“That Bigger-Than-Me Kinda Thing”: Interdependence and Affective Wellness in the Berkeley Student Cooperative

by

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Introduction.

31 Toad Lane

It is 1844 and twenty-eight English weavers ranging in age from their late teens to their late sixties sit together in a dimly lit room. While the mechanization of production continues to replace more and more laborers with cold, untiring machines, the weavers are forced to search for a way to survive. They watched the soldiers coming home from war to a dark and jobless England. The soldiers found that the loom no longer needed the weaver to weave. It is 1844 and the sky is clouded with soot.

And that great cooperator, William King, wrote:

The factory workers’ “best days have been given to enrich their masters”

while “their worst days remain as a portion for themselves…”

And all the while the rich are growing richer.

“...Nevertheless let [the laborers] not despair.” he continued.

“Let them learn to look upon each other as friends—not as foes: as friends, working for one another, and enjoying the whole produce of their labour, not as foes, working against each other, and so giving the greater part of the produce of their labour to their masters…”

It is nighttime and the Rochdale weavers gather. They are sitting together by
candlelight. “What next?” They say. “Where will we turn?” They think of the Fenwick Weavers. They remember that, in 1769, the weavers formed a cooperative after discovering the economic benefits of pooling their resources and purchasing goods collectively...

“As their masters cannot make them independent, let them look to one another” (Mercer 922:4).

And the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers is born. The group gathers enough capital to open a store at 31 Toad Lane in Rochdale, Lancashire where they sell basic provisions: flour, sugar, oatmeal, candles, and butter. The Pioneers are committed to pricing their goods fairly and sharing the venture’s profits with all members. And the provisions are high quality and pure.

Universal suffrage is still a distant dream in 19th century England, but the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers abides unwaveringly by its commitment to allowing all members to vote. “One member, one vote,” they say. “31 Toad Lane belongs to us all.”

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Cooperative Pioneers and Their Principles

I did not hear the story of the Rochdale Pioneers until about two weeks after I flew to California and joined the Berkeley Student Cooperative (BSC). When I began my ethnographic research on which this thesis is based, I thought I would be exploring the ways in which the BSC as an organization is both radically opposed and inextricably linked to (and dependent on) the competition-based market economy. I was interested in exploring the idea that, paradoxically, the abundance of resources available to the select few individuals with the financial and social ability to
experiment with communalism would be an important factor in the success of an organization that has endured as long as the BSC. Indeed, scholars exploring the cultural dynamics of communalist projects have often written that while attempting to subvert or escape societal structures, many utopian experiments ultimately both reflect and reinforce the patterns (like hierarchy and greed) that they attempt to challenge (Bennet 1975; Redekop 1976; Sebald 1987). The most successful cohabiting communities, some argue, are those that maintain close ties with mainstream structures that provide safety nets for the inevitable emergence of uncooperative behavior that could compromise the stability of the community (Bennet 1975; Redekop 1976).

In retrospect, I realize that I began this project with the impression that cooperative living can only work by mitigating or accommodating some innate self-interest. But a thriving cooperative system, I ultimately found, can emerge in response to scarcity rather than abundance and can arise not only out of a self-righteous anti-establishment ideological position but from a commitment to equality and self-determination, as the history of the Rochdale Pioneers (and the BSC, as I will discuss) suggests. Before exploring this idea, however, it is necessary to situate the BSC historically.

Many point to the opening of the store at 31 Toad Lane as the origin story of the cooperative movement. Though truly remarkable, the Rochdale Pioneers’ project did not develop in a vacuum. Rather, the Pioneers were inspired by the utopian dreams of many early cooperators who responded to the poverty and exploitation precipitated by the industrial revolution by working with, and not against, one
another. Though collaboration has always been a part of human society, modern cooperativism arose in response to the fierce competition and economic stratification taking hold of society.¹

The Rochdale Pioneers drew on earlier philosophies to draft the widely influential Rochdale Principles that still serve as the guiding principles of the modern cooperatives movement (Purvis). Guided by these principles, the pioneers’ efforts were fruitful; within a year the cooperative’s membership had grown to seventy-four and it earned enough to be able to distribute dividends. Within sixteen years membership reached 3,650 and the cooperative was operating seven stores (Young Cooperatives March 31, 2014).

Though the world’s political and economic landscape has changed in many notable ways since the time of The Rochdale Pioneers, their story is still resonant today as financial systems continue to entrench devastating economic and social inequality. For this reason, cooperatives inspired by the efforts of the Rochdale Pioneers have established themselves worldwide; in 2008 more than 120 million people were part of some form of cooperative enterprise in the United States alone (Curl 2009:1). Having been adapted slightly by the International Cooperative Alliance, today the Rochdale principles read as follows:

**1st Principle: Voluntary and Open Membership**
Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to

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¹ One of those early utopian dreamers was Robert Owen, a 19th century British social reformer who advocated the formation of communities based on cooperation, shared labor and profit, and equality. Though ultimately unsuccessful, Owen’s utopian experiment, New Harmony, which he established in Indiana in 1825 after immigrating to the United States, laid the foundation for many future ventures. Three years later William King began circulating a publication entitled *The Co-operator* in which he advocated for mutual aid and the formation of small, cooperative communities (Purvis).

² A consumer-owned cooperative is owned and run by those who stand to benefit from its services. Many credit unions, housing co-ops, and food co-ops are examples of this kind of
use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

2nd Principle: Democratic Member Control
Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and cooperatives at other levels are also organized in a democratic manner.

3rd Principle: Member Economic Participation
Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the cooperative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4th Principle: Autonomy and Independence
Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter to agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.

5th Principle: Education, Training and Information
Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public—particularly young people and opinion leaders—about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

6th Principle: Co-operation among cooperatives
Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7th Principle: Concern for Community
Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members (Rochdale Principles April 9, 2014).

But to what kind of organization do such principles apply? How do they work? According to the International Cooperative Alliance, a cooperative is “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their economic, social
and cultural needs, and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise” (Curl 2009:8). Within this definition, there are many different kinds of cooperatives. A cooperative can be as small three people but has no upper limit on membership; there exist functioning cooperatives with up to tens of thousands of members. As Loren explained to me, cooperatives value “sharing resources, both tangible and structured (like food and utilities as the BSC does) and intangible—support networks, friendships, etc.” (McIntyre 2013).

Unfortunately, the rich story of American cooperation and collectivity is often forgotten by traditional history curricula, overshadowed by the dramatic social restructuring precipitated by the industrial revolution. Though history books often make some mention of communal experiments in the context of Jacksonian Era Reform, cooperative ventures are largely dismissed as the unsuccessful projects of a temporarily inspired and patently crazy few individuals. Such erasure enforces an understanding that people are innately self-interested and that economic competition is an inevitable extension of human nature.

But as leading Communal Studies scholar, Timothy Miller, writes in “The Roots of the 1960s Communal Revival,” cooperativism is deeply woven into the fabric of American history, running parallel to the mainstream American market and impacting the course of countless American lives. The country has periodically

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2 A consumer-owned cooperative is owned and run by those who stand to benefit from its services. Many credit unions, housing co-ops, and food co-ops are examples of this kind of cooperative, as was the cooperative established by The Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers. A cooperative is producer-owned when members jointly purchase the means to produce and distribute a particular product (for example, dairy farmers might cooperatively own milk processing facilities). A worker-owned cooperative is a cooperative that is owned and managed by those in the employ of the business (Types of Cooperatives). This model is often considered a more equitable alternative to what curl calls the “authoritarian structure” of the hierarchical “Boss System” (Curl 2009:10) that gives workers little or no say.
experienced booms in the establishment of cooperative enterprises, a trend that tends to correlate with the onset of widespread economic hardship as people attempt to cope with hard times (Miller 1992). Cooperation is—and has long been—an attractive alternative to economic competition, exploitation, and waste.

**A Cheap Place to Live: History of the Berkeley Student Cooperative**

In this respect, the BSC was no different. When the organization’s founders established the Berkeley Student Cooperative (BSC)—originally known as the University of California Student Cooperative Association (UCSCA) and later the University Student Cooperative Association (USCA)—they were responding to the extreme poverty precipitated by the Great Depression. Indeed, following the collapse of the stock market in late 1929, cooperativism and other collective forms of “self-help” emerged as what John Curl calls a “spontaneous mass movement,” with the San Francisco Bay Area as one of its primary epicenters (2009:164). In the years leading up to the formation of the BSC, cooperatives, such as the Pacific Co-operators’ League of Oakland and the Unemployment Exchange Association (UXA) were cropping up everywhere (Curl 2009). It was in this context that Harry Kingman, director of the Young Men’s Christian Association affiliated with UC Berkeley, met with fourteen freshmen at Berkeley to discuss the possibility of organizing a housing cooperative for students. Kingman was concerned by the fact that poverty was preventing potential students from enrolling in college or forcing many of those who

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3 According to the BSC website, the name was changed first in the 1950s when a new law prohibited the use of the name “University of California” in the name of any private organization, and again in 2007 to reflect the fact that much of the organization’s membership is comprised of undergraduate students who do not attend University of California Berkeley (History April 9, 2014).
had enrolled to drop out. While the small percent of the campus community comprised of the sons and daughters of the well-to-do lived comfortably, the vast majority of students struggled to make ends meet.

Intrigued by Kingman’s idea, the founding members of the UCSCA contacted Mrs. Annie Dickson, a woman involved in local churches, and persuaded her to help them run a cooperative boarding house for students in need. They agreed that the organization would provide meals for her family, and in exchange Mrs. Dickson would do the shopping and food preparation for the men, ten of whom were charter members and twelve of whom joined the cooperative before the end of the spring semester of 1934. As members of the UCSCA, the men were also responsible for completing four hours of chores a week. That first semester the boarding house ran smoothly and the UCSCA members began planning to expand membership (Lillian 1971).

* * *

**UCSCA on the Radio**

*It is the summer of 1933 and a group of Berkeley undergraduates manages to secure a little bit of radio airtime with the help of their friend Harry Kingman. Their clothes are patched and none can remember the last time he had a proper haircut. And they think about the future of the UCSCA. “So far, so good,” they say to each other, and “why stop here?” And they formulate a plan in a moment of inspiration. They say, “others will join us,” and “this is just the beginning.” The success of their efforts reinforces their belief in the power of cooperative frugality and they think, “why not let others get involved?”

Or maybe the idea does not come to them in a moment of inspiration. Maybe
expansion has been their plan from the beginning, what they wanted to build from the
day they sat together and decided that enough is enough. Maybe they know that their
idea will spread like wildfire. Or maybe they think the association is temporary,
something to keep students in school until times are better. Somehow or other the men
are ambitious and determined. Or maybe they are cautious and uncertain. But still
they push forward.

So in the summer of 1933 this rag tag bunch of undergraduates manages to
secure a little bit of radio airtime. They extol the virtues of cooperation and they
encourage listeners to join in. They say that they are not letting poverty keep them
from their education. And their voices carry over the airwaves and reach the ears of
penniless students all across Berkeley. It is a time of great need.

And their proposal is enticing: so enticing that suddenly the University of
California Student’s Cooperative Association finds itself with a much larger pile of
inquiries from prospective members than they had expected. So, as the summer draws
to a close, the search is underway for a larger space than the home of Mrs. Annie
Dickson. Then 2714 Ridge Road goes up for lease and the students know exactly what
they’ll do. The building is perfect; it is spacious, and it is one block north from
campus. It looks to the men like home. And practically overnight the UCSCA
membership more than doubles.

So begins the story of Barrington Hall, and so begins the eighty-year history
of the Berkeley Student Cooperative. From its inception the organization has been
responsive to changing economic and cultural times. All the while it has been steadily
expanding to meet the ever-increasing demand for affordable student housing.
Hoyt Hall and the BSC Today

Hoyt Hall, the site where I conducted the research on which this thesis is based, was founded in the Spring of 1953 when the UCSCA purchased a former inn for 50,000 dollars, which included the land, furniture, and the building itself. Even after most of the cooperative houses became co-ed beginning in the late 1960s, Hoyt (whose members are referred to as Hoytians) remains primarily a women’s space. During the school year the house is designated a cooperative for students who currently identify as female, have in the past identified as female, or plan on identifying as female in the future. During the summer, Hoyt is coed (Lillian 1971).

Today the BSC as a whole consists of seventeen cooperative houses, ranging in size from seventeen members to one hundred forty-nine members; and three apartment complexes, ranging in size from twenty-six to two hundred fifty-nine members. The organization currently serves about 1,300 members. Each individual community is connected to the overarching organization operating out of the BSC Central Office (CO). An integral component of the BSC’s central management is the Board of Directors, a group of students who, after being elected by the co-op’s membership, work with permanent staff members to create policy and appoint executive level staff (such as the executive director) who are responsible for implementing policy. In the interest of organizational transparency, all members of the BSC are entitled to attend Board of Directors meetings if they choose.

Despite the fact that central management is to integral to the functioning of

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4 Most of the houses became co-ed after the construction of The Ridge Project, later named Casa Zimbabwe, which was the first coeducational student living space at UC Berkeley (McIntyre 2013).
the organization, most important decisions that impact life in the BSC are made democratically within individual houses individual house level during house meetings called “councils.” Council is held weekly during the academic year and every two weeks during the summer. Any member of a given cooperative house can put an item on the meeting agenda and can volunteer a proposal (called a motion) at any point during the meeting. Though it is technically enough to have a simple majority of votes for a motion to pass, members generally engage in lengthy discussions in order to reach a mutually agreeable compromise before bringing an issue to a vote.

Decisions can only happen at council if there is quorum, meaning that more than half of the people currently living in the house are in attendance.

At council, co-opers also make “Community Agreements,” such as where in the house the community considers drugs and nudity to be acceptable. They also decide whether a mural design proposed by a member meets with the approval of the collective and how to spend house funds (during one council this summer, for example, one member proposed that the house purchase bicycle repair tools, including a pump, tire levers, and a patch kit). Emily, a co-op spending her last summer in Hoyt after graduation, explained council to me this way: “We want to make sure that everyone has a say. The biggest concern—at least on paper, as an official standpoint—is that equality be preserved above everything else. And the best way we can think about doing that is democratically. For example, house managers don’t have any more of a vote than [other] house members” (Drew 2013).

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5 This summer Hoyt voted to allow nudity in all common spaces for Hoytians (but not guests) but to respect every member’s right to request that a naked person put on clothes. Members also voted to allow use of alcohol in common spaces but to restrict the administration of other drugs to personal rooms. These policies are conservative relative to those generally accepted in other BSC co-ops.
During council, BSC members also elect managers who are trained and supervised by the central level permanent staff. Managers meet on a regular basis and all house members are welcome to attend their meetings. In exchange for their efforts they receive a combination of workshift credit and rent compensation, depending on how time-intensive their position is.

While all of the apartments are room only (meaning that they do not provide food service to members), the seventeen BSC houses each have a fully stocked kitchen where members are free to eat leftovers and snacks or prepare their own meals whenever they choose. Workshifters also prepare house dinner five nights a week and house brunch one morning a week, which allows members to gather and eat communally. Alex, the Hoyt Kitchen Manager, explained that the house spends five dollars and forty-two cents for food per person, per day. She continued,

It’s not very much but because we have so many people we have a lot of food purchasing power. Things like the cheese that we get from a farmer’s market. We get that for half price because we can get it in big blocks. People who come to visit walk in and they’re like ‘whoa that’s a lot of cheese!’ And I’m like, well, sixty people live here. So that’s the food budget. Usually what I do is kinda calculate at the beginning of each year how much I have per week, which is more important than the full semester and then I have to allocate that. So about five hundred dollars will go to nonperishables and a certain amount will go to dairy, etcetera (Yesian 2013).

Members are able to pay so close to the at-cost price of food because the

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Managers include House President, responsible for facilitating councils and promoting house cohesion; Kitchen Manager, responsible for ordering the house’s food and kitchen supplies; Maintenance Manager, responsible for performing basic house maintenance and collaborating with CO on larger maintenance projects; House Manager, responsible for helping situate members and for intra-house conflict resolution; Workshift Manager, responsible for assigning and enforcing the completion of regular house chores; Social Manager, responsible for planning house social events and serving as point person for issues of consent and drug use; and Network Manager, responsible for maintaining house internet connections.
cooperative’s function is to serve its membership, not to generate a profit for a landlord; the BSC is structured around the belief that while competition benefits the few at the expense of the many, a cooperative system benefits everyone equally by distributing resources in a non-hierarchical fashion. Thus, as noted on the organization’s website, the BSC remains committed to providing “a quality, low-cost, cooperative housing community to university students, thereby providing an educational opportunity for students who might not otherwise be able to afford a university education” (General Information April 1, 2014).

Who Lives in the BSC?

There is, however, some debate about whether the BSC strays from this mission to suit the preferences of an increasingly wealthy membership base. While very few members spontaneously brought up the socio-economic dynamic of the cooperative during day-to-day conversations, a few did express concern during interviews that the environmentally and politically conscious ethos of the organization is preventing it from fulfilling its mission to the best of its ability. Conor, a member of Wolf House, expressed that the BSC “has kinda been moving away from [its mission to provide affordable student housing]. Living in the co-op is becoming more expensive because everyone’s buying organic, free-range food. Very high end stuff” (Carrol 2013). Such decisions, he explained, are making the co-op less and less accessible to students who cannot afford the cost of such expensive goods. Brendon, a rising senior working in CO, explained that because the three co-op apartment complexes run by the BSC do not offer food service (and are thus significantly
cheaper), they have “the most EOP—Equal Opportunity Program—students” (Melendez 2013). Presumably this distribution of students occurs because many feel that they can spend less money buying their own food than by paying the extra cost of living in a BSC house with food service (which is possible, Margie explained, if you are “living the ramen lifestyle” [Guillory 2013]). In an email, Loren, a summer Hoytian and member of the BSC Board of Directors, explained, that

Legally7 our mission focuses on providing edu opportunity for univ students possibly not otherwise able to afford univ edu. However some or even many members of the organization see it broadly as a political organization [that is] counter-cultural, socialist or anarchist in nature that stands against injustice, esp. capitalist. These ideas can at times completely remove the focus of providing affordable housing to students not otherwise able to afford univ to focus on political concerns [sic] (McIntyre 2013).

Margie, a former Hoytian who lived in the BSC in the 1970s and then worked for CO for forty-five years, argued that the shift towards an increasingly affluent membership base corresponds with the increasing cost of tuition of college tuition. She explained that this phenomenon accounts for the fact that “not a lot of students come [to UC Berkeley] from that blue collar background of the trades where you work your way up anymore.” She continued, “I think a lot of students are coming [to UC Berkeley] from middle and upper-class families and they join the co-op and they’re like ‘hey, I get to be a hippy before I have to go corporate’” (Guillory 2013).

From Margie’s perspective, then, more wealthy students are joining the BSC because college education in general is becoming less and less accessible to students whose families are not wealthy.

The racial makeup of the BSC was another topic that members rarely brought

7 The fact that the BSC’s mission is to provide affordable housing for students allows it to maintain its non-profit status.
up when speaking with me about the organization, which surprised me, me as a student of a private university at which the administration and much of the student body fetishizes (and talks constantly about) racial “diversity” but fails to address issues of accessibility and inclusivity in a meaningful way. By contrast, while the members of Hoyt did seem to come from a wide range of cultural and racial backgrounds, the discussion of diversity did not feature prominently in Hoytian life, though many members did talk about the emphasis the BSC puts on creating a “safe space” for people from a wide range of backgrounds.⁸

Co-opers did, on the other hand, discuss the intersection of ideology and economic practicality in the BSC. Conor and many others observed that the primary cultural ethos found in the organization is a (sometimes paradoxical) combination of frugality, co-operation between equals, and radical liberalness. Indeed, when asked what they think students who don’t like in a co-op associate with the BSC, most members described how the co-ops have a reputation for housing “dirty hippies.” They explained that co-opers’ general proclivity towards environmentalism, unconventional forms of self-expression, drugs, and nudity is responsible for disseminating this impression.

What John Curl calls the “overt idealism” (2009:10) of hippy culture (a commitment to buying organic produce, for example) and the pragmatism fueling cooperativism likely did not converge until the 1960s, when countercultural and social justice movements reached a crescendo. According to Curl, the revival of collectivist forms of community organization (like cooperativism) corresponded with

⁸ Notably, the only person who did bring up the topic of the BSC’s racial demographic during an interview is a student at a private university who was living in the BSC for the summer. She commented that the BSC seemed “pretty white.”
the fact that during the 1960s “almost every social justice movement had a component of collective work and cooperation, and through this collectivity a new generation struggled to find its identity” in a society that many young people viewed as hyper-competitive and hyper-conservative (Curl 2009:204). The influence of hippyism was even more acutely felt at UC Berkeley where the Free Speech Movement captured national attention.⁹

As a result of some combination of ideological commonality and the cultural osmosis that occurred when cooperativism and hippyism intersected in the 1960s, the BSC retains a distinctly counter-cultural ethos reminiscent of 60s culture. But as Conor pointed out, there is sometimes tension between hippy values and cooperative values; the progressive nature of the former sometimes moves the co-op to strive to purchase sustainably sourced produce, for example, at the expense of the BSC’s ability to provide the lowest cost, high quality housing possible.

Since the 1960s, the BSC has also become infamous for its drug culture, likely another result of the merging cooperativism and counter-cultural hippyism. Many co-operators explained to me that these days one of the main things non-co-opers at UC Berkeley know about the BSC is that many of its members experiment extensively with drugs.¹⁰ Margie related to me that this issue has occasionally caused tension

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⁹ According to “A Cheap Place to Live,” the Free Speech Movement began when UC Berkeley students swarmed the police car of an officer attempting to take a non-student political activist to the police station and prevented it from moving for several days. This protest prompted more than one thousand students (some reports estimate that the number may have been closer to four thousand), including many BSC members, to occupy Sproul Hall, an administrative building. About eight hundred protesters were arrested that night in December, 1964 (Lillian 1971).

¹⁰ In recent years, this reputation has embroiled the organization in scandal. A BSC member’s mother sued the organization after the co-oper overdosed in Cloyne Court and was left with permanent brain damage. This incident resulted in the BSC Board of Directors’ March 14th
between members of BSC houses and the BSC Central Office (although most students expressed to me that there is relatively little animosity between CO and individual houses).\textsuperscript{11}

But, despite the fact that “hippy” inclinations (such as a desire to experiment with drugs) play a prominent role in BSC’s culture, most participants in my ethnography still expressed that the primary reason they live in the cooperative are the cost, though many also listed convenience and the chance to live with people with similarly progressive values as important factors in their decision. According to the BSC website, over a third of BSC members come from households with an annual income of less than $50,000 (History), while California’s median household income of roughly $61,000 (California).\textsuperscript{12} Generally, then, I think the BSC holds different appeal for different subsets in the (increasingly affluent) student body. The BSC is engaged in a constant interface with the rest of the world; current trends and events impact and shape the co-op community. Nevertheless, it remains a cheaper alternative to most other housing options in the Berkeley, as illustrated in figure 1.

\textsuperscript{11} She explained that at one point Casa Zimbabwe (CZ), a house particularly infamous for its party culture, was growing a large number of marijuana plants on the roof of the 124 resident building. After a non-BSC affiliated neighbor complained (the plants were apparently clearly visible from surrounding houses—which I find not surprising considering that I could easily see onto the CZ roof from the top of Hoyt’s--CO insisted that the co-op remove the plants. Indignant, the Czars (residents of CZ) removed the plants from the roof one night and placed them in front of CO’s. Margie described arriving at work the next day and not being able to get into the office because of the sheer number of pot plants blocking the entrance (Guillory 2013).

\textsuperscript{12} About eighty-four percent of Cal students are in-state students (University of California: Berkeley April 9, 2014).
Bibi Lee

It's mid-morning and the house's ventilation system is humming. Looking up at the duct Margie tells me that when she lived in Hoyt she learned how to fix all manner of broken fixtures, from radiators with broken valves to clogged up toilets.

I ask her about the BSC's mission. "Low cost quality housing for everybody, that's the goal," she says, and then continues:

We don't discriminate which is a good thing. But it's also sometimes a bad thing. You let in some really squirrely people. And then you end up having to evict them. Guns, sexual harassment, you know, harassment in general. Being crazy. People have had to leave because they've killed somebody else. But you can't evict them for that. You can't, that's a criminal case, you can't evict them because they killed somebody. You can evict them for not doing their workshift or paying their bill which they can't do from jail. And in the late 1970s Bradley Page murdered his girlfriend.

An organization this old is bound the have its share of scandal. In 1984
Bradley Page is accused of murdering his girlfriend. According to police reports, he denies any involvement in her death. He maintains that the investigators forced him to confess.

“I think he’s still in jail. And he lived at Lothlorien, and continued to live there after it happened.”

In fact, Bradley serves two-and-a-half years in the California Men’s Colony in San Luis Obispo before being released on parole.

“And he looked for her when everybody was looking for, what was her name? Bibi Lee? And so he went with them, he participated in the search.”

On the afternoon of November 4th Bradley Page and Roberta “Bibi” Lee leave for a jog in the Oakland Hills with their friend, Robin Shaw. The couple has been arguing all day and, exasperated, Lee splits off from the group; she wants to jog alone. So the other two co-opers finish their loop alone. Back at the car Page tells Shaw that he is going to find Lee to tell her that they are ready to go. Fifteen minutes later he returns alone. He says he couldn’t find her, but that he’s sure she’ll be able to find her own way home.

Margie knows this organization well, maybe better than anyone. But details fade, or are blurred by time. Piled on top of one another they form a narrative that is imprecise, but powerfully instructive. It conveys a certain essence and thrust.
Investigators find Bibi Lee’s decomposing body near Skyline Boulevard in Oakland on December 9th, 1984. She is still wearing her jogging sneakers.

“I think they found her in Tilden park,” Margie remembers. “It was really awful.”

It is 1933 and fourteen students sit together and realize that if they pool their resources they all might struggle a little bit less. But they are not trying to create utopia. They are all just trying to get by.

It is 2013 and I am sitting with Margie in Hoyt Hall. She tells me that this is a place full of joy and trust. But just beneath the surface there are faint traces of tragedy. She explains that a bit of what is here is everywhere, and that a bit of what is everywhere is here. It is a place unlike any other, but, in many ways, just like every other.

“Society, with all of its good stuff and all of its bad stuff, comes to the co-op. You can’t filter it out.” Margie says.

I ask in shock, “Bradley Page really lived in the BSC until he went to jail?”

And she nods. “We had to terminate his contract because he wasn’t doing workshifts. You know, what are you gonna do?”

**Literature Review and Project Overview**

My interest in studying communal living arose primarily from a fascination
with the interface between the lives people lead and how they experience them emotionally. How do we situate the fact of consciousness in a spiritual framework of meaning and order? How do we come to grasp the futility and chaos of life at one moment, and nourish and propagate ourselves in the next? How do social structures promote or inhibit conceptualizations and experiences of wellness? How might the act of cooperation in a communal context impact a person’s understanding of self and even shape their experience of wellness?

My perspective on and fascination with this topic is deeply informed by my personal and peripheral experience with mental illness, which has moved me to query how desire and fulfillment are represented in a socio-political context that places at the center of every person’s existence their own project of selfhood and individuality, and defines said project in economistic terms of competition, success, and failure.

However, discussion of that which makes life worth living is difficult in part because the concepts that it invokes (happiness, contentment, purpose, or perhaps hope for the eventual realization of a different pattern of existence) are vague and amorphous. Each is a complex and deeply personal sensation that is negotiated differently by every person depending on their own cultural situation, life experience, and personal psychological chemistry. As anthropologist Gordon Matthews points out in “Finding and Keeping a Purpose in Life” (2009), it is far easier to discuss how any given group of people conceptualizes and consciously articulates the meaning of well-being than it is to analyze how members of that group actually subjectively experience well-being. Further, personal happiness is a difficult topic to discuss.

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13 In this essay, Mathews seeks to locate a some universal element of “well-being” that can serve as a point of departure in cross-cultural examinations of human wellness, a topic which
because of the universalizing potential of viewing from an anthropological perspective a subject so rooted in evolutionary psychology. In their introduction to *Pursuits of Happiness: Well-Being in the Anthropological Perspective*, Matthews and Carolina Izquierdo (2009) discuss anthropologists’ anxiety over the tension between social constructionism and cognitive psychology has often discouraged many anthropologists from delving into studies that would require the interpretation human affect.

Despite these challenges, an examination of the dynamics of personal well-being is a vital anthropological undertaking, writes Neil Thin in “Why Anthropology Can Ill Afford to Ignore Well-Being” (2009), as our meticulous theoretical deconstruction of relations of power, institutionalized oppression, and the texture of human life has no better application than to help us understand how humans enact satisfying existences while allowing us to grasp how this pursuit is complicated, frustrated, and obstructed. To be “humane,” writes Thin, anthropologists must begin concerning themselves with the well-being of humans and with what it takes for people to thrive emotionally (2009:39). According to Daniela Heil (2009) such research is important because much of the contemporary Western discourse that exists on the topic of well-being focuses on an individual person’s physical and psychological health while neglecting other ways of conceptualizing well-being. This neglect arguably occurs when researchers fail to recognize how profoundly embedded conceptualizations and experiences of happiness are in cultural context (Heil 2009).

But if happiness is a culturally specific phenomenon, how can we even begin
to talk about it? What universal element serves as a point of entry for anthropologists to analyze the disparate ways humans conceptualize and (consciously and subconsciously) pursue happiness and how will we recognize it?

In “Finding and Keeping a Purpose in Life” Gordon Matthews locates this universal within the “existential component” of well-being, writing that “the pursuit of significance itself is a matter of being human” (2009:168). The author uses the Japanese term *ikigai*, which he translates as “that which makes life worth living,” to refer to this concept, but emphasizes that even though not all communities express it using such a precise word this idea exists cross-culturally. What varies between communities, then, is the cultural context that forms any given individual’s interpretation of *hir ikigai* (Matthews 2009).

In North America, the person’s sense of well-being is profoundly influenced by the marketplace. Indeed, in *Powers of Freedom* sociologist Nikolas Rose discusses how the particular conception of personhood that emerges from American fetishization of “freedom” and individuality has a tremendous impact on a person’s sense of well-being. He writes that advertisements attempt “to link goods to individual satisfactions placed within a matrix of lifestyle and social activities” (Rose 1999:86). The marketplace thus contributes to the cultivation subjects who see their own well-being as a personal and private endeavor. Rose writes that “maximum freedom” corresponds with isolation and alienation from others, and correspondingly a profound sense of dissatisfaction with life (Rose 1999).

The hyper-individualist sense of self promoted in the American marketplace contrasts with a conception of self which many theorists have termed a “dividualist”
perspective (LiPuma 1998; Strathern1988; Mosko 2010) whereby the person is “a composite formed of relations with a plurality of other persons” and “a product of the gifts, contributions, or detachments of others” (Mosko 2010:218). The idea that there exist multiple ways of conceiving of the self in relation to others is an important tool in deconstructing the social, economic, and political powers responsible for the formation of the hyper-individualist American self; people come to understand selfhood in culturally specific ways as they are socialized and integrated into particular cosmovisions.

Relevant to culturally situated nature of selfhood is the theory of habitus. Pierre Bourdieu draws on the work of Marcel Mauss and Aristotle to develop this concept; he theorizes that particular dispositions, preferences, and ways of seeing the world (and the self) are internalized through the enactment of particular modes of being. In other words, subjects emulate, embody, and ultimately reproduce existing social structures. Different groups of people (for example, people of different socioeconomic classes) cultivate different habitus based on circumstance. Variations in tastes and sensibilities ultimately articulates distinction between groups (Bourdieu 1984).

Bourdieu’s discussion of habitus is part of an extensive body of anthropological literature on the subject of socialization. According to Elinor Ochs in Language Socialization Across Cultures (1987), much of the discourse on the subject produced during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries drew on Thomas

14 Of course, as both Mark Mosko and Edward LiPuma emphasize, the idea that a cultural perspective is either individualistic or individualist is reductive, as it ignores manifestations of individualism in groups that primarily consider the person relationally, and vice-versa.

15 A person’s world-view that encompasses hir understanding of existential and normative axioms.
Hobbes’ and Sigmund Freud’s understanding of socialization as the process by which society counteracts the subject’s innate violent and selfish tendencies. Though deeply problematic, the idea that humans are innately selfish, I will argue, is still widely accepted in much of Western discourse, as it fuels the neoliberal apparatus structuring an increasingly large portion of the world (Ochs 1987).

Schieffelin and Ochs draw on the work of George Herbert Mead to demonstrate how socialization is not something that happens to a subject but a process in which ze is an active participant. They write that socialization is “an interactional display to a novice of expected ways of thinking, feeling, and acting” (Ochs 1987:2). In this work, the authors discuss the role of language acquisition in the socialization of children, arguing that “sociocultural information is generally encoded in the organization of conversational discourse” (Schieffelin and Ochs 1987:2). In what follows, I will demonstrate the ways in which “sociocultural information” that is “encoded” in Hoyt as a communal place with which co-opers interact and interpret, and in the structures that compels members to fulfill obligation to the co-op’s community. I extend Schieffelin and Och’s understanding of the ways in which children engage with other subjects during the process of socialization to demonstrate how worldviews and understandings of selfhood can be learned and unlearned, supplanted and instilled.

My point of entry for the following theoretical and ethnographic exploration was the incredibly strong sense of community I observed and experienced within the Hoyt community. This phenomenon struck me as particularly remarkable for two reasons. First, Hoyt exists as a cooperative microcosm within the context of an
overwhelmingly individualist society that encourages competition and assumes selfinterestedness to be an innate human quality. Second, this community cohesion exists despite the transience of the organization’s membership; most Hoytians only live in the co-op for between one semester and three years, a rate of turnover I expected would render the development of a unifying collective ethos impossible. In this thesis I will explore how the physical and organizational structure of Hoyt implicitly accounts for these two dynamics through a process of socialization that involves the cultivation of a particular kind of cooperative self.

But in order to establish the variable nature of humankind’s conception of selfhood, I attempt to denaturalize pervasive neoliberal notions of selfhood through a critical examination of how the neoliberal “free,” autonomous, decision making subject is constructed in a culture that celebrates personal choice and individuality, particularly within the marketplace, as a vital tool in every citizen’s personal path to fulfillment. Drawing on Emile Durkheim’s concept of anomie (Durkheim 1893) I will discuss how this conception of selfhood may ultimately result in emotional alienation.

Next I will illustrate how two distinctive features of life in Hoyt—the quotidian fulfillment of obligation to community and the deliberate and incidental sharing of space—function to cultivate an understanding of codependency, rather than autonomy. Though many community members expressed the practical nature of their participation in the co-operative (as one friend expressed, “it was the cheapest living situation; I get government aid but even with that living elsewhere is too expensive” [Almanza 2013]) I observed the degree to which a feeling of

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16 Hoytians moved out for many reasons including because they are no longer students and are therefore not eligible to live in the BSC any longer.
interconnectedness ultimately generates a sense of well-being; members consistently expressed that in feeling themselves connected to a broader whole they experience a profound sense of wellness (as one Hoytian put it, living in Hoyt makes “you feel whole” [Hoyt Survey 2013]). Drawing on Gordon Matthews’ discussion of the universal existential component of human happiness, I will thus discuss how focus on community rather than individual needs creates emotional fulfillment by instilling a sense of belonging, self-worth, and, correspondingly, purpose and a clearly locatable reason for being.

I have divided the following thesis into six parts, which together comprise the theoretical and expository framework through which I explore how the cultivation of a sense of relationality generates the experience of affective wellness. I chose not to work within the more common three-chapter thesis structure because I see this thesis as a unified project whose component parts are interdependent. In this way, I am able to unite content and form; in a composition whose component parts must be taken as an amalgamated whole, I discuss how individual co-opers together establish a cohesive community. I hope this structure will evoke a sense of the complex and layered nature of community building.

Within the analytical text of this piece I have also included a series of vignettes intended to punctuate the reading this thesis with glimpses into the immersive physical experience of living in Hoyt Hall. They are meant to communicate the ways in which I experienced the Hoyt community as dynamic, colorful, and textured. They are also meant to convey the atemporal nature of the Hoyt community ethos.
Methods

This thesis is based primarily on research I conducted during my six weeks living in Hoyt Hall (from July 6th to August 16th, 2013). As a member of the co-op I lived the Hoytian life; I ate, slept, socialized, participated in council, partied, scrubbed the floor, took out the trash, paid social fees, and attended member education workshops in Hoyt Hall. I spent as much time as possible in communal spaces, which facilitated many incidental interactions and spontaneous conversations with fellow co-opers and visitors. I took extensive field notes, with a particular eye to the social character and daily practices of the cooperative.

I also conducted formal interviews with Hoytians and other BSC members. Of the twenty people I interviewed, ten were current Hoyt residents, six of whom held managerial positions and one of whom was on the BSC Board of Directors. I conducted two interviews with members who eat (“board”) at Hoyt but live elsewhere, two with Hoytians who had only recently moved out, and one with a woman who lived in Hoyt in the 1970s. Six participants were residents of other BSC houses, including Wolf, Lothlorien, Casa Zimbabwe, Cloyne, Ridge, and Andres Castro Arms. After moving out of the co-op I gathered additional data through an electronic survey through which ten participants shared personal anecdotes about their time living in Hoyt. In what follows I refer to those who asked to remain anonymous by pseudonyms.

My introduction to Hoyt Hall happened as much by chance as by design. When I began looking for a community that might lend itself well to ethnographic research I remembered hearing about the BSC from a Yale student who spent a
summer in Berkeley taking summer courses. The BSC was a good fit for my project, I found, because membership in the co-op is open to any undergraduate student and the timing of the summer contract period corresponds with the timing summer vacation.

The organization adheres to a policy of “open and voluntary membership,” so admission to the co-ops is determined on a first come, first serve basis. All I needed to do was fill out a brief application and demonstrate my status as full time students (a letter from my class dean sufficed). As part of the process I was asked to rank the co-ops in order of preference. In making my selections I chose among the seven houses that offer food service during the summer (the other ten houses that offer food service during the school year are room-only during the summer) because I anticipated that collective cooking and communal meals would be integral aspects of community formation and would thus offer important insights into what the community values and how it functions. This ultimately proved to be a good decision, as many Hoytians expressed that the dining room and kitchen are Hoyt’s two most important social spaces (“this is a community built around food and sharing food” [Yun 2013]). So CO placed me in Hoyt, a house known for being calm, clean, and conservative relative to other BSC houses, and with an extraordinarily dynamic, warm, loving, and welcoming atmosphere.

17 As stated in the first Rochdale Principle, “cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination” (Rochdale Principles April 9, 2014).

18 Among the houses that offered both room and board, my rankings were relatively arbitrary; though each house within the BSC has its own particular dynamic which is described on the BSC web page, it was clear from the outset that nothing but immersion would allow me to understand what each individual community in the BSC has to offer. As one Hoytian later put it, “Living in the house is what it takes to understand. You can’t really fully understand until you’re fully in it” (Mathat 2013).
As I began settling into life in Hoyt I became particularly aware of the ambiguity of my presence as a researcher. On one hand there were notable ways in which I was stood out; while most Hoytians were from California, attended UC Berkeley either during the academic year or the summer, or (most commonly) were both, I was one of only a handful of students who was neither a Cal student, nor a California resident. The fact that I attend a private university and not a public university or community college made this distinction even more pronounced. In a community whose primary mission is to provide affordable housing for students, especially for those who might not otherwise be able to attend college, and in a place where “a lot of people go to public school because they really, really believe in public school education” (Drew 2013), there was a certain incongruity between my identity as a private school student and the fact that I was living in a place whose ideological ethos is in many ways fundamentally opposed to the kind of economic stratification precipitated by elite private universities. Being an outsider in these ways allowed me to be more aware of certain dynamics in the community—like socioeconomic dynamics—that I might not otherwise have noticed.

On the other hand, however, I fit in with the Hoyt community. As soon as I moved in I became aware of how, as a liberal, academically inclined, vegetarian student with an asymmetrical ‘do, I looked and acted the part of the stereotypical Berkeley co-op. Many aspects of life in Hoyt that might seem odd to many people were thus unremarkable to me (the fact that meat was cooked only very rarely for communal meals, for example); I found that by and large the co-operators and I shared a
cultural language.\textsuperscript{19}

In some ways, fitting into the Hoyt community was advantageous. It allowed me to feel more comfortable around other co-opers and for them to feel more comfortable around me. This made it possible for us to interact genuinely as friends without being excessively focused of the awkward participant/observer relationship. In other ways, however, the familiarity of the community was an obstacle in my research. It made it more challenging for me to think analytically about daily routines and community choices that seem so normal to me that I may forget not to take them as given (of course the co-op comports all food waste!). Further, the fact that I could blend into the community so easily made it particularly important that I take the necessary steps to ensure that participation in my investigation was actively consensual; because it was easy for Hoytians to forget that I was in the house conducting, I worried that I might witness intimate or private communal moments that individuals within the community might not want observed from an analytical perspective. I worried that my presence in the co-op during these moments might represent violation of the community’s safe space.

This concern compelled me to inform the Hoyt community via email that I would be moving into the house to conduct ethnographic research (and that anyone with concerns should feel free to contact me). Some co-opers joked about how it was an interesting experience to be “observed” as part of a research project, but no one expressed discomfort with my presence in the community. Though I often felt a deep connection to the Hoyt community, in most of this thesis I refer to Hoytians in the

\textsuperscript{19} This is not to say that Hoyt members are homogenous, just that there is a certain overarching ethos that unified the diverse community.
third person, as I joined the cooperative with the express purpose of conducting research. I found this prevented me from integrating fully into the community. I use the first person and include myself in the term “Hoytian” only when I am drawing on my own emotional experience.

Image 1: Brittany Mathat and Skyler Wities outside of Hoyt Hall, July 2013. Photo by Charlotte Hyrse.
A Flock of Birds

Turning right, I walk past the liquor store on the corner of Ridge and Euclid. The summer evening sun envelops the neighborhood in a warm glow. Or it is cool and dark, but for the light passing through windows on either side of the street. Or it is morning, and the people I pass are wearing backpacks and carrying coffee mugs or jogging in sweats and “Cal” shirts.

Hoyt is a quarter block up the hill on the left. It is non descript and barely distinguishable from the buildings on either side of it. The main thing that sets the house apart is the flock of birds intricately stenciled in black paint onto the side of the cream colored exterior. Someone painted the birds years ago, or maybe more recently, and we wonder who, and how, and when.

I am walking up the five stairs that lead to the door, noticing or looking past the lush and disorderly plots where Charlotte grows herbs and tomatoes, and where someone grew herbs and tomatoes before her, and where, one day in the past, someone looked at a blank bit of sidewalk and said “let’s build a garden.” Later or before, the same person, or perhaps a different person, places two stout planters on either side of the stairs and plants flowers inside them. Someone paints the planters pink. I walk past.

I am sitting at the top of these steps, sipping water from a jar that once held
pasta sauce but is now a cup, with my back against the wall. I am writing field notes or drafting interview questions on my computer. Someone is hoola hooping barefoot on the sidewalk. If it is dinnertime, we have plates on our laps. Or it is close to midnight and a dozen or so people are sitting on the stoop with their third or fourth glass of wine in hand and we can hear music drifting from inside out into the night air.

* * *

**Hoyt and Social Immersion**

When asked about what it is like to live in the Berkeley Student Cooperative (BSC), one member described that to be a “co-oper” is to “immerse yourself in the tightly knit social scene” (Hoyt Survey 2013). This idea of immersion resonated with me, as it expresses the degree to which community formation in Hoyt fully incorporates the individual, integrating hir into a broader entity that exists as part of, and prior to, the particular member’s self. It was an ethos that I encountered daily; I found that despite the many reasons Hoytians joined the community—including budget constraints and personal ideological alignment to the house’s physical proximity to certain academic buildings—many found membership in the co-op to be socially immersive. Though each Hoytian only remains in the BSC system for a relatively short period in the collective’s history, it was my impression that the sense of community that so fully surrounds them during that time is itself atemporal; it seems to encapsulate, integrate, and radiate the amalgamated experiences of Hoytians past, present, and even seems to anticipate the presence those of the future. It connects them to what one co-oper called “that bigger-than-me kinda thing” (Carrol
Though I could relay any number of anecdotes that would convey the degree to which the individual Hoytian is integrated and invested in the broader Hoytian community, I felt this cohesion particularly acutely during the final council meeting of the summer. I was sitting nearby the House President, Maggie. We were at the head of one of the dining room’s three long tables, which meant that I had a particularly good view of the group that had gathered. The room was quite full; Hoytians shared chairs and laughed with each other as they leaned over bowls or mugs full of lentil soup. Some sat on the floor, leaning against the walls. These people, once total strangers, were now people I knew and cared for, and with whom I had formed memories. And though I knew that in four days time I would pack up by belongings, board a plane back to Boston, and that I would never see many of these people ever again, this last council felt for me both purposeful and personal.

I remember thinking that physical and emotional closeness were deeply entwined in this moment, like bike spokes in the overflowing Hoyt bike room or sweater sleeves in the co-op’s free-pile. I looked out over the room and felt a certain unity with the group that had gathered, with the group taking ownership of the familiar rituals of dinner, of fellowship, of council, and of the resources we shared with one another, things that had been passed down to us and that, if we accepted them, we would pass down to future Hoytians. Every person in the room was equally entitled to eat the food that the cooks had prepared and to occupy this communal space for which we were all responsible, from those who had lived here for three years to those who, like myself, had moved in fewer than six weeks before. Hoyt feels
like home, Esther, a former Hoytian and international student from England who I met just before she completed her year studying abroad at UC Berkeley, speculated, not just because of the people who inhabit it but because of “the organization, and having workshift, and dinner at seven, and everyone sitting down. Because of the routines” (2013). That night I thought about how the “routines” of Hoyt belonged to each one of us, about how they totally immersed us and integrated us with the broader whole. As Esther expressed, familiarity with the routines becomes a unifying “shared language” among co-opers. I found a certain pleasure in my grasp of this language because it meant that I had been integrated into the community. The affection I felt, then, was not only for this group but also for the broader community it represented.

The council proceedings began. Kim, Hoyt House Manager and a rising junior with a quiet yet commanding presence stood up. Earlier in the summer she had told me, “I feel very at home here...I feel protected” (Almanza 2013). She explained, however, that after this summer she would be moving into a different co-op in the BSC because she wanted the opportunity to experience something new and to live in a place that houses both men and women during the academic year. As she stood at council, Kim told us that when we move out we should remember to put our keys in an envelope labeled with our name and room number and slip it under the co-op store’s door. This reminder was a last order of business, the last thing she was responsible for before leaving her community. “I have loved being your House Manager,” Kim continued. “I will miss you so much. Thank you all.” She then began to cry.

During this moment of emotional expression and vulnerability fellow co-opers
stood up and surrounded Kim in an embrace. To me no image could have encapsulated better the community spirit I felt while living in Hoyt than that of our House Manager, surrounded by friends, expressing her love for the collective. In this moment it was clear that Kim was not just a person living in Hoyt Hall but to be part of the collective; the line that separated her as an individual member and the community as a broader entity had been obscured as she ate, slept, studied, fostered relationships, and otherwise integrated herself into the community. I suspect that Kim cried because, perhaps to her surprise, in detaching herself from an entity into which was she deeply entwined Kim experienced a painful emotional rupture.

Part 2. Denaturalizing Hyper-Individualism

The Extraordinary Self

In 30 just seconds, L’Oréal attempts to persuade the American woman not only that a bottle of shampoo represents the height of glamour and can improve her life, but that she is unequivocally entitled to own it. Smiling into the camera, superstar Blake Lively begins, “reveal your most extraordinary hair everyday.” She glides around the frame, coquettishly swinging her hair from side to side as a deep, seductive male voice cuts in: “for fine, thin hair, a transformation awaits. L’Oréal presents volume filler shampoo.” He continues as the camera cuts between neon graphics that illustrate how the product works and shots of the star’s made-up eyes
and cascading hair.

“Our first hair-care with filloxane to actually increase the diameter of your hair,” he describes. Blake’s blonde hair billows in slow motion against a black background. “With volume filler, hair’s instantly thicker. Feels like two times more hair! A transformation that lasts, wash after wash.”

With her hair draped over one shoulder the actor leans into the camera and says: “more than beautiful, extraordinary.” The voice-over cuts in again as an artfully arranged line of up shampoo bottles appears from the dark and tracks towards the camera, as if emerging from an abyss:

“New volume filler from L’Oréal Advanced Hair Care. The science behind extraordinary hair.” At this point the music that has been softly pulsating in the background reaches a crescendo.

And then, as she spins around to face front, Blake recites a variation on the iconic line that has resounded through American television airwaves for more than four decades. It is a phrase that concisely summarizes the very foundation of American consumerism:

“And you’re worth it” (eNovatic TVC April 9, 2014).

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Conceptions of Personhood: Dividuality and Individuality

The tropes that L’Oréal invokes in this multi-million dollar commercial—the social importance of beauty, the possibility of self-improvement, the ability of large corporations to harness the power of science to put products on the market that improve their buyers’ quality of life—are so ubiquitous that almost every person living in the United States and, in fact, much of the world, can expect to encounter
them many times a day. The advertisement addresses the potential customer, insisting that she has the ability to stand out among those around her; others may be beautiful, but by using this product she can be “extraordinary.” Blake Lively embodies this physical perfection, serving as a symbol for the beauty that L’Oréal “hair-care” will allow customers to achieve, or to which they can at least attempt to inch ever closer.

And there is nothing unique about this commercial. I could have chosen any one of thousands to illustrate the ways in corporations like L’Oréal link products to self-improvement and self-improvement to wellness.

The product itself is mass-produced and there is nothing unique about the qualities it purports to unveil. Still, the message of the commercial relies on and reinforces the viewer’s conception of herself as an autonomous individual who is socially and personally defined by her distinct features. It seeks to convince the potential buyer that she, as a discrete individual, can be improved, and that this undertaking is not only worthwhile but an end to which she is entitled; she has value as a human being and is therefore “worth it.” The meaning of “it” in this context is vague, but the viewer is led to believe that the word is code not only for the indulgence of buying a glamorous beauty product but for the satisfaction of having others read on the outside the beautiful qualities she possesses on the proverbial inside. In this subtle way, L’Oréal is able to assert that “Volume Filler Shampoo” does not alter or mask the women who use it, but rather exposes them for the worthwhile human beings they have always been, albeit disguised behind a curtain of thin hair.

For an American subject steeped in a culture in which individual

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20 L’Oréal invented the chemical “filloxane” for marketing purposes.
characteristics are read as the manifestation of deeply personal qualities it can be difficult to imagine any other way of conceptualizing the self. Nevertheless, notions of personhood are deeply rooted in cultural circumstance and are therefore variable across temporal and contextual situations. As Edward LiPuma discusses in “Modernity and Forms of Personhood in Melanesia,” for instance, the Maring people define themselves during the act of exchange through complex interweaving of both “dividual” and “individual” elements. On one hand, each person’s actions are interpreted contextually based on the “field of relations” ze has formed while engaging with other subjects (LiPuma 1998:58). This contrasts with the understanding of personhood implicit in a commercial that presents the idea that a personal choice can correspond with self “transformation.” On the other hand, among the Maring the history of exchange patterns are attributed to the person as an individual agent who may one day choose to act in a way that is not wholly informed by hir constitutive relationships (LiPuma 1998).

Understanding the culturally specific nature of personhood makes it possible even for a person socialized into an individualist perspective to conceptualize a social environment in which the focal point of a subject’s experience is hir role in a collectivity and not, as is often the case in Western contexts, hir own self. We can imagine a situation in which people are not assumed to be constantly acting in self-interest or with the objective of self-improvement, for example, but who focus on maintaining a communal equilibrium. Drawing on LiPuma’s work, I will adapt the

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21 In this piece, LiPuma responds to the body of literature that has been written by anthropologists examining the effect of “modernity”—including globalization and the introduction of Christian religions—on Melanesian understandings of personhood. He problematizes the essentializing duality that has figured prominently in such literature between conceptualizations the person as an individual or relational being.
term “dividualism” to refer to the state of being that corresponds with a person’s perception that hir well-being is inextricable from that of hir community. Later, I will discuss how a primarily dividualist ethos is produced while individualism is deemphasized, or at least reframed, within the Hoyt community, though it is important to note that I am not drawing a perfect comparison between Maring and Hoytian conceptions of self; rather, I am invoking Maring perspectives on self to denaturalize notions of hyper-individuality.

LiPuma further stresses that it is, of course, also important not to essentialize when engaging with the inter- and intra-cultural construction of subjectivity. He pushes back against an anthropological approach that “fetishizes difference” (LiPuma 1998:56), noting that the act of conducting ethnographic research assumes implicitly that there exists some degree of unity within the human experience. It is therefore not necessary, he argues, to view as completely incongruous the individualist perspective that “persons are conceptually distinct from the relations that unite them and bring them together” and the dividualist perspective that “persons are the compound and plural site of the relations that define them,” a dichotomy anthropologists have in the past reinforced while conducting ethnographic research in Melanesia (LiPuma 1998:58).

If, as LiPuma asserts, “in all cultures...there exist both individual and dividual modalities or aspects of personhood” (1998:56), then the person need not be defined as either a) the embodiment of a unique personal essence, or b) a relational being whose selfhood emerges from the ways in which ze intersects and interacts with hir surroundings, including other subjects. Different self-understandings can emerge at
different times and by different actors. What is interesting, then, is the “ontological status, visibility, and force granted individual/relational aspects of personhood” (LiPuma 1998:57) in a given culture, and not by which of the two conceptualizations of personhood it can be characterized.

A Genealogy of Neoliberal Individualism

How, then, does contemporary American society come to “foreground” so emphatically certain individualistic rather than dividualistic perceptions of self? In the words of prominent neoliberal thinker, Milton Friedman, “Liberal” society has always “emphasized freedom as the ultimate goal and the individual as the ultimate entity in the society” (1962:5). Many of the foundational elements of the American capitalist individualism can be traced to religious communities in early America, as Max Weber does in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism. The Puritan notion that God predetermines whether a person will go to heaven or to hell, for example, helped to instill the pervasive conception of people as individual agents whose actions can be read as a reflection of their inner attributes. From this perspective, a person’s social status relates directly to hir inner quality and whether ze is one of the “elect.” Further, Puritan religious belief maintained that those who do not work or who do not make the most of the opportunities provided for them are ungodly. Though the religious basis for this mode of interpreting the world has largely dissipated, the Puritan conception of personhood and the corresponding “spirit of capitalism” has had a profound influence on American culture (Weber 1905).

But even in a society so strongly influenced by Puritanism, the degree to
which the nearly unchecked individualism, fetishization of personal liberty, and resistance to collective responsibility has come to characterize contemporary American cultural climate is unprecedented. What is responsible for this dynamic?

An examination of the economic history of the last century illuminates how American notions of self are tied to a rapidly shifting political climate. In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* David Harvey describes that, since the 1970s, the world has experienced the rapid deregulation of markets and the proliferation of a particular manifestation of capitalism: neoliberalism (2005:3). In the decades following the collapse of the stock market in 1929 and the economic slump of the 1930s the U.S. government took a ‘Keynesian’ approach to fiscal policy, actively intervening in the market to increase rates of employment, stimulate the economy, and develop welfare systems. This economic strategy was largely effective in helping grow the economy until the end of the 1960s, when the simultaneous surge of both inflation and unemployment moved politicians to search for other answers. From this crisis emerged a group of economists who advocated for the deregulation of markets, the reduction or removal of restrictions on corporations (such as environmental regulations), and the disassembling of welfare programs. They aimed to release the capital otherwise allocated to public schools, health care, public assistance programs, and other collectively financed safety nets for use in the free-market (Harvey 2005).

Individuality and economic “freedom” are deeply interrelated and interdependent concepts in the neoliberal economy. The functioning of the free-market relies on citizens’ conception of themselves as unique actors who are socially

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22 This system is often termed “embedded liberalism” because it surrounds “market processes and entrepreneurial and corporate activities” with “a web of social and political constraints and a regulatory environment” (Harvey 2005: 11).
and personally defined by their individual (material) choices. As Nikolas Rose writes, freedom and its attendant hyper-individualist notion of self are together the project of a certain mode of governance that yields the idea of liberty as “a mode of organizing and regulation” in a society in which the citizenry is “made free” through “the transformation of educational practices to inculcate certain attitudes and values of enterprise” (1999:65). If the combined pursuit of personal ends (self-interest) is to fuel the marketplace, citizens must understand themselves to be discrete agents whose successes, failures, and desires are their own; they must be able to imagine wants and be free to pursue them by enacting personal choice in the marketplace. As Rose describes, in such a society “the problem of freedom...comes to be understood in terms of the capacity of an autonomous individual to establish an identity through shaping a meaningful everyday life” (1999:84). Corporations like L’Oréal, then, rely on the consumers’ belief that their individual qualities are a profound reflection on their lives and that their position as economically free people allows them to seek self-betterment by choosing the products best suited to them as individuals.23 Further, the widespread neoliberal belief in the decontextualized individuality of each person has both produced, and garnered support for, policy makers who dismantle welfare programs on the grounds that that all people should, in the words of Milton Friedman, assume “responsibility for [their] own destiny” (Friedman 1962:2).

Not only is individualism “foregrounded” by the free-market system, then, but

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23 Still, despite Western “foregrounding” of the bounded self, it is possible to uncover ways in which certain facets of Western society consider the personally individually. Even within an overwhelmingly meritocratic system of higher education, for instance, advocates for affirmative action policies often cite the systematic disadvantaging of certain groups as grounds for contextualizing academic achievement. This stance demonstrates an understanding of the person as a composite being whose academic performance reflects not only hir innate qualities, but hir status in, and treatment by, society.
it is also framed in moralistic terms. As prominent social theorist and critic of global capitalism, David Harvey observes in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* that neoliberal practices of governance are theoretically predicated on—and absolutely justified by—the belief that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills” (1989:2). Drawing on an extensive body of economic literature, Friedman writes that this free market economic and cultural strategy is necessary for the optimization of individual freedom because only through the free-market can “cooperation” between individuals with distinct desires and interests be achieved “without coercion” (1971:13). Such liberty is, he believes, intrinsically valuable and is achieved by “reducing the role of the state in economic affairs and thereby enlarging the role of the individual” (Friedman 1962:5).

Further, Friedman argues that “new frontiers of human knowledge” are “the product of individual genius, of strongly held minority views, of a social climate permitting variety and diversity” He writes that curtailing them with government (economic) regulation “would replace progress by stagnation” (Friedman 1962:4). The author assumes a teleological perspective on what constitutes goal towards which society should ultimately orient itself; what is important is not promoting a sense of wellness for all people, but promoting invention and innovation under the pretext that humanity can be improved, and can “progress” from a lower state of ignorance to a higher state of knowledge. Well-being, then, takes on a philosophical tenor, whereby the security of some must be sacrificed in order to produce conditions that ensure the advancement of humanity as a whole (according, of course, to upper-class Western
The system works best, of course, if most economic subjects believe, true to Puritan form, that they themselves are members of “the elect,” as this belief discourages them from opposing the system on the grounds that it relies on their economic depravity.

But is morality really behind this economic and cultural shift? David Harvey writes that neoliberalism can be viewed “either as a utopian project to realize a theoretical design for the reorganization of international capitalism or as a political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power to the economic elite” (Harvey 1999:19). Through an investigation of the corporate interests that benefit from free-market economics and their role in its inception it is possible to further denaturalize the idea that the system advocated and implemented by Friedman and other neoliberal thinkers unveils and accommodates an innate free and autonomous human self in the interest of human progress. In other words, though framed politically as a system that empowers the people by casting off the oppressive bonds of government restriction (“a utopian project”), neoliberalism benefits the financial situation of a few at the economic (and emotional, as I will discuss later) expense of many (and is thus “a political project”).

24 Paradoxically, Friedman advocates a system that promotes the interests of the collectivity at the expense of individual quality of life. It seems, then, that he supports a system in which individuality is paramount when it is beneficial for the wealthy, while collectivity is paramount when it allows him to frame disadvantaging poorer classes as a side effect in the pursuit of absolute morality.

25 As a result of the implementation of free-market policies including Reagan era tax cuts and deregulation of industry, for example, the portion of the national income going into the pockets of the top .1 percent of American earners tripled between 1978 and 1999. In 1970 the ratio of worker to CEO pay was 30:1; by 2000 the gap had grown to 500:1, while taxes were cut from 70 to 28 percent for those in the highest income bracket. Meanwhile, as neoliberalism took hold on a global scale, the wealth gap separating the 20 percent of people living in the world’s poorest countries and the 20 percent of people living in the world’s wealthiest countries went from 30:1 in 1960 to 74:1 in 1997 (Harvey 1989).
apparatus appears less like the revelation of a state that is on one hand fundamental to
personhood and on the other vulnerable to violation by “the concentration of power”
(Friedman 1962:2). Instead, it begins to appear like a calculated fashioning of a
sociopolitical climate amenable to corporate interests that entrenches itself by
appealing to and reinforcing established notions of self-evident truth. It justifies
socioeconomic inequality with the insistence that all people are better off in a world
in which progress is possible, all the while denying vast swaths of the world
population access to the most basic material welfare. During an interview one co-oper
explained that cooperativism is a response to this systemic inequality because in the
American economy at large

People like to exploit others. People like to make larger profits on
others. If you own a business, if you can just hire some people to do
work for you for lower than what you’re making, why not do that?
Why actually [let the workers have a] say in how the system is run,
why split to profits up with them when you could keep all the profits
for yourself? It’s about who’s in charge….There are lots of people
who are working very hard and don’t earn enough money to pay for
their daily necessities. Minimum wage is 7.50 an hour [in California]
and that’s not very much at all. There are lots of people struggling to
make ends meet while working very hard while the owners and
investors of the company are making lots of money and profit off of
them (Hammid 2013).

**Freedom, Individuality, and Discontent**

How might free-market policy and its attendant political indoctrination not
only fail to operate non coercively but actively feed a deeply alienating cultural ethos
that denies many citizens not only economic stability but also emotional stability?
Despite the clear correlation between corporate interests, the rise of free-market
policy, and the American fixation on ideas of “liberty” and “individual” autonomy,
neoliberal techniques continue to be so omnipotent and powerful that they reach into our consciousness, informing not only how we behave but compelling us to define and advocate for ourselves in a particular material way. They work by transforming us into subjects who crave a particular type of self-improvement that can be bought and sold, and who believe that the products we own correlate with our ability to realize fulfillment. The free-market, in other words, is not free. It does not respond to human want, but (coercively) individuates persons, then inculcates desire by drawing on and reinforcing a culture of obsessive self-centeredness to convince potential buyers that to be free is to be free to purchase, and that the acquisition of products will allow us to construct better selves. Necessary to the whole system is a profound and unabating feeling of discontent that represents the impetus driving the constant quest for improvement.

And so L’Oréal is able to insist that “you” as an individual, are “worth” indulgence, no matter the cost. On the one hand, the commercial presents its product as one that will help the consumer uncover her inner potential. It begins with an enticing invitation: “reveal your most extraordinary self.” The word “reveal” implies that the consumer at her best already exists, but is hidden by qualities that are less than extraordinary. The message appeals, therefore, to the American preoccupation with asserting ownership over the self and over personal characteristics. The idea that the product works by exposing the true inner self lends it validity in the American eye because the corporation is not purporting to deny any woman her individuality, but rather claiming it can enhance what already exists. It is important that the ad opens this way because it renders the ensuing message—that the customer can undergo a
positive “transformation,” bettering herself by moving from a less desirable state of being to one that is more desirable—acceptable in a society that glorifies the notion that each person possesses an innate self to which ze should be ever true, but is also convinced that some ways of being are better than others. The legacy of Protestantism is here extremely apparent; the commercial appeals to the notion that, though people cannot ultimately change who they are predestined to be, every individual wishes to see hirself as one of the “elect,” and thus strives constantly to be hirself, but to be hir best self, in order to prove hir intrinsic worth both to hirself and to others. Drawing on this framework, L’Oréal frames the process of self-making as one of self-realization.

In “Powers of Freedom,” Nikolas Rose critiques this blind fetishization of “freedom” and “authenticity” in a globalized marketplace, observing that the “norm of autonomy” and hyper-individualism that characterize consumerist culture, and especially neoliberal consumerist culture, produce “an intense and continuous self-scrutiny, self-dissatisfaction, and self-evaluation” as people become acutely aware of and intensely focused on their own needs and desires (Rose 1999:93). In other words, in order for the consumers to be motivated to engage with a market that promises them self-improvement they must be constantly moving from one state of discontent to another so that they can also be constantly seeking to fill emptiness in their lives with material goods. In some cases, products allow them to control deviation from a broadly agreed upon and upheld state of normalcy that exists outside of any given person’s experience of reality. Pharmaceutical companies have created a vast market for psychotropic medications like that medicate away the anxiety, hopelessness, and obsessive-compulsive tendencies—and sometimes the creativity, passion, and
emotional intensity—that together make up “Major Depressive Disorder.” By medicating hirself to normalcy the “mentally ill” subject is able to participate in societal structures (like the office and the school) that are designed to accommodate the propensities and inclinations of the normal person who thinks, acts, and engages with others in particular way, but who does not actually exist.\textsuperscript{26} The “normal” person is not born, but is built by the continuous, unabating self-muting of idiosyncratic tendencies.\textsuperscript{27} Ironically, it is the isolation and individualism brought on by “modernity” that both trigger and pathologize symptoms of depression.

In other cases, consumerist society focuses the subject’s efforts on the pursuit of an ideal that is, like the qualities that constitute normalcy, collectively defined but separate from any person’s lived experience. What is normalized here is not perfection itself but the \textit{quest} for perfection; society insists that we be acutely aware of our faults and constantly seeking to remedy them. This expectation compels the neoliberal subject first to be intensely aware of hir (physical and other) characteristics, and second to evaluate them relative to a socially determined standard of perfection. It is in this comparison that there arises an obsessive fixation on and profound dissatisfaction with the self, as no body or soul can ever achieve a mythical, and thus ever elusive, ideal.

Many co-opers echoed the feelings of dissatisfaction described by Rose. Several expressed that before moving into Hoyt they had experienced the alienation of living in a society that encourages people to focus inward and to consider every

\textsuperscript{26} In \textit{Discipline and Punish}, Michel Foucault discusses the means by which mechanisms of social control individuate people such that their deviation from the norm can be measured and diagnosed (1975).

\textsuperscript{27} A paradox which should move us to ask, is it the patient or the society that is sick?
individual life as discrete from those around it. Anthony, a community college student from Berkeley who saw living cooperatively as a return to “a more natural way of living” explained that he felt emotionally isolated and unhappy when he lived by himself in a “modern” and “atomized” style that left him occupied with the dynamics of self rather than those of community. He explained, “when I was living by myself I would find myself receding into depression. I can’t really do that [in the co-op]. There are always people around looking into doing interesting things, talking about interesting things. They’re kinda willing to push you up when you’re feeling down” (Sherman-Gasseti 2013). The construction of people as wholly individual units goes hand in hand with what Rose calls “fragmentation” and “estrangement of individual from fellow individual” (1999:66), which results in a feeling of purposelessness that Anthony called “depression.” This feeling is relieved when he is able to engage with others and move his mind away from himself to the “interesting things” going on around him.

Brittany, a rising sophomore at UC Berkeley who was living in the co-op system for the first time, also noted that something about the collectivity of living in Hoyt made the experience different from living in a dorm, which she had done during her freshman year. She described:

In the dorms it was easy to just go into my room and shut the door and be by myself whereas living here has allowed me to socialize so much easier...You cannot avoid social interactions in the house, so if you’re not feeling well and you want to go get some food or go to the bathroom or something you have to be able to face people. But I think that is kinda good for you. I know that if I’m down and I lock myself up in my room I’ll stay there and then it will get worse so I think that forcing yourself to get out and talk to people actually helps you bad moods go away more quickly (Mathat 2013).

For Brittany, living in a manner that is physically isolating allows sadness to
be a self-reinforcing cycle; when she feels “down” there is no community to prevent her from retreating into seclusion, which in turn exacerbates feelings of sadness by eliminating contact with other people who might be able to distract her from, and thus alleviate, her distress. When Brittany lived alone there was nothing “forcing” her to engage in the difficult but crucial act of social interaction, which she finds moves her enough outside a focus on her own inner state that “bad moods go away more quickly.”

A hyper-focus on self thus correlates with a sense of isolation from others, which further entrenches a sense of dissatisfaction. In “Forms of Social Solidarity” and “The Division of Labor” sociologist Emile Durkheim terms that isolation “anomie.” He describes how in industrialized society people are necessarily “differentiated” (Durkheim 1973:141) from one another in order for them to be able to efficiently accomplish specialized work. This process erodes the possibility of unification under “an active and permanent feeling of mutual dependence” that obliges individual subjects to an entity (perceived as society or a higher being) that they perceive as being larger than themselves as individuals, and that lends purpose to their lives and actions (Durkheim 1973:184). Without the ability to locate themselves within a unified moral fabric, writes Durkheim, people enter a state of “perpetual unhappiness” (1973:175).²⁸

²⁸ Though Durkheim’s functionalist perspective is problematic in that it is both ethnocentric and teleological, his discussion of social cohesion offers useful insights for any discussion of communality.
The glorification of individualism that characterizes contemporary neoliberal society intensifies this differentiation of subjects, further obscuring the ways in which discrete actors in society are interdependent. The person is forced to consider the impermanence and meaninglessness of any one individual existence: in isolation, every human action of leisure or self-preservation seems infinitely futile. But when situated within a web of interdependence in which every person both supports and is supported by a broader structure, the individual life is suddenly profoundly important. Its significance extends outward, often beyond the point of knowability. This is not to say, of course, that no one in Hoyt is ever depressed. Rather, it illustrates that life in the co-op can be gratifying and healing.
An Entrance

I am unlocking the front door or it is already ajar, propped open by a giant stump that someone brought to the house weeks or months or years ago. I enter the building and the green-carpeted stairs that lead to the second floor stretch out in front of me. In a gray linen dress I am sitting with a group of new friends on these steps. Hoyt is throwing a party. Laughter and music fill the front hall.

Or I am vacuuming the steps. I joke with passing co-opers about the space-pack vacuum cleaner that barely works. To the right of the steps is what’s called the piano and bike room, and beyond that the recycling room and one of the laundry rooms. To the left is the dining room, and then the kitchen and storage closet. I am dragging the recycling bins from the recycling room out to the curb. Ellie is teaching Geena and Jenny to play the ukulele. They pause to let me pass by, as I push the house’s glass, metals, and plastics in front of me. We are laughing.

As I open the door and step into the co-op I can hear someone playing piano in the room to my right and the murmur of voices from the dining room on the left. Co-opers gather, waiting for dinner to begin. Someone at some point in the past proposed that we be allowed to take plates from the kitchen at 6:30 and line them up on the stairs to hold our places. We are gathering on the stairs, as we do five nights a week and as Hoytians have been doing for years, or maybe for months. And then we are filing down the stairs and through the kitchen, scooping food prepared by the night’s cooks onto our plates from salad bowls and pans. I am taking a seat at one of the three long tables in the dining room, and on the couch in the piano room, and on the stairs leading up to the second floor, and on the stoop. We are lifting forkfuls of
food up to our mouths, but we are also enacting, embodying, and generating a powerful feeling of togetherness.

Part 3. Transitory Membership and the Social Continuum

The impact of member transience on community cohesion also merits examination. Some students, like Kim, choose to move into other BSC houses after a few semesters living in one house. Even those who move in at the beginning of their freshman year and never change houses, however, can only stay in Hoyt until they have completed their degree, generally a four-year process. New members are constantly filling spaces in the house, such that every few months the Hoyt community is comprised of a different set of individuals. When I moved into the co-op midway through the summer, for example, I was one of seven new members. Many other new Hoytians had moved in six weeks earlier at the beginning of the summer, which meant that a significant portion of the people I lived with had been in the house for fewer than two months.

One might think that the rapid rate of turnover among members would render a sense of community cohesion impossible. But as a new member I found that a sense of house unity did not build from the ground up with every new set of members to move into the house. Hoyt’s character does not arise simply from the interpersonal dynamics generated by a discrete set of members occupying the place at any specific
time. Rather, new members are implicitly asked by the community to locate themselves within a preexisting ethos and to establish themselves as part of the fluid continuum that is Hoyt fellowship. In this way, the community spirit is felt as stable and atemporal, relatively unmoving as its component parts shift around it. I imagine this concept metaphorically as a riverbed guiding the currents rushing through it. Each current shapes and is shaped by the course. However, despite constant change and the formation of new pathways and the erosion of others, the basic structure of the bed remains fixed. And despite the fact that there is no way to know what it was like to live in Hoyt twenty years ago—or even five years ago—there was a persistent sense that to become a Hoytian is to become a part of something continuous and larger than any individual.

Though Hoytians are asked to locate themselves within a preexisting ethos, the cooperative structure is, in some ways, fundamentally responsive to the individuals who comprise its membership at a given point in time. During council, for example, the votes of new members count just as much as those of the oldest members. According to the Second Rochdale Principle of Cooperation all members in a “have equal voting rights” in the collective. As one Hoytian explained to me “the BSC’s main slogan is ‘one member, one vote’” (Drew 2013), a maxim that I heard frequently during my time in Berkeley.

In other ways, however, new members are implicitly and explicitly guided to conform to the established practices of the co-op, voicing opinions and taking initiative only within a set framework whose boundaries they can only fully grasp after having been socialized into Hoytian culture. As Theodore Caplow observers in
“Goals and their Achievement in Four Utopian Communities,” when individuals enter into a communal living environment with its own distinct set of values, traditions, and practices, they bring with them norms inculcated by the outside world. New members must undergo a process of socialization before becoming fully functioning members of their new community (Caplow 1973:109).

Christina, a rising senior who began living in Hoyt in the spring of 2010 and returned after taking time off from school, articulated clearly the importance of respecting the Hoyt status quo. Of all people I met while living in the co-op, Christina may have been the member most emotionally invested in the community. Every time we spoke I got the sense that she cared deeply about Hoyt and took very seriously her role in helping maintain the functioning of the cooperative. I could understand, therefore, her concern that new members who did not yet know the ways of the collective might weaken the community spirit that had become so precious to her. In fact, if I could say that any one person embodied what the word “Hoytian” came to mean to me, it would be Christina. She was the first person I met in the co-op, as she led the workshift tour to introduce new members to workshift procedures, and the last person I said goodbye to, when she came downstairs at five in the morning on my last day in Hoyt to make sure I was awake and getting ready for my flight.

Christina and I discussed the near continuous influx of new members into Hoyt. She said that while co-opers are “still learning the ropes,” old members lay down the law: “this is the way the house runs. This is the way it goes.” She

29 In this piece, Caplow discusses the relationship between individual and community based on research on four utopian projects. He argues that even in many organizations that are on principle non-hierarchical, hierarchies based on seniority emerge. According to Caplow socialization in this context emerges as a result of a combination of voluntary and coerced conformity to community norms (1973).
continued: “we don’t mean to impose a hierarchy. It’s just that the house goes through a lot of cycles.” Christina said that suggestions from those not yet versed in the ways of the co-op “come from a good place at least” because “everyone is really eager to contribute to the house.” Nonetheless, she expressed that an understanding of the inner workings of the organization is one of the main things that distinguishes new members from old members and reflects the importance of respecting the established order:

“People who have not seen the cycle don’t really get it until they’ve lived here for a couple semesters…. [For example, a couple semesters ago] somebody proposed that we buy a salad spinner. I was anti-salad spinner not because I think a salad spinner itself is stupid, but the practicality of buying it for a co-op is absolutely farcical and stupid and ridiculous… Now, we live in a house where we eat off of things that are not actually plates and that are not actually bowls. So what’s going to happen is that we’re going to have the salad spinner that comes in multiple parts—the bowl part, the basket part, and the spiny parts. There are three parts. How many of us have looked for things that have multiple parts and have had to rummage around for ten minutes? Every single one of us! And I was just like ‘look, for a co-op this makes no sense. What’s going to happen is that people are going to use the basket as a strainer. The bowl part will probably get broken or cracked anyway. We’re not going to be able to find it. So there’s no point in spending this money on a salad spinner!’ As an old member there are just certain things like that that I see come back up everything time… All I can think [when members make proposals like this] is ‘you must be new… here we go again: youngins trying to radicalize and change the way the house goes’” (Yun 2013).

The expectation that new members integrate into the Hoytian lifestyle is articulated in many different ways. Shortly after I moved into the house a fellow new member, Jessica, proposed that we prevent tension surrounding room choice from recurring by establishing different criteria to determine who gets to live in the house’s

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30 When there are not enough plates and bowls to go around (which happens often because people leave dishes up to their rooms or store food on them in the fridges to eat later) people eat off any suitable receptacle they can find, especially put-away container lids.
single rooms. This would mean that room selection would no longer be based on who has been living in the house the longest. After a pause and the exchange of a knowing look between house managers, the meeting facilitator patiently explained that room selection is always done by seniority, and this is the way it is done BSC-wide; a change in this policy would involve a change in the by-laws and lengthy discussion with CO. Jessica’s suggestion was then disregarded as infeasible, and her status as a pre-socialized member served as grounds for its dismissal. Interestingly, it was reference to an established co-op order existing beyond any one Hoytian, not the personal opinion of established members, that the facilitator invoked in explaining why it would be unreasonable to implement Jessica’s proposal. She understood this, and did not push the proposal. Though BSC policies such as the one Jessica suggested changing are created by members, it is only with an appreciation of procedure that it is considered acceptable, as Christina articulated, “to radicalize and change the way the house goes.”

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**Petroleum Jelly and Fifty-Two Army Cots**

It is the summer of 2013 and I am walking up Ridge Road. I am pulling my suitcase up the road’s steep slope on my way to 2519 where the garden is in full bloom and the kitchen is bustling. The sun is at my back and I don’t need anything but a thin sweater: the air is warm and the wind is cool.

I am walking eastward up the hill.

It is the summer of 1933 and the UCSCA members are standing at the top of Ridge Road. Maybe they are looking westward towards the Bay, maybe down the hill, or at the building in front of them. This is their new home, number 2714. And they are
discussing how they are going to stretch the $650 loan they received from the U.C. Club House Loan Fund. With it they need to furnish the whole house. They are filled with the cooperative spirit of resourcefulness they know it can be done. “We will do our best,” they say to one another.

They are in a secondhand store in Oakland, and they begin their search. They will stretch the money as far as it will go. This is the cooperative way. So they are in Oakland rummaging through piles of used items. And under piles of junk there are a few hidden treasures. So the co-opers are buying the necessities, they are buying a library table for $1.50, two blinds for ninety cents, a single chair for $3, silverware for $14.87...

And then they find fifty-two old Army cots for $98.43. The cots appear to be in good enough shape, without need of repair. Maybe they write down their new address and ask to have the cots delivered as soon as possible. Or maybe they know someone with a truck. Either way somehow or other the fifty-two army cots are unceremoniously dumped on the sidewalk in front of 2517 Ridge Road. And there they sit until the house’s new residents begin to arrive. It is late afternoon.

The cots are well suited for the co-op’s purposes but they are not quite ready for use. Someone has covered them with petroleum jelly, presumably to prevent them from rusting while in storage. And now they are oily and lying by the side of the road. As the house’s new residents arrive they choose from among the cots and have no option but to find a way to get it clean. It is a messy job and some new UCSCA don’t quite know what to make of the situation. But they roll up their sleeves and get the job done. No one ever said life in the UCSCA would be glamorous.
Recalling the incident years later Francis A. Smart\textsuperscript{31} calls the ordeal a “fortunate thing.” He laughs and he says that “it gave each of the members who had to do this work a feeling that he really was a part of the house,” that he “belonged there.”

It is 1934 and again there are more students interested in joining the UCSCA than there are beds to accommodate them. There is no longer enough space in 2715 alone, so the members begin to look for another house. Their sights turn to the east side of campus where an old fraternity has packed up and left Sheridan Hall vacant. The co-opers leap at the opportunity to house fifty-seven new roomers and many boarders.

But unlike the UCSCA’s second round of new members, the Sheridanites do not have to spend their first day in the co-op scrubbing petroleum jelly from their bed frames. One of the co-op’s original fourteen members and his wife worked together to put a bed in each bedroom, and to ready them with sheets and pillows. “This pampering,” the slightly resentful, Barrington residents lament, “is bad for the cultivation of the cooperative spirit.”

And Fran Smart recalls, “it seemed to take a little longer for these new members to acquire the feeling of ‘belonging’ to the cooperative group...the hardship which the early members of Barrington experienced proved beneficial in making the boys feel themselves part of a unit.”

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\textsuperscript{31} An employee of the University Y.M.C.A. who is helping the students get their fledgling organization off the ground
The Mystified Origins of Community Practice

New members play an important role in maintaining the underlying consistency in community ethos that allows the cooperative to function smoothly despite rapid member turnover; they are expected to observe and emulate the way established members behave. They observe how Hoytians line up for dinner, do workshift, conduct themselves at council, which knives they used to slice bread and cheese, how they interact with each other in the hallways, which activities are acceptable in which spaces, and countless other details.

The fact that we were provided with such minimal orientation (orientation consisted of one workshift tour, a very minimal house tour, and an online video about the philosophy and decision making structure of the BSC) reinforced the importance of this constant vigilance; members do not enter the community with a comfortable understanding of the rules they are expected to obey. Instead, they are compelled to assume that there is a particular way Hoytians are expected to engage in nearly every pattern of behavior, from propping the front door open (when is it acceptable to do so?), to playing music over the kitchen speakers (who is entitled to use the speakers, when, and what kind of music can we play?).

This mystification of the Hoytian way of life, of the history and impetus behind specific community practices and rituals and the less concrete community ethos, lends the status quo significance and power. No single member can recall the origin of every rule, nor the details of the co-op’s history that co-opers experience diffusely through the culture and traditions they inherit. They can accept this inheritance and become a part of the Hoyt community, or reject it and distance
themselves from the collective. Indeed, the way of life they witness and into which they are socialized represents the compounded product of decades of experiences and changes. The historical details that have formed Hoytian culture ("this is why we do things this way, this is why things look this way") are rarely mentioned, as member turnover makes it such that these specifics are obscured almost as quickly as they are generated. Occasionally longer standing Hoytians relate stories to newer members, but with time these memories are abstracted, distorted, and integrated into lore, such that no one can say for certain what is true, what is false, and if it matters.

But the impact of this history does not disappear. It shapes the particular character of the community, the collective’s spirit, which co-opers feel all around them. The power of this essence actually derives from its atemporal nature; the inability to trace components of the Hoytian way of life magnifies the importance of every practice, generating the illusion that this is how it has always been done and how it will always be done. Every practice carries the weight of the accumulated past.

That is not to say that the culture of Hoyt is totally unchanging. Some members live in the community for long enough to witness significant shifts in character. Christina described: “I’ve seen the co-op transform and seen how the house culture and house personality have changed” (2013). Indeed, members do push back against the established order in an attempt to better life in the co-op or because they have chosen not to integrate themselves into the community by refusing to accept and integrate themselves into Hoyt tradition and culture (individuals living in Hoyt can, of course, ultimately decide that it is not important to them to become an active member of the cohesive community). Proposals come to a vote and changes are made.
endure, others fall by the wayside. It is through this immersion in, (ir)reverence for, and movement within the Hoytian framework that all members become a part of Hoyt’s history. Eventually all of the norm subverting and norm reinforcing decisions that they make while living in Hoyt are woven into the complex amorphous tapestry of the Hoytian ethos, such that their presence will be felt indirectly, yet acutely, for an indefinite length of time.

Hoyt Hall is, of course, constantly engaging with the surrounding community and therefore can never be said to socialize members into people who live completely outside of external systems; Hoytians are still subjects embedded in an individualistic neoliberal culture. They bring with them all of their insecurities and self-focused tendencies, as living in a co-op does not completely eradicate the self-doubt or unhappiness. It would be truly remarkable if such a temporary community could do so.

Nevertheless, the co-op does operate internally using cooperative principles. It is a place in which the congregation and interaction of community members cultivates a particular cultural dynamic different in character from that of the world outside of what many termed “the co-op bubble.”

When I interviewed Esther during a visit to Hoyt a few months after she had moved out, she expressed to me the sensation that the communitive, or community generating, center of Hoyt is produced and perpetuated by, but exists outside of, any given set of members. She explained that when she lived in the co-op it felt more like home than a temporary living situation. She reflected, “the people make it feel like home,” but that, though “the people in the house have changed” since she moved out,
Hoyt “still feels like home” (Roberts 2013). The atemporal nature of the Hoytian ethos reconciles the simultaneous sensation of camaraderie through enactment of the “routine” Esther discussed and the transience of Hoyt’s membership.

* * *

**Lore**

People are carrying their laundry upstairs to the roof to pin it, item by item, on to the clothesline. A torn and broken hammock slumps off to the side. “I don’t know if you’ve heard about Cloyne’s pirate party,” Esther explains to me downstairs in the freepile room. Cloyne is a cooperative in the BSC known for its party culture.

They show up at other co-ops to flyer for their party and things get out of hand. You know, the nature of it being a pirate themed party, they come in and steal things from other houses while they’re advertising. So, they arrive with water pistols, and water balloons, and buckets of water and absolutely rampage the house. They break a couple of paintings that are hanging up. Water everywhere. So a bunch of people from Hoyt break into Cloyne and you know that hammock on the roof? They steal that from them.

The hammock is absolutely dilapidated by the time I move into Hoyt, broken down by some combination of use and exposure to the elements. But it is an artifact of Hoyt history that invokes nostalgia in all Hoytians, whether or not they themselves witnessed the covert operation. One day, though, time compounds this story completely with the rest of the invisible, amorphous, but ever-felt history stored in every nook and cranny of this house. Shortly after, someone drags the hammock down from the roof and onto the curb to be picked up with the trash. She wonders why no one thought to do this sooner and maybe speculates as to how it got up on the back roof in the first place.
Part 4. Obligation and the Cultivation of Dividuality

Respect for one’s obligations to the Hoyt community is a central component of the community ethos into which new members are socialized. In this section I will
explore how such an ethos reinforces Hoytians’ sense of unity by compelling them to situate their sense of well-being within a matrix of others. It forms a dividual understanding of the self while dislodging their conception of bounded individuality by obliging them to be ever conscious of their role in the collectivity. Though the formation of the cooperative system was initially a response to economic hardship that made resources scarce, exploring the social dynamics of a community in which optimizing individual freedom is not the ultimate objective illuminates the ways in which cooperativism is not merely a last resort when individualism is economically unfeasible but a system that encourages a different, more emotionally gratifying way of conceptualizing the relationship between community and the self.

Cooperativism allows members to locate themselves within a collective that requires collaboration to achieve stability and fortitude and prioritizes maintaining harmony within the community. As the BSC Owner’s Manual, a pamphlet designed to equip new members to be active participants in the cooperative and distributed by the Member Resources Department of organization’s Central Office, describes, “Like an ecosystem, we are all interdependent upon one another.”\(^{32}\) The Hoyt community cultivates this understanding of interconnectivity through a clearly established system of obligation to which every member is committed when ze joins the organization. While some of these obligations compel co-opers to consider how their pursuit of individual ends impact those around them, and others require them to contribute actively to the maintenance of the house and community, all inform how community

\(^{32}\) This is not to say that living life with a constant attentiveness to the needs of the collective requires complete conformity; as Anthony described, co-opers “are very open to however people choose to live their lives, in so far as it doesn’t mean interrupting everyone else” (Sherman-Gasseti 2013).
Consideration as Obligation

It was clear from the moment I entered Hoyt Hall that all Hoytians are expected by the collective to be considerate of the needs and preferences of other community members. Nearly everywhere I looked I saw colorful sheets of paper with written and illustrated reminders, invoking the collective to frame individual actions in terms of their impact on other people and on the broader community. One reminded us to pull the water heater out from under the cabinet so we would not damage the wood. Some reminded us to remove hair from the drain after showering. Some signs even explained explicitly the link between one individual’s failure to consider the impact of hir actions and their consequences on others; one implored, “Pretty please always put your bike in the bike room? If your bike is in the way, in an emergency it will become a hazard. And people can trip over your bike, emergency of not.” In this community, individuals are not autonomous actors free to pursue the realization of their every want, but component parts of a broader whole. Notably, the signs found all around the co-op were written and posted anonymously, such that they were not instructions from one individual acting in a position of authority but, through their anonymity, messages from the cooperative entity as a whole to every individual agent.
The ethos that such signs reflect and seek to reinforce is one of accountability to, and consideration for, others. The fact that the community is so transient lends the reminders particular importance in training the cooperative member to think relationally; it can be assumed implicitly that, for most, this perspective is not intuitive and therefore it needs to be instilled time and time again, as members move in and out of the space. Meanwhile, members are also integrated into Hoyt’s *habitus*—its values, propensities, and cultural ways of being—through daily or even momentary enacting and re-enacting of cooperativism.

Despite the fact that I noted the presence of these reminders immediately, I only truly understood the degree to which the Hoytian community takes respect for, and responsibility to, others seriously when I, myself, was found to be acting...
“uncooperatively.” I cannot say that the violation was wholly inadvertent, only that I was unaccustomed to the idea that my seemingly inconsequential, albeit selfish, actions could truly disturb the cooperative equilibrium at the foundation of this institution.

One evening I walked upstairs from my room on the second floor to the upstairs laundry room to load my dirty clothes into the washing machine. I chose this laundry room and not the one downstairs (which, unlike the former option, is not adjacent to anyone’s bedroom) because it was closer to my room which meant that there were fewer flights of stairs for me walk up and down. I noticed at that point a sign that reminded co-opers to use the downstairs laundry room during quiet hours (11pm-8am) because the machines are loud and shake the floor, making it hard Hoytians living in nearby rooms to sleep or study. It was around 9:30pm and, not remembering that I would need to transfer my laundry to the dryer (which would still be running with my clothes in it after 11pm) I began the wash cycle. I realized when I did go to transfer the laundry around 10:30pm that the dryer would still be running well into quiet hours but, not thinking it would bother anyone, I threw the clothes in the machine, put my quarter in the slot, and walked away.

The next morning, my laundry was gone. A fellow co-oper had noticed that the machine was running after quiet hours. She had confiscated my clothes and left me no option but to wait for her to approach me, which she did that evening at dinner. She apologized for the inconvenience and then told me that removing the clothing was the only way she could identify the offender. This was important, I understood implicitly, because when people violate house rules they need to be made to
understand that their actions impact other people, and that that matters in this community. She explained that this time I would not be penalized, but that next time I would be issued an “uncooperative fine” of $13, the amount the membership had determined to be fair the previous year. I was new to the community, and I could tell she felt badly about having to take my laundry in order to teach me this lesson. She brought the pile of clothes down to my room later that night. As a gesture of friendship, she had neatly folded every item. This gesture tempered the tension that might have arisen from the seemingly hostile act of confiscating my laundry, thus preventing me from feeling alienated from the community.

Rules such as the one I violated restricted my freedom to act in the manner most convenient for me by obliging me to consider the impact of my actions on the collective. This community recalled the social dynamics Emile Durkheim discusses in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* when he writes that because society “has its own nature separate from ours as individuals, it pursues ends that are equally its own: but because it can reach them only through us, it imperiously demands our co-operation” (1912:154). I found that the broader community that made up the “bigger picture” discussed by many members was experienced as a force with a life of its own that regulated our behavior without ever having to be traced back to a single source (which it could not have been, as it emanated simultaneously from none of us, and from all of us in congregation). This is why I had no way of knowing who took my laundry until she approached me in person; everyone in the house has the authority to stand up for the rights of the collective. At the same time, as I enacted my responsibilities I became increasingly aware of myself as a part of the collective, such
that I apprehended my own well-being to be inextricable from that of the group; if the collective is made up of all of us, then what is good for the collective (for example, being comprised of members who respect quiet hours) is good for me. In that way, in sacrificing the liberty to decide where and when to do my laundry, I was experiencing a blurring of the lines that I had previously understood to separate what I wanted from the wants of those around me.

**Active Contribution as Obligation**

The functioning of the community as a whole becomes every person’s project not only through consideration of how the ways in which we act influence others but through active contribution to the collective. As the BSC Owner’s Manual describes, “creating a harmonious community requires you to do your part to communicate, handle your responsibilities, and be respectful of others.” Said “responsibilities” include tasks like spending two hours a semester (or one hour per summer session) both improving the house in some way (painting murals, fixing drawers that have broken, etcetera) and helping prepare for social events (arranging cheese platters, hanging streamers, etcetera). Co-opers are also obligated to attend at least two councils a month (or two per summer session) and pay small social fees (money that goes to community building social events).

But by far the most important active contribution required of co-opers is workshift. This obligation is so vital to maintaining the habitability of the house that the BSC has established a complex set of regulations intended to ensure that workshift runs smoothly and is completed thoroughly. After filling out an online
“preference form” at the beginning of the contract period each member is assigned five hours of workshift a week by the house’s workshift manager (WM). Every Sunday the WM posts a list of assigned shifts on the centrally located “workshift board.” If a member is unable to complete hir assigned workshift on a given day, ze must “circle out” (circle the shift on the workshift board) at least 48 hours in advance. Co-opers who are “down” hours (have, in a previous week, completed fewer than the required five hours) must make them up by filling in for someone who has “circled out.” Further, in order to get credit for doing a workshift, co-opers must have another community member sign off for them, attesting to the fact that they actually completed the assigned task. Any Hoytian can log onto the “workshift website” at any time to check hir shifts and see if ze has missed any of hir shifts.

“A co-op,” Connor, a BSC member and junior at UC Berkeley described, “is a community. You all agree that in order to uphold the community you need to do work and you all need to share in maintaining the house.” He continued, “[Workshift] is a shared burden but also there’s a sense that you are part of this thing that is bigger than yourself” (Carrol 2013).

Penalization and the Cultivation of Dividuality

Many of the co-opers I met expressed that they fulfilled their co-op

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33 In practice, most people had an agreement with another co-op whereby they are allowed to sign off for themselves using the other person’s name. While it was readily apparent when certain workshifts were “blown” (if someone missed a dish shift, for example, there would be no clean dishes and everyone in the co-op would notice), I got the sense that the workshift manager did not usually check to make sure tasks such as vacuuming the stairs and straightening up the backyard were completed. Still, it seemed as though an understanding that this could happen was enough to prevent people from blowing a shift and then signing someone’s name.
obligations because it was in the collective’s best interest that they do so, but also because of their sense that when they joined the co-op they became a part of something larger than themselves. But despite the fact that the general ethos in Hoyt is one of accountability and co-responsibility, the functioning of the co-op’s most vital systems, like workshift, does not rely on trust in Hoytians instantaneous willingness to behave cooperatively alone. Rather, obligation is enforced through a formal system of monetary fines and a less formal but just as acutely felt system of shaming that ultimately helps form co-opers understanding of the ways in which their actions impact the collective. This system simultaneously works on each subject to habituate cooperativism and a relational, dividual understanding of self. It also accounts for leakages that might cause community members to behave uncooperatively.

In “The Social Ecology of Communal Socialization” Calvin Redekop distinguishes between countercultural communal groups that operate completely outside of mainstream society and those that are integrated. He notes that the socialization methods that allow the latter category to function are necessarily more intensive because they are tasked with maintaining cohesion despite the influence of external structures. This is the case for two reasons. First, communality requires that each individual member feel himself to be united to the rest of the group, a condition that is more difficult to achieve when the community in question is not the only one to which each member belongs. Second, in order to live within a society (specifically, the society that exists outside of the communal space) that maintains a particular set of values, each person must, at least to some extent, internalize and embody those
values. Because the lifestyle to which a communal group adheres may be at odds with the attitudes that characterize society at large, the group must take measures to ensure that members conduct themselves in a way that is in accordance with the group’s ethos when they cross over the physical and social threshold into the community even if they act otherwise during their time operating in the outside world. Members of the collective must learn to metaphorically leave patterns of behavior that are appropriate in the external world but are incompatible with the functioning of the collective at the door (Redekop 1976).

Such is the case in Hoyt, a community with its own particular ethos but in which members are also integrated into (neoliberal) society. Members of the BSC are, for example, students. They attend classes, and many participate in extracurricular activities and hold jobs. Some of the people I got to know in the co-op wrote for UC Berkeley’s newspaper, one worked in an economics lab, and another was a dancer in a modern dance company. Many of the day-to-day activities in which co-opers participate outside of Hoyt do not operate based on cooperative principles, and some require that they think of their peers as competitors rather than collaborators. For example, a student applying to law-school (as the Hoytian living in the room next to mine was) knows that only a finite number of applicants are admitted to any given institution; hir admission means someone else’s rejection, and vice-versa.

The system of obligation that exists in Hoyt thus operates in conjunction with a system of penalization that works to instill an understanding of the necessity of cooperation in a communal living setting, and to counteract externally instilled competitive and individualistic tendencies that conflict with the functioning of the
cooperative. The formal punishment for co-opers who are “down” more than two hours (the “buffer” number), for example, is a thirteen dollar fine per hour they are “down” on the “fining date,” which comes at the end of a particular contract period (for example, on move-out day at the end of the semester). Co-opers who have “blown” a shift (did not complete a shift and failed to “circle out” in time) are also fined an “uncooperative fine” of thirteen dollars, in addition to being required to make up the missed hour. If a member is “down” more than 20 hours, ze could face eviction. Further, failure to complete “home improvement hours,” “social hours,” or to attend the required number of councils also incurs a fine of thirteen dollars per missed hour or council. Similarly, violation of a house rule, like failing to respect quiet hours, may also result in the issuance of an “uncooperative fine.”

In addition to fines, co-opers are compelled to fulfill their obligations through shaming, which is a less formal measure, but is arguably just as instrumental in motivating members to fulfill their obligations. Arielle, a BSC member living in a co-op for the first time, explained that fines help to enforce co-op rules but: “a lot more of [the incentive comes from] shaming...If you skip your workshift or are a slob people will say something to you or call you out at council. Or like you sometimes hear people talking about other people saying, ‘oh this person didn’t do their shift’” (Drew 2013). One Hoytian observed that individual community members will take it upon themselves to “call out” fellow co-opers who are not fulfilling their obligations to the community. She said, “other people in the house will be like...I saw on the workshift website that you haven’t been doing your workshift, and you should probably do it” (Drew 2013)
Shaming of anonymous co-opers who have acted inconsiderately also serves to compel community members to consider their actions by promulgating a sense of the sort of behavior that is considered unacceptable and by establishing the negative response uncooperative behavior provokes from fellow community members. Arielle explained that “even if they don’t know who it is” who blew hir workshift and left the house messy because they have not looked it up on the workshift board, co-opers will publicly say things like “‘oh someone didn’t do their shift last night and it’s gross’” (2013). In Hoyt, co-opers routinely made use of the community’s Facebook group to publicize and discourage anonymous uncooperative behavior. In one instance a member uploaded a photo she took on her phone of a roll of toilet paper balancing atop the toilet paper roll holder. She included a message that expressed her exasperation with whoever had been too lazy to put the new roll on the holder, a behavior thought to be inconsiderate and thus uncooperative.

Punishment is crucial to the continued existence of the BSC because it ensures that members who are not yet socialized into the cooperative ethos still have incentive to complete the tasks necessary for maintaining a habitable space. Esther explained that when you first move into the co-op penalties for violating rules make it such that “day-to-day things like workshift get hammered into you” (2013). All new members are informed that fines will result from uncooperative behavior, so fear of monetary consequence serves as an immediate deterrent. Once they have begun to integrate into the Hoyt community, a desire not to be seen as a “slob,” or to be publically “called out” adds an additional layer of motivation for co-opers to fulfill their obligations and to respect the rules. As a new member, my determination not to violate quiet hours
for a second time after the laundry incident derived in part from a fear of the financial consequence of doing so and in part from the embarrassment of having a fellow Hoytian draw attention to my bad behavior. Because of the close-knit nature of the cooperative, I could assume that when one person became aware of an uncooperative act, many others would become aware of it. As I strove to feel myself fully integrated into the community by building positive relationships with its members, I did not want to be viewed as “an energy suck,” as Christina termed those who choose not to adopt the cooperative ethos and see Hoyt as “a pool of random resources that they can just pull from” (2013) without contributing.

Though both fines and shaming serve to motivate co-opers, many explained that the latter is most effective in smaller communities than in larger communities. They commented on the fact that the two largest co-ops, Cloyne and Casa Zimbabwe (CZ), with 150 and 124 members respectively, are the least clean of all the BSC houses. As Brandon, a “Clone” (member of Cloyne) described, “It's more difficult to be cooperative in a larger house. It's not that we aren’t: we definitely are…The biggest problem at Cloyne is people blowing workshift, which tends to be less of a problem in smaller houses” (Melendez 2013).

Many speculated that “it’s more difficult to be cooperative in a larger house” because there are so many people living in the co-ops that there is a less immersive sense of cohesion or accountability. Joshua, a “Czar” (member of CZ) related to me a story of his experience doing a bathroom cleaning workshift in his house:

When I went to go cleaning supplies I found out that the cleaning room, even though the bathroom was relatively clean, the cleaning room was disgusting. It was actually just really nasty. The person who was in there before had left the in the bucket thing in the disgusting
water and just breeding bacteria and germs and everything...Maybe this was just me jumping to conclusions but cleaning the cleaning room itself wasn’t really on the to do list of ‘here’s what you need to do for this workshift’...[the workshifter assigned this shift before me] didn’t really go that extra mile to just clean up the cleaning room itself or clean up the cleaning supplies that they had just used (McGrew 2013).

According to Joshua, the workshifter who cleaned the bathroom before him was not regulated by the fear of being viewed by his close-knit community as a "slob," so ze did the bare minimum to avoid being issued a fine. By contrast, many Hoytians expressed to me that in a co-op Hoyt’s size “you know everyone as an individual” so there is a much greater degree of accountability (Mathat 2013).

How does the enactment of obligation to the collective impact how Hoytians see themselves as people? In “Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent,” Saba Mahmood draws on the concept of habitus to discuss how the calculated performance of certain external ways of being can develop internal “dispositions.” She writes that in these cases “action does not issue forth from natural feelings but creates them” (Mahmood 2001:214). Though Mahmood describes the very intentional development of virtue while co-opers did not express that their fulfillment of obligations began as a deliberate means of fostering an alternative conception of self, the author’s model is still reflective of the dynamic I observed while living in the co-op. Cooperative principles are first performed and then internalized; though punishment is initially coercive in that it moves members to engage in “outward behavior” in which they might otherwise not choose to engage (like scrubbing the

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34 In this piece, Mahmood challenges Western feminist discourse surrounding agency, illustrating the ways in which theories that position the reproduction of gender norms as antithetical to the assertion of personal agency overlook the possibility that submission can actually be a manifestation of agency. She discusses how some Muslim women in Egypt actively cultivate certain ways of being that correspond with Islamic tradition.
bathroom floor), the system ultimately contributes to the cultivation of a particular conception of self in which co-opers who choose to engage with the community come to see themselves not as individuals pursuing their individual self interest but as component parts whose well-being is indirectly, but absolutely, tied up with that of the collective.

As they become a part of the community, a desire to contribute—to “make it a nice place to live” (Hammid 2013)—and not a fear of being penalized becomes many co-oper’s primary motivation for fulfilling their obligations to the collective. When asked about obligation in the cooperative, one member put it this way: “Fuck yeah I always do my workshifts! It’s all about contributing to the whole and if one person falls out of the chain, it’s broken” (Hoyt Survey 2013). Maggie, the Hoyt House President and cooperative living enthusiast, explained that above all the co-op values “attentiveness to the needs of the group as a whole, to how you can contribute to that group, and to how your actions impact the whole group of people, as well as respect for decisions made by the group regardless of whether or not they benefit you personally” (2013). All members agree to uphold quiet hours, for example, even if they are not well suited to a particular member’s personal schedule on any given night. Emily, a graduated senior spending her last summer in the BSC explained:

There’s almost like a co-op morality here. Like, there are a lot of people who value cooperative living a lot, and who really believe in the system. I think here people really, really value the community that you get and really care about how much work they put into the house to make it good for everyone (Drew 2013).

According to Emily, it is the cooperative ideology, or “co-op morality” that motivates Hoytians to do their part in maintaining the house and community. Evelyn, a former Hoytian who had graduated from Berkeley and moved into an “adult co-op” in the
area, echoed Emily’s sentiment, saying: “people definitely take ownership over [this place]. Like, everyone tries to pitch in if a workshift is blown or someone needs help, even if they aren’t getting workshift credit for it, they’re willing to help out” (Hammid 2013).

Sitting on Hoyt’s front roof with Brittany and Quinn drew intricate patterns in pen on each other’s stomachs I asked about the role of this cooperative ideology in day to day life in co-op. “Well, like I was saying before with the workshift, you know, all of you take care of your house together.” Brittany began. Quinn continued, “But also in ways like you clean up after yourself so it can be nice for other people. You treat others as you liked to be treated and I think that really goes a long way.” Brittany responded, “I definitely feel like a lot of people in the house act that way. They bake things and just give them out.” Quinn explained, “And they really care about other people.” Recalling the fact that the people who had originally agreed to do the cooking workshift on Wednesday evenings had to back out of their commitment, she continued:

> For example, our managers cook for us every Wednesday. They don’t need to do that [because they receive workshift credit from their work as managers] and it’s more than they should [have to do] but they do it because they care about the house and they want us to be happy. It’s so nice when people cook for you, things that they aren’t getting workshift hours for doing but that they do for you anyway. That’s the stuff that really counts (Mathat and Miller 2013).

Again, this ethos of sharing and collaboration does not emanate from any one leader but is collectively enforced and generated. While punishment works to instill the habits consistent with this dividualist perspective on self, it is also positively reinforced in other ways. Notably, the house “props board” allows co-opers to “give props where props are due” (Hoyt Survey 2013) or, in other words, gives them a
place to publically praise Hoytians who have been particularly cooperative, or have
gone above and beyond their personal obligations to contribute to the community.
The props board not only explicitly invokes the kind of behavior the collective as a
whole seeks to promote, but also rewards co-opers for behaving selflessly.

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The Sexshower

One woman or another wryly starts calling bathroom 3.4, the bathroom with
the largest shower in the house, the “sexshower bathroom” and the name sticks.
Bathroom 3.4 is one of two half-bathrooms (shower and sink only) nestled into a side
hall on third floor of Hoyt. Once a week I clean them both. I scrub the floors, wipe
down the counters, and push the release latched underneath the plastic soap boxes to
make sure they are still full.

The door to the supply closet is covered in decorative pale green handprints that
match the color of the surrounding wall. This is where the process begins. I open the
doors and wrinkle my nose; the mop, still a bit wet, is resting in the bucket. I’m
supposed to use it on the floors of the bathrooms, but 3.3 and 3.4 have relatively little
floor space, so I usually opt to scrub with a sponge instead. Besides, the mop is
unruly. It looks person-like as I return it, yarn flopping soggily, into the broom-holder
on the wall.

I find a bottle of bleach on the shelf and pour about an half an inch into the
bucket. With Green Works spray, a sponge, and a toothbrush in one hand and the
bucket in the other, I back out of the closet. I shut the door with my foot on the way
out. I know that I should be wearing flip-flops to prevent the bleach from irritating
the bottoms of my feet as I splash the solution across the floor but I’ve left them in
some common space or in someone’s room, so tonight I am cleaning barefoot.

Adding water to the bleach already in the bucket is the hardest part of this workshift; the bucket is too large to fit in the sink but if I fill it in the shower I risk getting water all over my clothing. My tactic is generally to hoist the bucket up to the shower-head before turning on the faucet.

I like this workshift because it is gratifying and fairly intuitive. I look at the freshly wiped counter and at the scrubbed junction of shower pane and tile floor and see the progress I have made from beginning to end. Not that the difference is ever all that stark; this bathroom, like all the bathrooms in the infamously tidy Hoyt (infamous, at least, among the other houses in the notoriously messy BSC system) is cleaned every day, which means that it has generally only been about 24 hours since the last person had gotten down on hir hands and knees and scrubbed the floor. I imagine all the Hoytians who have done this task before me. I picture them humming to themselves at night while wiping down the mirror or hoisting the bucket up to the showerhead after classes on a Wednesday afternoon.

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Penalization and Accounting For Leakages

Of course, though the system of punishment and reward in Hoyt encourages members to think of their actions in terms of their impact on others and on the collective as a whole, individualist tendencies are never fully submerged by the cooperative ethos inculcated by socialization into the collective. Fines are necessary, therefore, because they provide a buffer for leakages in the system that might result in enough “blown” workshifts as to compromise the habitability of the co-op. Punishment thus keeps in check residual self-interestedness and accounts for the fact
that some people who move into Hoyt do not choose to integrate themselves fully enough into the community. When asked if she always does her workshift, for instance, one co-oper responded, “I always do it mainly because I do not want to be fined, and because I expect people to do so as well” (Hoyt Survey 2013). Her response reflects the dual nature of many members’ motivation to complete their obligations. On one hand, she knows that not doing her workshift will have consequences for her as an individual, and she acts accordingly. On the other hand, she understands herself to be part of a collective in which she must fulfill her obligations because she knows that she is not the only subject impacted by whether she completes her workshift or not (just as she expects other people to complete their workshifts because the outcome impacts her). Another co-oper’s answer reflected a similar dual motivation. She responded that she “almost always” does her workshift. She continued,

Sometimes I feel a strong connection or feeling of pride toward my house, thinking that my work is directly helping it function. Usually though, my thinking is just that workshift isn't too hard or takes up that much time, and I can just do it and not have to worry about being hassled [by having to pay a fine and having to make up the missed hour] (Hoyt Survey 2013).

**Dividuality and Agency**

Milton Friedman wrote that “to the free man, the country is the collection of individuals who compose it, not something over and above them” (1962:1-2). Perhaps, then, Hoytians are not “free” according to Friedman’s definition; while he conceptualizes the free country as an entity that should orient itself around the economic behavior of individuals, the co-oper’s ideal community is one in which individuals together generate a community ethos that does exist “over and above” any
single person, subordinating individualism to collectivism. Importantly, though, this process of subordination does not deny the agency of Hoytians, nor does it fail to accommodate their personal desires and self-expression. Rather, in foregrounding collectivity, members reformulate their conception of these categories, moving them to view agency and desire through an alternative conception of personhood that obscures the distinction between self and collective interest.

Saba Mahmood argues that Western feminist scholarship has historically “centered” notions of “free-will” and “self-actualization” in its discussion of what constitutes a liberated subject. Pointing to the work of Judith Butler, the author writes, “agency, in this form of analysis, is understood as the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles” (Mahmood 2001:206). This perspective assumes, Mahmood contends, an opposition between agency and submission to social norms produced and reproduced by structures of power. To resist, in other words, is to work towards liberation. Thus, though Butler does acknowledge that even acts of norm subversion are located within constituting matrices of power, in equating defiance and agency she echoes Milton Friedman’s belief in the irreconcilable nature of individual freedom, articulated through the assertion of agency, and submission to the demands of a preeminent (“over and above”) entity.

Mahmood interrogates this opposition. Writing about Muslim women who choose to cultivate virtuosity through prescribed forms of social practice, the author asserts that “agential capacity is entailed not only in those acts that result in (progressive) change, but also those that aim toward continuity, stasis, and stability”
(Mahmood 2001:212). Agency, then, is not always “emancipatory” from prescribed modes of being, nor is it by definition the resistance of a “presocial” individual to subordination. Rather, submission to norms and the cultivation of a certain kind of self through the act of submission, can itself be a form of active agency. In Mahmood’s discussion, she demonstrates that in many cases the preservation of tradition by Muslim women in Egypt via submission to the will of God involves the assertion of agency. Analogously, co-opers do not surrender their “agentive capacity” in considering the self relationally and in subordinating personal freedom to behave impulsively to the rules of the broader collective. Instead, they actively participate in structures of obligation that situate them relative to others, making individual choices informed by an understanding of dividuality.

Part 5. Cohabitation and the Cultivation of Dividuality

The very act of cohabitation—of the intentional sharing of a particular space—results in a powerful sense of cohesion and a feeling of belonging to something that extends beyond the self. As Bourdieu discusses in his formative piece on space and identity formation, “Berber House” (1970) structural elements of the places people inhabit both reflect and reinforce particular constructions of group and
individual identity. In what follows, I will examine how Hoyt Hall, an enduring and static fixture housing a transient community, sustains its community ethos. I will discuss how the physical places Hoytians occupy shape their understandings of self and of sociality, a phenomenon Hoytians experience especially acutely as the building they occupy is itself deeply charged with the mystified physical and symbolic legacies of former members. I will thus explore how, through moving within and engaging with Hoyt Hall, many Hoytians experience not only solidarity with current members but also a sense of unity with all of those who have ever been a part of the Hoyt community. This attachment derives in part from an understanding of the cooperative ethos as an amorphous entity existing separate from any discrete set of individuals, a conceptualization that lends the co-op’s status quo particular importance. I will conclude this section with an examination of how engagement in acts of workshift, maintenance, and home improvement, strengthens the atemporal cohesion and sense of belonging felt among Hoytians by generating a unifying ideological position that distinguishes this community’s ethos from those of other groups of cohabiting students.

The seemingly dissonant realities—that on one hand the very component parts of a community are ever shifting while its essential culture is felt as continuous—moved me to examine the one (relatively) static fixture in the life of this community: the physical building it occupies. What is the role of space in the generation of the atemporal solidarity and collective ethos I observed? How does it facilitate the socialization of Hoytians into the lasting Hoyt community? How do co-ops’

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In this piece Bourdieu illustrates the ways in which the structure of a house in the Berber community establishes gender roles.
interactions with Hoyt Hall allow them to feel themselves connected to an enduring community, despite the fact that the collective’s membership is constantly in flux?

While members themselves absorb and reflect the collective ethos into which new members are socialized, I found the very place we occupied to be vitally important in the process. Indeed, when I think back to the six weeks I spent living in Hoyt Hall, I cannot separate my memory of the interactions I had with those inhabiting the building—Hoytians, other co-ops, boarders, visitors, “fish” (people living unofficially in the co-op for some length of time)36—and recollection of the physical surroundings and environment that housed, formed, and otherwise promoted this contact.

Hoyt Hall is linked to the Hoyt community in a dynamic, reciprocal, meaning-giving relationship. The building itself is comprised of a variety of different spaces. Some rooms serve very specific functions, like the laundry rooms (for washing clothes), the kitchen (for preparing meals), the study room (for studying), the recycling room (where the recycling bins are kept), and the pantry (where much of the food is stored). Other rooms serve more abstract functions. Places such as the stoop, the TV room, the freepile room, the piano room, and the roofs are common spaces that allow co-ops to determine how the space is best used. With the exception of the bathrooms in Hoyt, which are single use,37 all sites—those designed to help house members achieve very particular goals, those with more open ended

36 They are called fish, one member explained to me, because BSC policy does not allow members to keep warm blooded animals in any of the co-ops but does allow cold-blooded pets, such as fish.
37 One Hoytian even expressed to me that she wished the Hoyt bathrooms were multiple use, recalling spending time with one of her friends in another BSC co-op where she played guitar in the bathroom while the other person showered in one for the shower stalls. She explained that she wished this were possible in Hoyt.
functions, spaces people encounter en route to other spaces like the stairs and the hallways, spaces people interact with deliberately—are sites of social interaction, whether the interaction is calculated or incidental.

In the introduction to Radical Space, Margaret Kohn introduces the idea that “shared spaces,” like those discussed above, “help forge communities by enabling and constraining the way in which people come together” and “by providing scripts for encounter and assembly” (2003:3). My experience in Hoyt pivoted not on my awareness of and deliberate interaction with discrete personalities and community dynamics in relation to myself, but on a holistic understanding of the particular place and time that facilitated interaction. Indeed, the Hoyt community and Hoyt Hall are inextricable; they are mutually constitutive entities, neither of which can exist without the other. Should we have transposed the co-opers occupying Hoyt Hall in July and August 2013 to a different space, my experience would have been entirely different and the relationships I formed would have taken on a different tenor all together, just as the place that is Hoyt Hall has no meaning to this community without the people who live within its walls.

Hoyt Hall, then, serves not only as a site of convergence, but actively shapes how co-opers experience relationships with the collective and with one another. According to Edward Casey’s discussion of the concepts of space and place in his chapter “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time,” traditional philosophical discourse holds that all spaces begin as absolutely void of meaning and are, with time, inscribed by their human inhabitants with significance. It

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38 In this piece political scientist Margaret Kohn discusses the ways in which shared space influences political projects.
is through this process that our surroundings become places that evoke memories and reflect back upon us ways of understanding the world. But there exists another way to think about the locations we inhabit, according to Casey. He writes that the places around us are always shaping our experiences; they exist only through our perception of them and are never void, but always acting as agents. In other words, just as “body” cannot be “prior to culture,” “space” cannot be “prior to place” because place itself “plays a role in perception” (Casey 1997:19) People are therefore always in place, always necessarily engaged in and dynamic relationship with their surroundings.

I will extend this theory to illustrate that place not only communicates meaning and shapes experiences, but that its agentive role can even have a communitive effect; it transmits an ethos that links Hoytians to an enduring (literal and figurative) structure, regardless of their temporal situation. This constitutive relationship between space and community is reciprocal; while members of the co-op as a unified group and as individuals lend significance to the space in symbolic and visible ways, the structure of the co-op building itself shapes how the collective experiences the community ethos. Further, the fact that co-opers perceive this ethos as lasting despite the ephemerality of its membership strengthens the relationship of individual members to the broader collective (a strength expressed by Kim at the summer’s final council) because, by participating in the community, Hoytians feel themselves to be contributing to an ethos that will shape the lives of an indefinite number of others; their actions are links in an enduring “chain” (Hoyt Survey 2013). Engagement with the structure of Hoyt thus represents a dialogue between past,
present, and future Hoytians, with place as a mediator and instigator.

* * *

**The Dining Room**

The dining room is spacious and bright. The floor is a light colored wood that, along with the natural light coming in through the windows or the glow from the overhead lights, depending on the time of day, lends the whole space a particular warmth. In the back right corner of the room are two industrial sized silver refrigerators and a freezer. They are full of fresh dairy and meat.

I am eating breakfast in the dining room and looking at the green and purple clouds above the doorway that leads to the kitchen with the SF Chronicle is open on the table in front of me. Someone is stumbling home drunk one night and climbing on the countertop to paint these clouds. Someone else is upset with her because the project was not first approved at council. As the details of the confrontation fade, the story becomes a part of Hoyt mythology or maybe is forgotten altogether. But the clouds remain. Or, they remain for now.

The room is empty and it is still dark outside while I prepare to mop the floor. I hoist each chair up on the table and I sweep crumbs and paper napkins into a dustpan. Then I am in the dingy maintenance closet behind the kitchen looking for cleaning solution. And I am dancing in the closet with Ray one evening when he has come to visit. We are clasping hands and shuffling over the uneven concrete.

Or I am mopping. With smooth, sleepy strokes I clean the hardwood. My movements are rhythmic but not slow. I look at the way the floor glistens, but the shine is fading as the water dries. I take the chairs down off the tables as the sun begins to rise.
It is noon and Hoytians are coming home from their classes to make lunch. We slice pepper jack cheese and look for leftover avocado. Or the room is bustling as some of us prepare late night snacks while others lean over biology textbooks. Someone is scrawling a reminder to pull the water heater out from under the cabinet to keep the steam from damaging the wood. She tapes it to the cabinet. “Keep the door closed!” someone else reminds us with a sign posted at the entrance to the pantry. Sean is standing between the dining room and the kitchen and telling me that he has never been so drunk in his life. “Someone is dancing naked on the table in the co-op next door. Have I been hallucinating?” Someone else is making popcorn. Then the room is still and empty.

* * *

Engagement with Community through Place

While conducting my ethnographic research in Hoyt I found that participants reflected on the physical building in two different ways. Some chose to describe for me the concrete details they recalled or had learned about how Hoyt Hall came to appear as it does today and how such features impact life in Hoyt. Margie, a former Hoytian who worked in the BSC Central Office for forty years before retiring, took this approach. She and I sat down together one morning in the Hoyt study room to talk about her experiences living in, and later working for, the co-op. Before I even asked my first question she looked around the room and recalled:

“This used to be a triple when I moved into Hoyt in April of 1970. I think there were over 64 women living here and so now we’re at sixty-one if we’re at full capacity. This room was a triple and the TV room was a triple. They made that change to give the co-op some more common space.”

When I asked about the other ways the building itself had changed since it
was built she explained:

“The house went through the 1923 North Berkeley Fire, so if you stand back and look at this building you’ll see the original base of the house. And then there’s this square boxy addition where the dining room and the front little foyer are and that was an addition with the block of rooms above. So if you walk up the street you can kinda see the peaked roof, if you look at it from the street, it’s square” (Guillory 2013).

As a former BSC administrator, Margie is knowledgeable about the co-op’s history. My interview with her thus allowed me a rare glimpse into Hoyt’s past, a perspective to which most Hoytians are not privy. Rather, most expressed to me that their experience of their surroundings is informed more by the perception of an abstract historical ethos and by speculation about the place’s past (such as one rumor that Margie debunked that Hoyt Hall was once a brothel; before the building was purchased by the BSC it was in fact a boarding house, and later a sorority) than by a concrete understanding of its history.

I found that this mystification of the building’s past rendered its role in the community more acutely felt; it moved members to be continuously engaged in the act of interpreting the messages transmitted through the space even while enacting daily routines. In this way, every feature of the place could encapsulate and radiate stories vague enough to allow members’ imaginations to project possibilities.

Christina described being thoroughly captivated by the mysterious way Hoyt preserves and transmits its history:

There are a lot of weird things [about the building you will notice] if you walk around and kinda look. We have a bathroom that’s the size of a closet. It’s just a toilet. It’s on the fourth floor and you open the window and there’s a shaft. I think it’s just frickin’ weird. One of my friends actually, my best friend, he, well, I’d been fascinated with it and the whole time I’d been living here I was like, ‘Why is this here? What is it?’ So he literally crawled down. He had black gloves and he
climbed on the pipes and lowered himself down the shaft. We figured out where it went: the window opens into the maintenance closet. [We think that it could have been built] there for ventilation because it opens all the way up to the roof (Yun 2013).

Christina located herself as a Hoytian within the history emanating from her surroundings. Reflecting on her time as a member of the community, she observed that her sense of this history has deeply impacted her own experience “maturing” and “coming of age” in this cooperative. As she looked around the room she asked, “Can you image the volume of people who have had memories who did workshift, or bitched about things, or formed friendships for all of these years just because the space existed?” Shaking her head, she continued: “It floors me...I mean, so many people must have done so many different things here!” (Yun 2013).

I shared Christina’s interpretation of our surroundings. During the short period of time I lived in Hoyt, to some degree I, too, situated myself as part of a continuum, as if we were all inheriting a legacy communicated through the place around us. We engaged in a reciprocal relationship with our surroundings as they transmitted layered histories by moving us to conjecture, speculate, and hypothesize about those who walked the halls of Hoyt before us. I sensed that my fellow Hoytians and I were joined to this transhistorical collective as we experienced stress, accomplishment, friendship, and heartbreak in a place physically and ideological oriented toward community formation. I also sensed that future members would one day perceive the memories we formed through their immersion in this collective place.
Murals and the Transmission of Ideology

Aside from the structural idiosyncrasies of the building, one of the most prominent ways the house communicates its mystical past is through the murals that line its walls. Walking around Hoyt for the first time my attention was immediately drawn to the colorful designs and representations that I saw everywhere around me. The paintings are rendered in a wide variety of styles and give each room and hallway in the building a distinct character. Some are large and appear to have taken hours to complete while others are smaller and simpler.

Perhaps my favorite of the Hoytian murals is one of the many just outside the room I shared with my roommate. An adaptation of a painting done by famous graffiti artist, Banksy, it depicts two old women painted in black and white against a pink background. Each is knitting a sweater, one of which reads “PUNK’S NOT DEAD” while the other says “THUG FOR LIFE” (image 5). The mural lends the hallway an aura of humor and informality that drew the attention of nearly every guest who visited my room on the third floor. I do not know the painter, or when and why the mural came into being. But still, the painting conveyed to me a particular message about the place I was inhabiting; its integration of wholesome images and anti-authoritarian message reflects the homey but norm subverting atmosphere of a co-op like Hoyt where at any moment a co-oper might be walking room to room offering to share the banana, blueberry, yogurt, and cardamom pie she had just taken out of the oven, making a dress out of a discarded pillow-case, or dying her hair purple. As one member explained, the murals “give an idea of what the house stands for” (Carrol 2013) because they are a artistic manifestation of how artists’ feel in and
interpret Hoyt as a place.

Further, just as the truncated bathroom on the fourth floor moved Christina to speculate about the history of the building, the house murals encapsulate and evoke a nonspecific sense of the community’s past. One co-op explained that “there’s always a fond memory associated with a specific painting or a fond memory associated with why the thing was painted in the first place.” He continued: “It gives a kind of history for new co-ops to see how the house has been changing, how the house has evolved, and where it has come from” (Carrol 2013).

The content and form of each piece thus convey an array of messages and elicit a range of sensations. On one hand, I wondered specifically about why former Hoytians had made particular practical and conceptual decisions; why paint this
mural so large or so small? Why this figure or symbol? Why in these colors? But the fact that time had swallowed these details, that my understanding of each mural’s origin could only ever be imprecise, rendered their presence more powerfully influential over my experience; each exudes an energy that captures above all its artist’s attachment to this collective, as each painting represents someone’s, or some people’s, effort to beautify the enduring symbol of the community. Further, rather than being inaccessibly located in a single moment in time, the anonymity of the marks that had accumulated on the walls allowed me to experience them as timeless. They conveyed not inside jokes or the exact details of a fond memory but impressions that I could interpret through my own experiences.

The murals I encountered in Hoyt were especially striking to me considering that, in most public and domestic spheres, the essential integrity of a place is considered inviolable; while wall-hangings and other furnishings that can be easily removed are acceptable, artistic alterations applied directly to the walls are regarded as degradative to the value of a place, and are therefore taboo. By contrast, any member of Hoyt may paint a mural directly onto the building’s walls, as long as hir design has been approved by the collective at council. In fact, contributing to the artistic landscape of the house counts in the fulfillment of home improvement (HI) hours which all co-opers must complete during their time in Hoyt (members are required to complete two hours per semester and one hour per 6 week summer session). In other words, this community believes that murals beautify, rather than devalue, the house.

Maggie described to me the ideological impetus behind this divergence. She
explained that co-opers decorate the house because, taken as a whole, the paintings “establish the community that lives in the house having ownership over it and the connection between the physical space and the people who are living in it.” She continued, “A lot of the time, especially if you’re in student housing which is really, really temporary. The extent of your ownership of the space you live in is just the stuff you keep in it. But co-opers kind of build things into the house that are kind of part of their time there” (Hardy 2013).

As Maggie articulated, the act of engaging with the “physical space” by painting and otherwise acting upon it allows co-opers not only to integrate themselves into the physical house through the investment of artistic energy, but also provides them an opportunity to push back against the notion that, as impermanent residents, students have no claim over the places they occupy. Members thus “establish” their presence through the alterations they make to the house, asserting Hoyt’s autonomy and making visible the community’s separation from hierarchical structures that disenfranchise them. As Sean, a rising junior about to begin his first year at UC Berkeley after having transferred from a community college in Southern California, explained, the cooperative community is “trying to do something that’s not being done [elsewhere], which is to give students the power. The idea is, let’s do it ourselves and let our voice reside in [the BSC] houses. We’re the ones running it and we’re the ones making decisions, embodying whatever we want to embody” (Katz 2013). Hoyt Hall is constantly reflecting, generating, and instilling this ethos, both in those who themselves have painted murals and in those who have not painted a mural, but experience them as they move about the place.
Further, Maggie’s explanation of the presence of murals around Hoyt reflects that the ethos reproduced through interaction with place is communitive through its atemporality. The “community” that is connected to the place by the markings on the wall incorporates all of those who have occupied the place throughout its history. Because the existence of murals represents a collective ideological ethos that Hoytians embody by living cooperatively, their mere presence unites those living in Hoyt at discrete points in time, as the meaning the murals transmit as a cohesive set is felt throughout history.

* * *

Foreshortening

I am walking up the last set of stairs before the roof and I am carrying a bottle of wine. My new friend Anthony and I are sitting on the landing wrapped in blankets and watching a movie. We need to pause it every few minutes when the internet cuts out or when we need to adjust our position to let housemates squeeze by on their way up or down the steps to the roof. Co-ops are painting murals on the walls around us: gay pride penguins, a pink squid, tacky the penguin, and others. We laugh at the painting of a shirtless fireman with a half-a-hose who lives in front of the stairs. His legs are oddly proportioned and every time I pass I think of Maggie when she says that this is what foreshortening gone terribly wrong looks like. “I really like that mural,” she tells me. “But I know other people have some really strong feelings about him.” She laughs.

I step close. There are areas where graphite lines run along the wall, drawing out the murals projected shape. But the artist stops just short of completing the
project. One day someone finishes the hose or paints over it in white. A physics or geography major then sees a white wall or an unfinished naked firefighter and imagines it as a tree or Abe Lincoln in a tutu. She makes a sketch and brings a proposal to council and it is unanimously approved, or unanimously approved but for one person who thinks it offensive to paint Abe Lincoln in a tutu. But for now I gaze at the firefighter and his half-hose, preserved in this liminal stage, while I lean against the wall and rest my feet on the steps. A sign points up the stairs: “heaven” with an arrow, scrawled in sparkly purple paint.

* * *

Establishing Ideological Difference Through Place

The atemporal relationship between person and place does not generate cohesion in a vacuum; the strength of the bond between Hoytians and their community is in many ways dependent on a feeling of their community as distinct from, and superior to, other student communities. Many co-opers expressed pride, for example, in the fact that the co-op cooks and cleans for itself while many other student living spaces hire people to do cooking and cleaning. Hoytian’s perspective on the consequences of this delegation of labor evoked what activist Barbara Ehrenreich’s calls the “consequence-abolishing effect,” a phenomenon that occurs when a mess is generated by one party with the expectation that it will be cleaned by another. Delegating responsibility to another person in this way, writes Ehrenreich, moves people to feel disconnected from the results of their actions and ignorant of their impact on the world around them (2000:101-102). Many co-opers observed such an attitude among students living in non cooperative group living settings. Evelyn, a
former Hoytian who moved into an “adult co-op” after graduation, recalled a significant lack of personal accountability among the students who lived in her freshman year dorm at UC Berkeley. She described:

There was one incident freshman year when one of my floormates had a bloody nose and he was in the bathroom dealing with it. He had blood all over the sink and everything. I was asking if he was alright and he said yes, he was alright. Then he said something along the lines of ‘Oh, do I have to clean this up? Someone else comes and cleans the bathroom right?’...There’s just a sense of lack of responsibility if someone else is taking care of you. (Hammid 2013)

Many of the Hoytians I interviewed contrasted the “lack of responsibility” that characterizes not only dorms but also fraternities and sororities (places where “someone else is taking care of you”) with the profound feeling of ownership and cooperation in Hoyt, where “you scrub your toilets or your showers yourself.” On one hand, they expressed that the intimate connection between place and community motivates Hoytians to care for the space, as it represents an extension of their community. Esther described:

In dorms there is lots of alcohol and lots of trashing the place and not really caring either about the physical building that you’re living in or the emotional meaning of the building or organization. It’s just a place to get drunk and maybe write a few essays. So I think [in Hoyt] it’s quite different from that, from the physical side we look after the building...it’s the coop, it’s home! (Roberts 2013).

For Esther, Hoyt Hall is embedded with the “emotional meaning” of the organization to which it corresponds, and thus moves co-opers to “look after it.” This approach is different from that of students who spend a year or two living in a place but “not really caring” about it. For them, there is little or no affective connection between inhabited place and inhabitor, and no reason to treat the former with care.

Though care for the space is motivated by an attachment to the community,
the physical act of doing workshift itself strengthens the connection between co-opers and the space they occupy by allowing them to see and attend to the impact (both generative and degenerative) their lives have on it. Maggie described, “You leave behind marks, like murals or HI projects, and just by doing workshift you put a lot of physical labor into the house, and a lot of creative labor into the house so you sort of develop a deeper sense of possession...because [the act of working upon the space] gives you a sense of belonging in a place because you actually become a part of it or contributed to it” (Hardy 2013). From this perspective, a “sense of possession” comes from integrating elements of self into the physical place of Hoyt; acting upon the building changes how co-opers think of its role in the community and, in turn, reinforces their desire to care for it.

This dynamic relationship with space allows co-opers to establish their identity as a group in opposition to that of other groups, which in turn strengthens Hoytian solidarity. Like Esther, Brittany compared the way other groups on campus live to the way Hoytians live. She explained, “I like how we have to each take turns and cooperate in taking care of our house, like we have workshift. And I know a lot of sororities, they have someone who cooks for them, someone who cleans for them, I mean, like, I feel like [workshift] makes you feel more connected to your house and the people living in it” (Mathat 2013). In comparing sorority life and cooperative

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39 During interviews, co-opers routinely referenced fraternities and sometimes sororities to define what cooperativism is not. While many acknowledged that there is some overlap between greek life and cooperative life (“some of the BSC cooperatives resembles frats in a lot of ways,” “some people think of the co-ops as hippy frats,” and “frats provide the same kind of communal thing” as cooperatives), they described how, unlike frats, co-ops are not “heteronormative or normative in any sense of the word” and “in a lot of frats, trans, queer, and other sorts of people don’t feel safe” but “in the co-ops you’re free to be whoever you want or whatever you identify as” (Sherman-Gasseti 2013; Melendez 2013; Carrol 2013).
communal living, Brittany established workshift as an act that is not only pragmatic but is also an ideological position that characterizes cooperativism; it is communitive (because in doing workshift Hoytians “feel more connected” to the community) and removes the need for someone else to “cook” and “clean” for them, an arrangement I found that Hoytians were consistently critical of (and correspondingly proud that they, as a community, are aware of and accountable for any mess their use of the space precipitates).

* * *

Bobby

Bobby and I are on the roof. He tells me that I’m in “stuck mode” and he laughs and laughs. We spend time on the roof together some nights. Sometimes someone is sitting up there smoking with friends or alone or maybe a third of the houses is on the roof smoking as the sun sets. Bobby speaks quickly. I catch snippets here and there about his family, his past, his creative writing class, his goals. The sun is setting over the Bay. He tells me that he feels old these days, at least too old to have so much of his education ahead of him, but in some ways it’s not a bad thing. We are glowing.

The back roof is enclosed by a rickety wooden railing painted white. Standing at the railing we can see out over Oakland and over the Bay. Hoytians are painting the angled stairway cover with bright paints. Someone fashions the silhouette of a unicorn in white against a background of purple, blue, and green applied in generous, gestural strokes. Somehow, the discontinuity between this mural and that of a tiger bust another Hoytian is fashioning with close attention to detail on the other
side of the staircase generates the sensation that this space is timeless. It is not planned and executed but alive and in flux.

A group of us leans against the railing and we sip wine out of mason jars. Nina disappears down the steps and reappears minutes later carrying a platter of cheese, crackers, and fruit. These are Friday evening happy hours on the roof when the air is crisp.

Part 6. Dividuality and *Ikigai*

I return now to my discussion of *ikigai*, that which makes life worth living.
What is the impact of the individual understanding of self on co-opers' sense of wellness? Every person’s understanding of what makes his life worthwhile depends on the institutional and social structures that have guided and shaped his values and perspectives on life; these structures make “some ideas seem far more palatable and natural than others” (Matthews 2009:174) and thus promote certain beliefs about what should give life meaning over others, according to Gordon Mathews. A member of the Australian aboriginal community about which Daniela Heil writes in “Embodied Selves and Social Selves” (2009), for example, might say his *ikigai* is social participation and active constitution of interdependent relationships, while many of the Hong Kongers Matthews discusses in “Finding and Keeping a Purpose in Life” might respond that their religious beliefs make them feel that life is significant and worth living (2009). Though I believe Matthews is correct in asserting that *ikigai* is a universal component of human happiness, he focuses on the notion that every person has one *ikigai* that is most important to him, while my research in Hoyt illustrated how a general feeling that life is worth living can be the result of various *ikigais* cultivated in various contexts.

But just because the pursuit of wellness is understood and enacted differently within and between communities does not mean that all such pursuits ultimately produce *ikigai*. This, I argue, is the case for many subjects in neoliberal society. The neoliberal marketplace as it exists today is arguably one of the most influential structures forming how many people living in the United States (and increasingly around the world) think about their *ikigai*. We are surrounded by advertisements, like the L’Oréal commercial described earlier, that insist that some product or other will
bring us fulfillment. In this way, the American cultural, political, and economic climate encourages every individual to see hirself as hir own primary *ikigai*. But despite what L’Oréal might have us think, this fixation on the self is not a stable or believable foundation on which to base a person’s reason for being. Nikolas Rose writes that it actually generates profound discontent and, citing psychologist Roy Baumeister, Gordon Matthews writes that in America “self becomes the bastion of value, with work and family justified only in that they fulfill the self” which makes life ultimately appear “futile” (2009:181).

In Hoyt, however, the cultivation of a dividual perspective allowed many Hoytians to decenter the individual self as a primary, profoundly empty, *ikigai*; many members of the co-op expressed to me that in performing obligations to and internalizing the needs of said “bigger-than-me” collectivity (Carrol 2013), they experienced a profound fulfillment deriving from a sense of belonging. In doing so, they locate an *ikigai* in the functioning of the collective and in active participation in the community. As Anthony described “in a collectivized space...you’re helping each other out. It’s not as lonely [as trying to do everything yourself].” He continued, “I’ve found that despite a lack of material wealth, you can be very rich in community” (Sherman-Gasseti 2013). Another co-oper explained that while living in a cooperative “means everyone puts in work to do the chores and keep the house running,” cooperation offers more than utility: “It also means that people can live with many other people to foster good relationships. For me,” she explained. “the point [of moving into Hoyt] was to make friends and live in a happy environment. When everyone is responsible for the house, everyone can more fully enjoy it” (Hoyt Survey
I spoke with Christina about why Hoytians are willing to devote time and energy, often more than is required of them, to make the co-op flourish. As the person responsible for assigning workshifts, ensuring that they are completed, and issuing penalties to those who fail to do so, she had spent a good deal of time considering the issue. She explained that when you do workshift, “you’re contributing to something bigger.” Through this common experience and others, co-opers feel bonded and supported by one another: “you love them, and they love you, and suddenly your life is that much richer.” Christina went on,

Cooperative living is the realization of a dream of people who really want to create a community where everybody takes care of each other...It’s about building a community that works, building upon trust and love and friendship and trying to get to know each other and trying to get by even though we all have different backgrounds (Yun 2013).

This sensation of belonging was especially pronounced for Christina, who was a rising senior and had been living in Hoyt since her freshman year. She described struggling when she arrived at UC Berkeley: “I was never really cut out to be a college student,” she explained. “I always felt a little different because I didn’t fit in anywhere. Almost the only people I actually enjoyed talking to were the people who lived in my house, which is why living in the co-op probably saved my life, especially mentally.”

The accountability Hoytians feel for one another plays a significant role in the feelings of love and friendship Christina discussed. She related this story to me to demonstrate this point:

The first time that I got really drunk I was in the bathroom in Hoyt and I was not feeling well. My friends came to find me because they were like we haven’t seen Christina in fifteen minutes! There’s a lot of
accountability. Multiple people came looking for me because they care about me. How many people can say that at a frat party? But we care about each other here (Yun 2013).

Christina expressed that those who benefit most from this feeling of togetherness are those who are willing to put the most energy into the community. Occasionally, she explained, people move into the co-op who do not, in her view, understand that Hoyt is not just a place to live, but a community. She told me about her interactions with people who never internalized the idea that their actions impact the collective, explaining, “there’s so much to gain from being in a place like this and actually engaging with it. People like them got nothing” (Yun 2013).

As the “oldest calendar Hoytian” Christina had a long time to cultivate a feeling of attachment to this particular co-op. However, even members who had joined the cooperative much more recently expressed similar sentiments. Brittany described the joy she derives from a sense generosity that comes from an understanding of interdependence:

I feel like in the co-op a lot of times when I experience something all I want to do with that experience is have someone else experience it. Sometimes it’s hard for me to even enjoy something if I’m not with someone else. I feel like that’s what gives you meaning in life, is sharing. So living in a co-op you do get to do that, and like for example I’ll go into the free-pile and be like ‘oh these pants would like good on Quinn I should go grab them and bring them to her and see if she likes them’ (Mathat 2013).

Brittany’s explanation of the communal experience reflects her internalization of the idea that the well-being of the community and the well-being of individuals are inextricable. Members are not in competition with one another, or always thinking about but striving to achieve harmony by abiding by what another co-oper expressed as an implicit but essential rule: “give more than you take” (Hoyt Survey 2013).
Brittany continued,

I feel like outside the co-op people do what they need to do to get ahead. But when you’re here things affect you and they also affect everyone else. Like, if you want something to be nice and you want to make something nice, it’s not about getting ahead it’s about everyone together being ahead, ahead of what? I dunno. But anyways, it’s about considering your impact on others (Mathat 2013).

Sean expressed that he also found contributing to a collective that is bigger than himself as an individual to be satisfying. I asked him why he decided to live in the co-op when he moved to Berkeley and he responded: “It’s cheap. Pretty much. I was looking into the dorms and I think almost 4,000 for the whole summer then the coops 2,000 and it’s a no brainer. Including food. And a lot of food.” But while for him the “primary advantage” was “the money,” he described that “the collectiveness” is also a significant advantage of cooperative living. He explained, “It’s very attractive because everyone wants to feel like they are a part of something. This is a community, and it gives you more of a sense of belonging. While in the dorms you’re just another guy, you’re a Hoytian here” (Katz 2013).

Margie reflected on the relative importance of the BSC’s economic and social advantages for undergraduate students. “They come for the cost,” she explained. “But they stay for the community” (Guillory 2013).

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**Song and Story Night**

*It is nighttime, about three weeks before the end of the summer. The room is dim, lit only by a small row of Christmas lights draped around the periphery of the room. Someone stands on a chair, hanging these lights. For many years they fill the room with a soft glow. Eventually, when three or four of the bulbs have flickered and*
gone out, a Hoytian takes a break from doing her chemistry problem set or reading *The House of Mirth* to unscrew and replace them. But eventually the whole string stops working and no one pulls up a chair to change the bulbs and after a while someone coils up the string and throws it in the trash.

And we are in our socks and the room is dim because the overhead light is off and only the Christmas lights are on. We are pulling the tables to the side to make space for Song and Story Night. Two people are laying out bottles of wine and plates of cookies in the front of the room.

And then we are covering the floor with blankets and old mattresses, which someone had stashed in the storage closet behind the kitchen before we found out about the bedbugs. Weeks later we are dragging the mattresses out but then we remember that they were never inspected for bugs, so we are dragging them back in again. In the next room, someone is pulling the cushions off the couches and bringing them into the dining room. She spreads them out across the floor. People have begun to gather and they stand talking to each other with their hands in their pockets.

They are sitting on the cushions, leaning against old friends or leaning against new friends. Men lean against the men, and against the women, and the women lean against the men and against each other. And they affectionately rest their cheeks on one another’s shoulders. Others hug their knees to their chests. Their backs forming “c” shapes and their chins rest on their knees. Their toes brush up against the backs of the people sitting in front of them.

We are passing the wine around, swigging from the bottle, drinking in the sweet taste of the communal experience.
And the event begins with a mixture of silly and serious acts. A rising junior sits in the front of the room with her legs crossed and her guitar resting on her thigh. With her eyes closed she sings a song she wrote a few days earlier. Her voice is powerful and clear and when she finishes we clap and someone calls out, ‘thank you for sharing!’ Someone else takes a gulp of wine then stands up and steps to the front of the room. She recites a poem, sucking our attention into her prose. There is a sign up sheet on the table in the front of the room but when we reach the end of the list the process becomes informal. People volunteer spontaneously. I even tell a story and then I eat a cookie. The mood is light.

And then the mood becomes very heavy. One Hoytian sits in the front of the room. He tells us a story he is sharing for the first time. It is a dark profoundly personal story, but I sense that he needs to say these things aloud, and he needs someone who will hear him. When he has finished, co-opers stand up from their places on the floor and cocoon him in an embrace. And then another co-oper takes a seat at the front of the room and opens up, and then another stands up, and then another. And as they speak they are weeping, or those curled up on the cushions are weeping, or almost everyone in the room is weeping and at the end of each story, or rant, or slowly whispered reflection, someone or other calls out from the audience “we love you!” and “we’re here for you!” and, again and again, “thank you for sharing,” “thank you for sharing.”

Tables are pushed to the side and cushions piled on the floor and this night is a different kind of night. This is Song and Story Night, a treasured BSC tradition. We create a sacred space, a separate and privileged space where people become
vulnerable to one another.

“You might think your house is close, but after Song and Story Night everyone feels closer than ever before,” A co-oper says to me one evening when I ask her about Hoyt’s traditions. “It’s a beautiful thing.”

Next semester and six years from now a co-oper shares a song or a confession and this room, full of cushions and people, echoes with the sound of someone calling out, “thank you for sharing!”
Why is it that as a society we so rarely problematize the notion that we are discrete and unique individuals for whom success and failure is a matter of personal merit? This ontological framework surrounds us from nearly all sides and is so completely integrated into the way we view the world that it can be difficult to think of its consequences as anything but inevitable. In celebrating freedom, autonomy, and individual choice, we collectively lose sight of the emotional and societal consequences of distancing ourselves from others. On an individual level, this detachment generates alienation and an inability to locate a firm and reliable ikigai. On a global scale, the refusal to acknowledge that the individual and the collective are inextricable has allowed the reckless pursuit of individual ends to push society and the non-human natural environment to a breaking point.

In this thesis I discussed how, despite the omnipotence of neoliberal individualism and the transience of Hoyt’s membership, the co-op community sustains a strong sense of unity and cohesion. I traced a genealogy of the hyper-individualist, market-oriented American self to illustrate the fact that, just as individualism can be cultivated, so, too, can dividualism. I examined how, in enacting obligation and actively sharing and maintaining communal space, many Hoytians develop an understanding of interconnectivity, which ultimately affords them an increased sense of well-being. This contentment derives from the fact that individuals are able to locate themselves within a stable, enduring structure that extends beyond themselves.
I arrived back at Wesleyan in the fall of 2013 with the Hoytian ethos still fresh in my mind. My time in Berkeley, I discovered, had made me acutely aware of the ways in which many members of my community and I revere individuality and feel entitled to enact personal choice whenever and however we see fit. This self-centered attitude negatively impacts those immediately surrounding us: we leave our dishes in the sink, hoping that someone else will eventually wash them for us; we neglect to acknowledge our friends’ and family members’ emotional needs; and we ask others to do favors for us that we would not do for them.

But this egotism is also profoundly implicated in the reproduction of class divides: it relegates a vast swath of the world’s population to the job of literally and figuratively picking up after a hyper-privileged few individuals who have the luxury of being able to behave recklessly without fear of consequence. Meanwhile, members of the less-privileged majority sweep up the broken glass when a Wesleyan student throws a beer bottle on the street during a night of weekend revelry, or go hungry when the CEOs of transnational corporations make food scares by destroying entire ecosystems for profit.

Examining the source and impact of neoliberal hyper-individualism can allow us to reconceptualize our relationship to people who we will never meet, but who are profoundly impacted by our social and economic choices. Indeed, our well-being as humans is inextricably linked to the well-being of others, a fact we overlook as we parade around celebrating our own uniqueness and individuality.

As we sat on the roof and talked about cooperativism, Quinn observed that a
disproportionate number of co-opers are interested in environmental and social activism. She speculated that this is because, in living cooperatively, co-opers come to understand humanity as a collectivity rather than a set of autonomous individuals. She explained: “I think co-operation implies conscientiousness. You’re conscious of the people around you and the house you’re living in and doing the work that makes it run. You’re part of a bigger thing, and maybe that plays over to your outlook on life. [It helps you understand that] you can’t be greedy with our world” (Miller 2013). Brittany agreed:

“It just makes you more thoughtful of everyone” (Mathat 2013).

**Compounded**

_I am walking around Hoyt, moving through the space and moving as the space encourages and restricts my movement. I can sense the presence of Hoytians all around me. They are in their rooms hanging artwork on the walls or in the study room preparing for an exam. They are rifling through piles of tools in the tool room where electric screwdriver chords have always tangled and twisted around each other. They are painting the walls and cleaning the floors. They are staying up all night drinking tea, they are baking cookies in the kitchen, they are sitting on the floor. They are just trying to get by. And they are watching Cosmos in the TV room, when someone walks in with five forks and leftover chocolate cake and suddenly the whole thing is a totally existential experience._

_Walking through the hallways I can see, and hear, and smell, and taste the social vibrations of those who occupy this place. They care for it and care for each_
other. In this place they are many, but they also see themselves one. The place they inhabit is as much a part of them as they are as much a part of the place. It absorbs their presence like a temporally situated, yet infinite sponge.

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