them was asked to record their reflections on the research in this book.

CHAPTER THREE - CHICAGO CASE STUDIES

QUMBYA

"There's a lot of people in this house who have chosen a life of under-employment or gig work and it's because we live so cheaply here… Now I'm like work is just where my money comes from and the house is actually my purpose and my ending and the house is where I invest a lot of my organizing time."

- Qumbya Bowers Community Member

Qumbya is a Housing Co-op based in Chicago founded in 1988 that includes several locations. The one that we were invited to is the Bowers location (founded in 1991), which is

also their largest location both in terms of space (18 bedrooms) and the number of occupants who live there. Being a part of the Bowers community includes sharing a meal once a day, engaging in leisure and creative activities with fellow members, and upholding principles of community, democracy, and affordability.

Affordability within the Bowers community extends beyond mere financial ability to cover living expenses such as room, food, and material goods. It also encompasses the capacity to allocate time away from work, fostering self-actualizing power through engagement in leisure, communal, and creative pursuits. This affordable lifestyle is accomplished through shared housing arrangements among numerous residents, enabling members the ability to spend less time earning money and more time to pursue other desires. As previously mentioned, these pursuits include endeavors like creating music and art, as well as participation in neighborhood, political, or social groups. Freed without the stress of high living costs, community members can be far more engaged in neighborhood and non-profit related activities.

Another theme that quickly emerged within Bowers was the emphasis on democracy embodied both in the political ideology of the members, and in the primary structural organization of the community itself. With many individuals sharing space in this community, decision-making becomes a particularly important element requiring participation and structure. Bowers achieves this by holding weekly house meetings every Sunday where members can bring up issues, concerns or suggestions which get voted on by all community members. This is how house decisions are made democratically and everyone’s voice gets a chance to be heard. Many Bowers members extend their advocation for democracy into their local Chicago neighborhood through participating in several social justice and political advocacy events that take on issues such as prison and police reform, and homelessness.

In terms of shared space within the Bowers community, it was the most fluid of all the communities we visited. The kitchen, library, music room, game room, and in some cases even the bedrooms, were considered shared spaces. During our visit, both interviews held at this

community were conducted in the bedroom of a prominent member, who through her seniority in the community had acquired one of the more spacious rooms. Though a bedroom, this space had a shared sense to it with us casually conversing with four different members of the community in it during our visit. It became clear to us that other community members used this bedroom besides its designated owner. The large number of bedrooms made it possible for rent to remain affordable and it also created flexibility for different situations with smaller bedrooms renting for less.

Since sharing the dinner meal once a day is an essential daily ritual wherein community members engage with each other, the shared kitchen and dining space are vital spaces for this community. Part of the rent goes towards groceries that are used for cooking a nightly shared dinner large enough to feed the whole house. Meals are always vegetarian and cooked by every house member on a rotating schedule. Though not everyone is expected at dinner every night, there is always a hot meal available, paid for by a very reasonable grocery fee.

A smaller, but highly used and important room in this community is located on the first floor and serves many functions. This room is where weekly meetings are held to discuss house operations, go over new member applications, and check in with one another. This room is also where shared activities like game and movie nights take place throughout the week. Because of the number of musical and creative people this community attracts, this space also becomes the music room for jam sessions and shared music practice.

During our interview with a prominent member, the same person whose bedroom served as our interview setting, she remarked how her bedroom was recognized within the community as being the third common space. It was a shared space where residents could watch movies, socialize, have jam sessions, or just hang out. Even in other communities that we visited, this was a very uncommon sentiment and seemed particularly countercultural. And yet, while we were there, it never once felt odd. Individuals would come in and out of her bedroom to speak with us, or to just hang out. It became a space where personal comfort isn't just reserved for

one person, but where intimacy (both in terms of space and connection) is not seen as something that must be private and is encouraged to be shared with others, if desired. This sentiment captures the attitude and ethos of Bowers community - a confidence in community and intimacy, and a fearlessness in affordability, in whatever form that may take.

FIREPLACE COMMUNITY

"So I think in terms of the larger valuing and putting community above productivity and individual excellence, you kind of just want to live life with other human beings in a really messy, vulnerable way and be kind of ordinary and just kind of be known and loved. I guess being part of the greater tradition [of communal living] is what I see as radical and maybe not that we ourselves are like this really amazing radical thing."

- The Fireplace Community Member

The Fireplace Community, founded in 2021, defines itself as an intentional community of artists, activists, and spiritual seekers. The 8-bedroom community is dedicated to creating a space for rest and refuge for its members and visitors - effectively maintaining a constant relaxed ambiance and environment that instantly welcomes and comforts you. The Fireplace Community, while not expecting its members to conform to Catholic faith and ideology, has its roots based in Catholic spirituality, activism, and communal traditions that inform many of its practices and ties it to a larger history of communal living that precedes the American counterculture.

During our visit, we were able to identify a series of core ideas and lineages that seemed to inform and encompass The Fireplace Community. Firstly, as aforementioned, the notion of “rest” was something that was continually emphasized - that people deserve a space for rest that oftentimes is not given in the modern American lifestyle. This is where the imagery of “The Fireplace” comes in - The Fireplace is a place of healing and refuge; it promotes slowing down as an antidote to burnout, and as a way of life. A commitment to “hospitality” was another tenant of the community that was very present. We stayed at The Fireplace overnight in a guest bedroom and instantly felt not only welcomed, but genuinely comforted by the amenities and individuals we got to engage with. The Fireplace Community believes that people need community to flourish, and that communal life can help people meet their material, emotional, and spiritual needs. They commit to this sentiment by opening their home to artists, activists, spiritual seekers, and people who need shelter.

Several communal living traditions exist within Christian history and lineage that has informed The Fireplace Community of their beliefs and commitment to the communal lifestyle. In more recent history there is The Catholic Worker Movement, which is an extremely countercultural Catholic movement, headed by Dorothy Day in 1933, which involves a collection of autonomous communities who strive to live in accordance with the justice and charity demonstrated by Jesus Christ through an obligation to the poor with resistance to oppressive

systems. Going even further back, there is The Franciscan Tradition within monasteries of living communally with others who share a commitment to spirituality and peace. The Fireplace Community's founders are Third Order Franciscan Sisters, and their shared life incorporates Franciscan values such as peace, joy, human dignity, and care for creation.

Many of the spaces within The Fireplace Community were considered shared; however there was a peaceful atmosphere even within the communal spaces that seemed to be unique to The Fireplace Community. It felt like spaces could be used for communing with other members, but they could also be used as additional meditative spaces of rest. We conducted our interviews within the Library/Art Room, which seemed to capture the philosophy of this community's use of space - a collaboration of artistic, spiritual, and social uses. This room on the second floor is an important space that houses a collection of books, arts and craft supplies, and has a peaceful, organized aura to it. This room gives community members a shared but quiet space to read, conduct personal work, and create art.

Other significant spaces that emphasize a commitment to their communal and spiritual lifestyle include a Prayer Space/Living Room, as well as Guest Rooms. The living room on the ground floor is an important area for community activity and for shared leisure. This space is used informally as a living room but is also used for house meetings as well as shared prayer, for which inclusive language for women and LGBTQIA+ people is used. The hospitality value of this community is manifested in part by guest bedrooms which host an array of guests with varying needs and reasons for staying. These spaces are rented for shorter periods and create income for the community.

Another significant space was the Backyard Patio/Stage which not only allowed for connective events within the community, but also with the surrounding neighborhood as well as other intentional communities. Here, a patio is used as a stage to host open mic nights, small concerts, poetry readings, fundraisers and more. These events are often open to the public, connecting the community far beyond its residential members.

During an interview with a prominent member of the community, a fondness and embrace of mundaneness was brought up. When asked about any kind of special memory she has associated with the community, she mentions how there were several weddings that were especially significant, but also how many of her special memories are simply day-to-day events, such as members playing instruments together, and doing puzzles together. The Fireplace Community celebrates mundanity in pursuit of living a more intertwined and connected life with those who share the experience of life. This sentiment is felt as soon as you enter the house, and was greatly missed shortly after we left.

SOPHIA COMMUNITY

"It's interesting to hear the kids like refer to community members with like familiar terms, like Uncle Ben or TT Monica. When we interview people to live here, we always ask questions like, 'how do you feel around kids?' 'How do you feel around different expressions of gender and

sexuality?' 'How do you feel about talking about things related to class and race?' So there's a lot of thought that goes into like who's going to come in and who's going to be comfortable here coming into this space."

- Sophia Community Member

Sophia Community was founded in 1993 by four women. Currently, the community is made up of nine individuals who occupy a Quaker House in Hyde Park near the University of Chicago. While not associated with Quakers, the two communities occupy the same house - Quakers use the prayer and meeting rooms during hours of worship, and the Sophia Community lives in the rest of the house. This existence of an intentional community living in close proximity with another community was especially unique and speaks directly to their mission statement of being a diverse group of individuals who companion one another in forming just, mutual and interdependent relationships.

The Sophia Community was additionally unique in their commitment to a "family-style" community and life. According to a member of the community, at the community's beginnings, many members were students that only stayed around long enough to complete their studies and move on. Desiring more long-term familial connections, they shifted their focus towards recruiting families, but it turned out that they did not stay around much longer than the students. Eventually, three families were living within Sophia Community at its peak capacity of 14 people in 2015, each family supporting two kids. It was at this time that they developed a core of long-term members that provided stability even when individuals or families would move out. While most of the communities that lived 'family-style" we visited typically all had the same age-range of people, the Sophia Community was truly unique in its intergenerational commitment. This was the only community we visited that had members who grew up within the community and came to know non-blood related members on a familial basis. This was also the only community that had significantly older members living and existing in the same spaces as younger folks. It

was an incredibly refreshing and poignant moment to witness so many individuals at various stages in their lives, of entirely different genetic make-ups, living and cohabiting in such a familial way.

The entire first floor of the Sophia Community is devoted to communal space and is clearly oriented towards visitors. A small, guest entry room creates a peaceful waiting space complete with brochures about Sophia Community, as well as about the many organizations affiliated with the community. Adjacent to this space is the Quaker Meeting Room. The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) act as landlords and use part of the house for worship space. The main meeting room is a flexible space that accommodates Quaker meetings, and acts as a meeting space for other social and political groups, some being student groups from the University of Chicago. Political activism and collective action are encouraged in this community and the first-floor meeting room makes space for this to take place. Political engagement by the community takes place in this space in the form of activities like collective letter writing exercises to local politicians and representatives. Children growing up in this community are constantly learning from activities and conversation that cultivate active citizenship.

With the ground floor of this building being so often occupied by non-residents, multi rooms of the upper levels are committed to shared space for residential members. This includes a beautiful library, which creates a space for members to read, adult members to work, and young members to do homework assignments. There is also a lush backyard with an outdoor dining table where shared meals are served when the weather is favorable. Shared meals take place two to three times per week and are started with the reading of a poem. This time is an opportunity for members to check in over a home cooked, vegetarian meal. Children and adults alike can catch up with other community members about things happening in their life and how they’re doing on a regular basis.

During our interview with a Sophia Community member, he described their typical Wednesday meetings which includes three important aspects. First is their business, financial, and conflict meeting where they discuss all of the practical and financial issues that go into maintaining the community, as well as discussing any interpersonal conflicts that may need to be addressed. Next, everybody has the opportunity to lead a prayer from their own spiritual practice. Lastly, they do collective letter writing for political advocacy. These three activities embody the goals and values of Sophia Community, and the commitment to create a familial experience with these events emphasizes a connection between community members that transcends religion, age, or blood.

COVENANTAL COMMUNITY HOUSING COOPERATIVE OF WOODLAWN

"The last two people who moved here were black and working class, and one was explicitly trying to not get displaced from the neighborhood, and like she had grown up in this building actually."

- Woodlawn Community Member

The Covenantal Community Housing Cooperative of Woodlawn is an apartment/unit style community dedicated towards fighting gentrification and displacement. CCHC was founded in 1979, and currently includes 21 separate units. This cooperative was founded by members of the University Church who were committed to serving a diverse, sustainable, and affordable space to CCHC community members. Nearly four decades later and this mission persists.

While this community is unique from others that we visited in its separated apartment-style layout rather than a family-style, or house-style, organization of space, they are still committed to a cooperative lifestyle in which residents collectively make decisions about the management of the building, and participate in a communal potluck twice a month. CCHC is intergenerational, multi-ethnic, and encourages conscientious living through such activities as gardening, recycling, and neighborhood involvement. There is a strong emphasis on being true neighbors and focusing on the needs of the immediate Woodlawn community, rather than students or Chicago transplants. CCHC is explicit with targeting an intentional audience; during an interview with a prominent community member, he elaborated on how he works at a Woodlawn community organizing nonprofit and circulates information about openings in the community to that population rather than posting on intentional community databases or other places where non-Woodlawn residents would see it. This targets native individuals who would otherwise be displaced by the large amounts of Chicago transplants who move in and effectively gentrify the area.

Most spaces in this community take the form of apartment units complete with their own kitchen, bathroom, living room, and bedroom (1-3). This makes the community appealing to

people of many different lifestyles and allows for movement as people's needs change, such as introducing a child or becoming an empty nester. New applicants for these apartments are considered largely on the basis of need, with people who are at risk of being displaced due to new development in the neighborhood being strong candidates. This application process, which is decided democratically by an elected committee, and which involves interested applicants to attend at least three community potlucks before joining, is in large part how the diversity and social responsibility values of this community are carried out.

Below all the building apartments is a vast amount of square footage dedicated to shared amenities and community spaces. This includes shared laundry, a gym space, bike storage, a wood shop and a multipurpose space where potlucks and community meetings are held. These spaces are open to all community members and make amenities available that would otherwise only be offered in more expensive living accommodations. Sharing tools, laundry machines, gym equipment and other amenities also makes it possible for residents to lead more sustainable lives in an affordable, time friendly and practical manner.

The form of the building creates a shared courtyard facing the public street. This courtyard creates a semi-private outdoor space where community members can relax and play. Children playing here are still visible from apartment windows. Additionally, shared stairways are used for storage by many community members, revealing a sense of trust amongst residents. Sharing of personal items and informal resident meetings could also take place here.

During our interview with a prominent member, we discovered how real and close the threat of displacement was for the Woodlawn neighborhood. The interviewee motioned towards a window and informed us about how the high-end tower that could be seen looming just across the street was being built as he moved in and how it was a trigger (but not the cause) for the gentrification that Woodlawn is experiencing. This visual evidence of what was taking place in the neighborhood was shocking and proved that the mission of CCHC was all the more crucial. CHCC is not only an intentional community for individuals who desire affordability and to have a

connection with their neighbors, but also a means of preserving a culture that is currently being faced with the threat of gentrification, and ultimately, dissolution.

CHAPTER FOUR - REFLECTING ON FINDINGS

LESSONS FROM CHICAGO

While located within a one-mile radius, the four intentional communities studied for this research and zine provided a variety of styles of self-governance, densities of occupancy, levels of participation and sharing of space. They also differed in the amount of time devoted to community activities and the organization of shared and private space. There were common themes however that came up in all four case studies. These shared themes were enlightening in considering the main attracting factors for living in international communities, and some of them countered our initial assumptions. From our research on counterculture, we knew that a driving factor in the conception of many '60s communes was embracing freedom as an organizing concept. Following the 1950s, a decade characterized by conformity, freedom was largely embodied by a desire to create one's reality by rejecting social conventions of the dominant culture. (Peariso, 2015) Now, half a century later, we are not in the same social situation. When asked the question, “As someone living in an intentional community in 2023, do you personally see yourself as taking part in something radical and countercultural?” most interviewees seemed caught off guard. It became clear that most of the individuals that we interviewed did not see themselves as social or cultural radicals, pioneering a lifestyle counter to the American mainstream. Though still embodied in the freedom to craft your own reality, the goal of living communally seemed more guided by building a meaningful, actualized life for oneself. This does not mean that it isn’t countercultural. When asked if they ever faced judgment or pushback by family, friends, or coworkers regarding their living situation, the response was mixed. One interviewee claimed that her parents explicitly didn’t want her living in her intentional community emphasizing their misunderstanding of her lifestyle. Another interviewee was raised in a co-housing community from a young age thereby perceiving it as a

norm, and one implied that his family and coworkers didn't seem to care. Though freedom is fundamental to American ideology, freedom to radically transform one's living situation isn't creatively exercised by the majority of Americans. Having grown up in detached, single-family homes, we still harbored doubts about certain elements of intentional community. Visiting, eating, and conversing with intentional community members was invaluable in overcoming internal biases that would've otherwise clouded our investigation of this mode of living.

Another avenue of thought we considered for questioning the main attractive factors for living communally was the idea of intentional community as an antidote for isolation. In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General put out a national advisory entitled Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation. It reports dramatic decreases in hours per month of social engagement with others (family, friends, companions) over the past 20 years and warns of its effects on mental health and wellbeing. We wondered if people joining intentional communities during this time might have done so in response to a yearning for connection and companionship. With this in mind, we asked our interviewees about their relationship to loneliness before and after joining an intentional community. Some responses did match this narrative. In describing her life before engaging in the intentional community lifestyle, one interviewee found herself feeling, "...really lonely, really isolated, [and] really depressed" and said that her current lifestyle had brought her friends and an ideological and spiritual community. More often, however, social isolation did not seem to come up as a precursor to communal living. The more common narrative involved individuals experiencing communal living in more casual settings (like shared living arrangements during college) realizing that living together with others enriched their lives in some way, and then actively seeking out more formal and organized arrangements so that they could continue to pursue a communal lifestyle of their choosing.

Beyond why people live together in intentional communities, our research enlightened us on how people do so successfully. The four intentional communities interviewed for our research demonstrated that it requires members with dedication, organization, and strong

communication/social skills as well as problem-solving competency for an intentional community to survive and flourish. All four communities have clearly defined organizational structures for decision-making that seem to directly correlate with how many people are sharing space and how much shared activity occurs in the community. For example, Qumbya Bowers has the most people living under one roof, share meals most frequently (once a day), and has the highest concentration of people sharing space. To manage this, community meetings are held weekly where community members make decisions democratically with one vote per person and the opportunity for any member to raise requests or issues for voting. The Covenantal Community Housing co-op of Woodlawn on the other hand consists of apartments and demands much less sharing of space and resources by occupants. In this community meetings are held monthly rather than weekly and are structured by representational committees whose members are voted in rather than having every member vote on all community decisions. All four communities had distinct organizational structures that would not be possible without dedicated and organized members.

Another theme that is present in all four communities is a strong connection with the larger neighborhood. This manifests in a variety of ways, from the Sophia Community's practice of political engagement through such practices as communal letter-writing exercises to local representatives, to the Covenantal Community Housing co-op of Woodlawn's devotion to prioritizing prospective applicants from vulnerable populations or who are at-risk for being forcefully displaced from the neighborhood. Neighborhood engagement also takes the form of more creative outreach such as with open mic events put on by the Fireplace community and thrifted clothing sale neighborhood pop-ups put on by members of Qumbya Bowers. A shared theme throughout all four communities is that by living together, life becomes more affordable, so members don't need to work as many hours each week as most Americans. In this way, intentional community members have more time to be active and engaged citizens, creatives, and neighbors.

These communities provide examples of styles of living that allow individuals to pursue meaningful, intentional, and gratifying lives. They stand in stark contrast to how many Americans live today in single-family, detached homes which are conducive to social isolation, are not environmentally sustainable, and are becoming less and less affordable to most of the population. Our journey takes inspiration from these intentional communities to imagine how we can use architecture as a force of freedom in experimentation to radically change the way we live. The uniqueness of each community in this research reveals flexibility in this living model. Living together can occur at a variety of levels of space sharing and commitment, it can be urban or rural, it can involve few people, or it can involve many. Living communally does not stifle individuality and personal freedom, on the contrary, it can enhance it. Architects, designers, and other adjacent creative leaders need to consider unique and creative ways that people live, organize, and occupy space to better design for a future in which Americans can lead autonomous, sustainable, and meaningful lives. In a world riddled with pessimism and cynicism for the future, this experience has shed light on a healthy, structured, and passionate culture of people who are taking the task of how they will live on this earth into their collective hands.

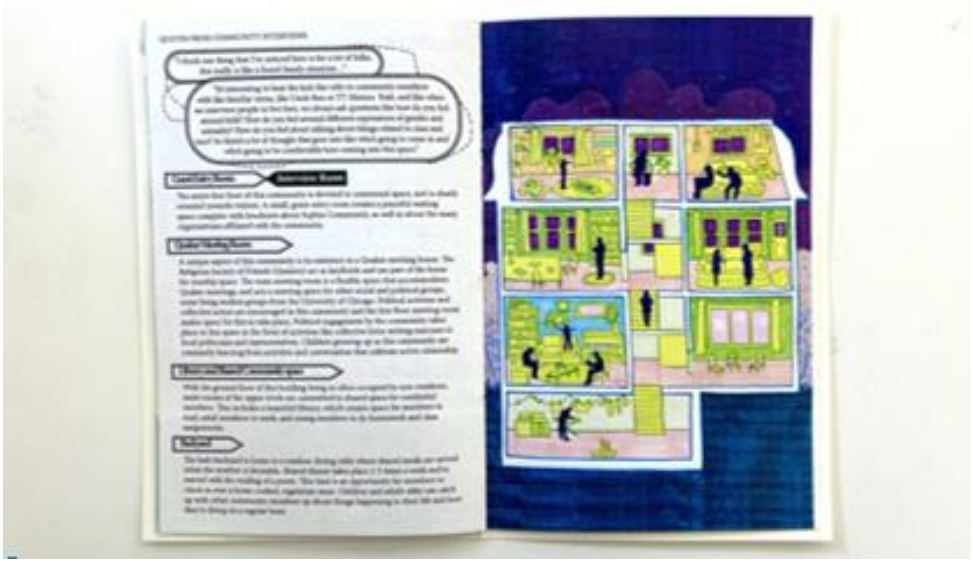
CHAPTER FIVE - DOMESTIC PUBLIC SPACES OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

ZINE BUILDING AS SHARED INTENTION

From our initial proposal, we intended for the findings of our research to be shared amongst our peers and the larger architecture community at Syracuse University through the production and dissemination of physical, handmade zines. Multiple aspects of zines fit the larger narratives and ambitions of this work. For one, their graphic quality allowed for the inclusion of hand-drawn elevations and sections of each intentional community which aimed to connect with the architect/designer audience. This same quality allowed for the inclusion of experimental representations of data such as perceived ratios of public and private spaces across each community (figure left). Zines are also almost always self-made and self-published artifacts and historically served as a medium of communication among various subcultures. These qualities align with the 1960s influences of this project in regard to knowledge sharing and production for the sake of self-expression, and self-actualization rather than financial profit. It also taps into the quality of freedom as the ability to create new realities, in this case through the ability to express and potentially pursue common ideas. Another benefit that presented itself through this medium was the ability to make the production of the artifacts themselves a communal act. The pages needed to create seventy-five individual zines were printed for distribution, totaling 600 pages that needed to be trimmed, folded, organized, and bound. This much work would have taken hours over multiple days for two students alone. We took this opportunity to take inspiration from our research and decided to host a zine-building night in the domestic space of our college apartment. We reached out to friends and colleagues to help assemble our zines and (with the promise of a provided shared dinner) were able to bring together a substantial team. Instead of the physical work of putting 75 zines together being a laborious, overwhelming process, it ended up being a lighthearted social event lasting less than

two hours. Something that could otherwise have been seen as a chore became a memorable experience through the act of sharing it with good company with a common goal.

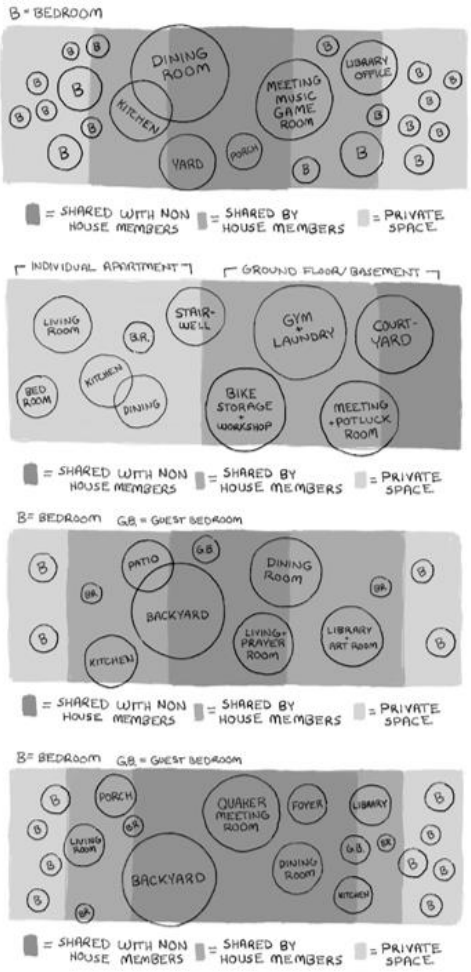
Cover and Back of Zine



Zine Spread

KNOWLEDGE SHARING

The site of distribution for our zines was the central atrium of Slocum Hall, home of the School of Architecture at Syracuse University. This space is regularly used to host lectures, academic conversations, and various exhibitions; hence it is already widely understood as a place of knowledge production. It is also a very public and largely traversed space within the building. For these reasons, we deemed it the best space to set up a temporary exhibition space to distribute zines as well as hold conversations with interested individuals about our research. Similarly to how intentional communities often subvert conventional expectations of space by using private, domestic spaces such as living rooms and dining rooms as shared, semi-public spaces amongst the community, we too wanted to subvert preconceived understandings of the space of our exhibition. To achieve this, we temporarily redesigned Slocum's atrium into a domestic, living room-inspired space. This involved softening the space with a large rug, adding cushioned furniture, putting out baked goods and fruit, and having everything revolving around a central table for zine distribution and discussion.



As hoped, this exhibition attracted curiosity and cultivated a variety of interesting conversations during its two-day run. At least one researcher was present at the table to field questions and facilitate discussion from 9:00 am to 6:00 pm during both exhibition days. Some students would stop by only briefly and thumb through a zine only to put it down and move on to their next destination. Many others, however, were interested enough to come up and ask what we were doing. On several occasions, this curiosity led to students taking a seat at our table

and either taking the time to read parts of the zine in full, asking us questions that lead to unique conversations, or a mixture of both. As they did this, we would make note of what they said or were thinking about. Most students had not heard of the term “intentional community” before but had some connection to concepts of shared living or other aspects from the zine that they seemed interested in discussing. One student had visited a Shaker Community and was inspired by their commitment to craftsmanship and furniture making. This student was intrigued to hear about the creative aspirations of many modern intentional communities and the ways in which shared resources could make creative work like furniture design more accessible. Another student spoke about how living with friends in college is something that she cherishes deeply and how she feels sad to think that moving on from college will likely mean having to give up the social connection of shared living. She expressed interest in the ways that intentional community living could maintain social connectedness in later stages of life. Another reoccurring theme in the responses to our exhibition was a consistent appreciation of shared domestic space for rest and socializing in the public space of Slocum Hall. “I wish this was here all the time” and “they should create a permanent space where students can rest and share ideas” were reoccurring sentiments. While less related to intentional community and shared living, these comments spoke to a larger issue of lack of spaces to gather.

This exhibition was a knowledge-production exercise for us as the researchers as well. Our thesis advisor invited a friend to come and experience our exhibition who is very deeply involved in L'Arche, USA, an organization that operates 79 living communities across the United States with a focus on housing and supporting individuals with special needs. The communities run by this organization fit the intentional community model but operate at a much larger scale than that which we studied. Though she does not live in an intentional community, her career revolves around the organization and management of an international organization that operates shared living communities with a focus on providing structured living for individuals with various disabilities. Part of her work focuses on collecting all the voices of the community to facilitate equitable decision-making. This recalls our experience in Chicago with communities' holdings evenings of shared decision- making. She spoke extensively about the intricacies of operating large-scale (50+ people) intentional communities and the nuances that become vital when taking into greater consideration different elements of shared living through the lens of disability needs. Living in intentional communities with mental or physical disabilities was only

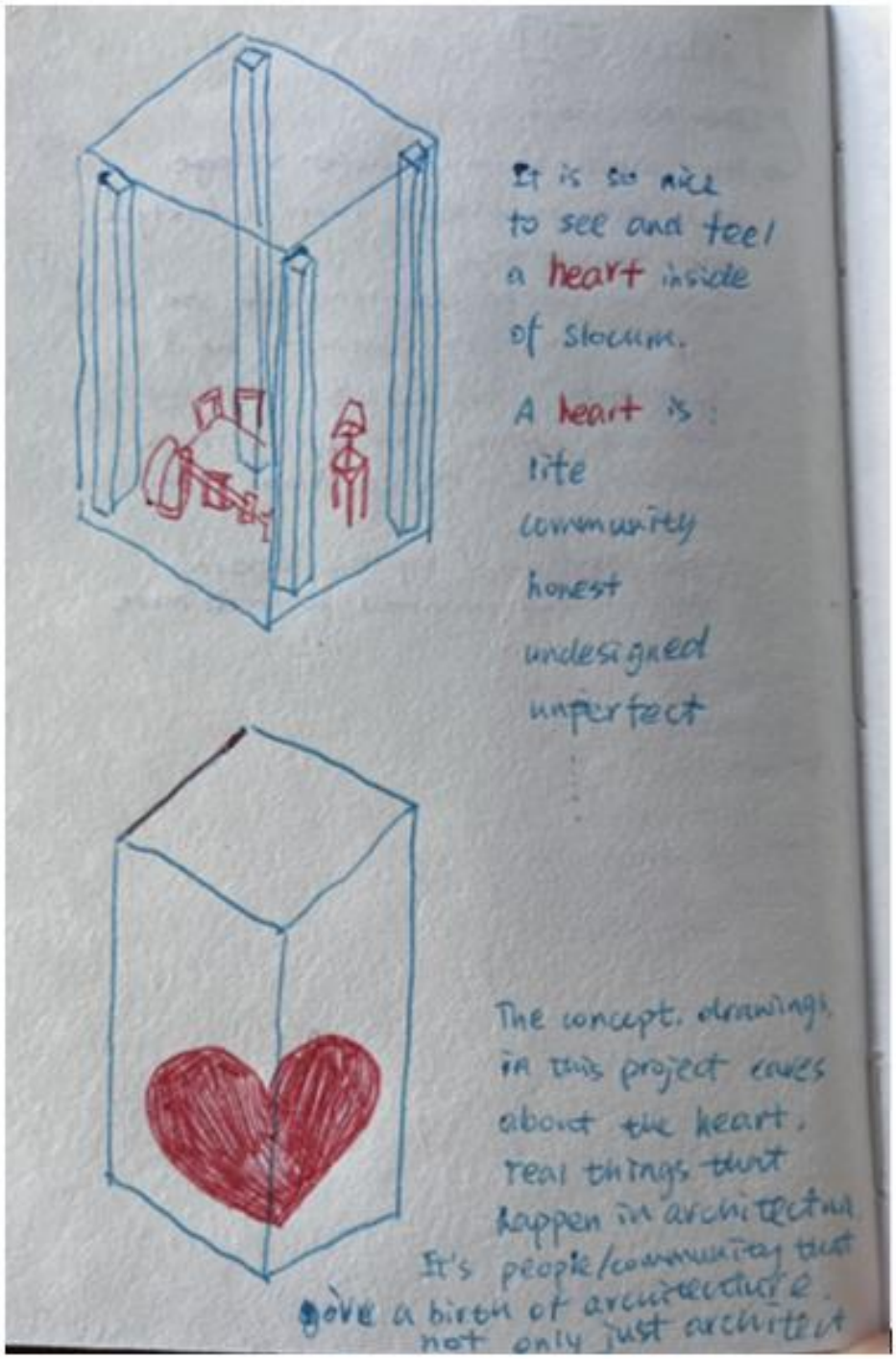
discussed in one of our five interviews. Thus, being more extensively informed by someone whose career revolves around this aspect deepened our understanding of the diverse realities of communal living.

One of the limitations of this research came in reaching the target audience of teachers and professors, in addition to students. One architecture professor came up to the display table and stayed long enough to share his impressions on intentional community. He had heard of the term before and was even familiar with the Foundation for Intentional Community website. What was striking to him about the intentional community movement was how groups of people with sometimes completely opposite radical ideologies were all present under the same title of "intentional community" and advertised on the same data base, the ic.org website. He went on to remark that he found it interesting when he came across a webpage on the ic.org website for a conservative Christian community posted in the same manner as a radical liberal community, with such mundane information as "number of meals shared a day" and "are pets allowed" making up a large portion of both pages. For the most part, however, professors did not engage with our installation nearly as much as students did. Not one took a seat or held a conversation that was more than quick back and forth remarks. We cannot be sure for what reason professors were reluctant to engage or show curiosity towards our display. What we can say is that it was students who were far more interested in exchanging ideas around the topic of our research in the space of the atrium over our two-day display.

The content and implications of this research are deeply connected to the discipline of architecture. The original interest for this project was sparked in an architectural history class which introduced the radical new ways of living that architects and designers were developing and testing during the 1960s. By conducting further research, we found that experimentation in models of shared living goes far further back in history than the counterculture movement and is deeply engrained in the fundamental freedom of designing how humans live together. After investigating how people are continuing these legacies, it is clear that there is still a movement

of people who are using their freedom to creatively design how they live with others. The people we interviewed were highly intentional with how they shared, designed, and allocated the space they live in. It was inspirational to see and learn from people continuing the legacy of movements we were taught about as students in an architectural history class. This did raise the question, however, why is it being taught as if it does not still exist?

The intentional community model is one that can host a vastly diverse number of members, spaces, ideologies, and degrees of commitment. It is suited for confronting issues of housing affordability, which has been a rising concern for many urban areas across the US. Through our research we found that intentional communities can create strong intergenerational connections, foster political activism, and encourage engaged citizenship with neighborhoods and cities. It is also a more environmentally sustainable model of living through the sharing of utilities, tools, and space. Most interestingly for us as designers, the intentional community model seeks to radically reimagine how we occupy the space in which we inhabit. Over the course of our research exhibition, we found that architecture students are interested in the aspirations and opportunities presented by intentional community. With this knowledge, it must be questioned how we reintroduce the radical design lessons from communal living movements into the discipline of architectural design.



Participant Note from Exhibition Registry Book

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