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## Filling a House with Meaning: The Construction of a Chicago Housing Cooperative

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# Filling a House with Meaning: The Construction of a Chicago Housing Cooperative

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Honors thesis

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**Abstract**

A housing cooperative is a non-profit form of housing tenure that has been a feature of American university campuses since the 1930s. Living in a co-op allows members the benefits of low rent, a close-knit social group, and democratic control of their living space. Unlike communes, however, members do not typically share income or unite around a particular ideology. This paper is the result of ethnographic research of one such house, Haymarket House of Qumbya Housing Cooperative in Hyde Park, Chicago. In 1988 the founders of Haymarket established its methods of structuring everyday life on principles of socialism, egalitarianism, and environmentalism. Since then, as residents have come and gone, the community has shifted away from its politically-charged origins, though members are still conscious of the political implications of their everyday life. This article seeks to understand the character of people's lived experience with co-op living and the relationships of the people of Haymarket to the ideologies "built in" to their everyday practices. Though ethnographic research revealed that members differ in their attitudes about the concepts of utopia and intentional community, they share a desire to live differently than their neighbors, and Haymarket allows them a space to imagine alternatives.

*The house was older than the World's Fair, and it had the electrical wiring to prove it. We used to have this box that was just a rat's nest and a tangle of wires, and nobody ever wanted to look into it because it all just made us feel unsafe ... The front steps were made of concrete, and one had a hole that was just big enough to fit your foot in, so it was a great way to break your ankle. The walls had been patched and re-patched, and there were patches over those patches, so it wasn't necessarily smooth. And it wasn't freshly painted. It was an old house with character, and that was a very polite way of putting it, but that was the only way we described it, because it was true. But when I first saw the house, the first thing that came across my mind was that my parents can never know that I live here.*

*Joaquin, Haymarket House resident, March 2013 field notes*

In the winter of 1988 a small group of graduate students at the University of Chicago decided to buy the house they would name Haymarket. With its rotting wood and sagging floors, it was clear that the building needed more work than the group could afford at the time, but they decided to take a chance on it. They had spent the previous two years saving money<sup>1</sup> and hoping to establish a housing cooperative as a low-rent, environmentally conscious, and socially supportive alternative to traditional student housing.<sup>2</sup> For one reason or another, the previous endeavors to buy a house had all failed. Presented with the opportunity to buy this house, barely a mile away from campus, they wondered when or if another chance would come along. It was a “now or never” moment. Everyone had doubts, but when the issue was put to a vote, no one was willing to be the naysayer. The decision was made to buy the house.

The group named their new home Haymarket House, a name which suggests their connection to the progressive philosophy associated with the momentous Haymarket Riot in 1884. Throughout this research project, I have endeavored to understand more precisely the degree to which current members continue to embody this progressive legacy. Twenty-five years later the house has seen occupants come and go, weathered financial crises, and gone through a major renovation that finally replaced its antique wiring and leveled the sagging floors. Its membership has added two sister houses, and the three together comprise Qumbya Housing Cooperative. Haymarket's close-knit community, which has hovered between twelve to fifteen

through the years, is evidence of what a small group of idealistic students can create despite odds stacked against them from the start.

Housing cooperatives are designed to be affordable, to allow residents to construct their own sense of community for residents, and to give residents control over the space that they would not have as renters. Each house in Qumbya is democratically controlled by its members who make decisions about their household by consensus. The buildings themselves are owned by a non-profit association, which means rent has remained low over the years compared to other housing options in the surrounding neighborhood, Hyde Park.

As one resident explained to me, Haymarket House was founded on “values of feminism, and pseudo-anarchism, and environmentalism.” These values are built into the systems that structure everyday life for its members. They are implicit in practices from the way chores are assigned to where shared groceries are bought and the ways in which members are expected to handle conflict. For members who enter the community with a strong interest in these principles, Haymarket provides them a space to live out these ideals in the routines of daily life. For members who come in with just a casual interest in these principles, it provides them a chance to explore them through “doing” them. It is an alternative model of housing that is attractive to many people who are critical of the modern ways in which we house ourselves and would like to return to a more cooperative way of living in community.

The United States has a long history of such idealism and similar efforts to build communities of people dedicated to a common purpose. These attempts are known generally as intentional communities. The idea of Haymarket as an intentional community will be discussed in detail; in short, members disagree over whether it is or is not. In this essay, I hope to present a fair representation of Haymarket’s current residents and their multiplicity of views concerning the status of the co-op as an intentional community. I hope to convey that choosing to live in a co-op is a politically meaningful act and that its significance, from its members’ perspective, takes the form of the everyday and the banal. I will finally suggest that the attitudes of Haymarket’s members display core features of utopian thinking, though their interpretation of their community as anti-utopian may have been an important factor in the group’s success.

Surprisingly, there exists a paucity of ethnographic research of contemporary cooperative households, and this project seeks to address this absence. Studies of other intentional communities provide valuable context for understanding Haymarket House. Part I of this essay

outlines the information that has been collected on other intentional living societies, some more similar to Haymarket than others.

Part II outlines the methods of ethnography I used in this study. The goal of ethnography is to generate an understanding of a culture from an emic, or insider's, perspective. Accordingly, my goal has been to understand how members view their relationships with each other, the house itself, and the principles upon which it was established. Over the course of this project I visited Haymarket several times in order to experience everyday life as the residents do. I also conducted interviews with ten of the thirteen current residents. In part II I discuss issues, particularly those related to confidentiality, which came up during the process of collecting information. Part III introduces Haymarket, its surrounding environment, the demographics of its members, its routines and decision-making process, and its relationships to other incorporations. In part IV I introduce findings from ethnographic interviews, explore themes that frequently emerged in conversation with the research participants and synthesize these ideas into a preliminary understanding of what it is like to be a member of a housing cooperative, in particular, the challenges and joys experienced by members. Part V explores how members define their community, reasons why this has changed over the years, the importance of Haymarket's founding principles in members' everyday lives, and the future of the community.

## **I. Background Information**

Intentional community is a concept that is central to this work. Though Haymarket members generally disagree about whether or not their household fits the definition of intentional community, at least some of them do agree with the term. Because Haymarket was established by its original founders as an intentional community, it is worth defining here. It is important to situate the kind of community Haymarket is within the broader historical context of other, perhaps similar housing organizations.

According to Lucy Kamau, an intentional community is one in which (1) its members have chosen to live together rather than being neighbors by coincidence, and (2) they share things that neighbors do not normally share (2002:17). Shared property can be wealth, material items, food, and labor. Timothy Miller describes seven defining characteristics of an intentional community, the first of which is a sense of common purpose, shared dissatisfaction with the outside society, and an intention to live separately from it. The other criteria are a degree of self-

denial of individual choice, a geographic location, a higher degree of personal interaction than neighbors who live near each other by coincidence, some form of economic sharing, and at least five individuals. Finally, the community must have real existence as opposed to fictional utopias. (1998:xx-xxi): Lyman Tower Sargent proposes a simpler definition: a group of five or more adults and their children, if any, who come from more than one nuclear family and who have chosen to live together to enhance their shared values or for some other mutually agreed-upon purpose (2000: 15). Jonathan Andelson's definition of an intentional community is "one whose members actively strive to forge such a shared identity" (2002:131).

Anthropologists, and indeed all other social scientists, have historically been interested in the notion of communities. In addition to studies of actual communities, scholars have also been interested in socially-constructed ones, an idea Benedict Anderson explored in his influential book *Imagined Communities* (1983). In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when anthropologists began to turn their focus inward to their own societies, intentional communities and utopian groups became a natural object of study because many of them are deliberately demarcated by strict boundaries in space. As Susan Love Brown (2002) explains:

"The intentional community is ... an important object of study because it allows us to observe how human beings living in large, heterogeneous societies use community to cope with the exigencies of life," according to anthropologist Susan Love Brown. Furthermore, "the study of community acknowledges the inherent need for connection that exists among human beings (making community a naturally occurring phenomenon) and affords opportunities to understand how this need is culturally configured and reconfigured with other human requirements in the face of change." (5-6)

*Utopia*, too, is a term that must be defined, although the relationship between housing cooperatives and utopianism is complicated and usually oppositional. There is a vast body of literature dedicated to the history of utopian thinking (Schaer 2000; Sargent 1994; Morris 2004). Although the fantasy of a perfect society has existed since ancient times, the idea of utopia (a perfect society) was invented by Sir Thomas More in 1516. It flourished first as a literary genre and people soon began experimenting with possible ways to make utopia a reality. Lyman Tower Sargent (1994) calls it "social dreaming" (2). The essence of utopian thought is rejection of the status quo combined with an alternative vision (Roberts 1971:9). There are no predefined characteristics of utopia itself, although most visions of utopia have been envisioned as non-hierarchical with a communist or socialist economy.

Anthropologists' interest in intentional communities renewed itself after the rise of popular interest in communitarianism in the 1980s and 90s. *Intentional Community: An Anthropological Perspective* (2002) was the first edited volume dedicated to viewing historical and contemporary intentional communities through an anthropological lens. This volume focused on some of the more well-known and radical intentional communities of the past. She explores the notion that Victor Turner's ideas of liminality manifest itself in intentional communities through their rejection of normal economic life, the establishment of rituals, and abandonment of boundaries of identity like class, race, and gender. A summary of well-studied intentional communities in U.S. history fits into this analysis.

The first wave of American intentional communities began in colonial times, was religious in nature, and included the Shakers, the Harmony Society, and the Oneida Community. The beginning of the period of American secular communitarianism has been pinpointed at somewhere between 1820 and 1825 and continues to the present day (Kanter 1972: 334; Sutton 2004:1). Although Robert Sutton (2004) distinguishes the religious (1732-1824) from the secular (1824-2000) waves of American utopianism, other scholars have further differentiated secular American intentional communities according to the aspect of society they critique. Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1972) distinguishes the politico-economic wave (1820-1930), which was characterized by dissatisfaction with the working and living conditions industrial capitalism, from the psychosocial wave (1960s-1970s), which grew out of a critique that modern society fosters unnecessary competition between people and prevents them from forming meaningful connections with each other (1972: 334-5).

A famous contemporary of these American communities is the Kibbutz Movement in Israel which originated in 1909. Though the *kibbutz* is a religious organization, it had other motivations similar to the early twentieth century politico-social criticisms of American intentional communities. Intended as a site of freedom from alienating factory work and a haven for refugees, the *kibbutz* is a cooperative agricultural settlement in which members own property collectively. Children are raised together in a dormitory apart from their parents, similar to the religious utopias of the early United States. Jobs are assigned and rotated in a joint decision making process in weekly general meetings. A great deal of research has been devoted to the structure of life in the Israeli kibbutz, beginning with Spiro's classic ethnography *The Kibbutz: Venture in Utopia* (1956). Although they have experienced a decline since the 1990s, the kibbutz



was one of the most durable and successful communal experiments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Blasi 1986; Morris 2000: 164-6).

The student housing communities from which contemporary urban housing co-ops originate first appeared in the US in the 1920s, towards the end of what Kanter (1972) considers the politico-economic wave of intentional communities. Student cooperatives were different in fundamental ways from actual communes, however. Instead of an attempt to separate from society, they were organized to help university students live affordably, in fact making it possible for them to access education and employment that they might not otherwise be able to afford. California is the state with the largest number of student housing cooperatives. Some universities have cooperative systems that date back to the 1930s and still operate today.

Several organizations exist which are dedicated to education co-op members and promoting the cooperative movement. The International Cooperative Alliance, a union of international (not solely housing) co-ops professes seven principles: voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, member economic participation, autonomy and independence, education, training, and information, cooperation among cooperatives, and concern for community (International Co-op Alliance 2011). Established in 1968, North American Students of Cooperation (NASCO) is an association that provides education and technical assistance to co-ops across the country. According to NASCO, the values of cooperatives are self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity (North American Students of Cooperation 2012). As a member of NASCO, Qumbya (including Haymarket) promotes these values.

It is also pertinent to this discussion to mention cohousing, a form of housing that exhibits many similarities to Haymarket and housing co-ops in general. The cohousing movement originated in Denmark in the 1970s. American architects Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett wrote *Cohousing: A Contemporary Approach to Housing Ourselves* (1994) after spending time studying the movement in Europe. This book introduced the principles and practices of cohousing to a very receptive American audience.

Haymarket is an alternative approach to housing individuals in a single dwelling, whereas cohousing is an alternative approach to arranging families in a neighborhood. Cohousing communities consist of a number of families, typically less than fifty, who live in individual dwellings arranged around a common house where events like communal dinners, meetings, and

other social gatherings take place. Communally owned gardens, leisure facilities, and workshops are other common features. The arrangement combines private homes with a greater sense of familiarity and cooperation between members than a typical urban or suburban neighborhood. Most cohousing neighborhoods are located in the countryside and are usually designed by members, requiring a great deal of research, planning, and collaboration. Members take turns cooking and share responsibility for maintaining the common house and grounds. Cohousing residents often report that children in particular benefit from this arrangement, as they have ample space in which to play, many playmates, and form close relationships with adults other than their parents.

The second wave of cohousing refers to the movement of the 1990s in the United States. American cohousing families, more similar to members of housing cooperatives than European cohousing communities, tend to take an anti-utopian stance. They distance their practices from those of intentional communities. Lucy Sargisson (2012) studied attitudes and features of fifty American cohousing neighborhoods and argued based on her findings that cohousing *is* a form of intentional community. Her surveys reveal common ideas and values among members, such as “light” environmentalism, a respect for diversity, and cooperation, and she argues that the structural organization of physical space and community design enables members to achieve their shared goals. At the same time they are truly nonideological, which, she argues, may explain their success (50). My own study of Haymarket House is similar in many ways to Sargisson’s findings of cohousing groups. Though not (or no longer) dependent on the shared ideology of members, cohousing and cooperative living allow members to actively imagine alternative ways of living.

## **II. Research Methods**

I visited Haymarket a total of five times between November, 2012 and March, 2013. I first contacted the community through the online database provided by the Fellowship for Intentional Community (<http://directory.ic.org/>) and was invited to visit during a Sunday dinner and meeting. Each of my subsequent visits also took place on Sunday evenings because of the opportunity to witness the weekly meetings. Aside from observing and participating in these social events, I conducted one-on-one interviews with members on a voluntary basis.

Individual interviews with members were my main source of information and focused not only on the experience of co-op living, but also on the history of the community, its structure, and its routines. Other sources of information were a document containing rules and tips that is used to introduce new members to the community and two ten-year-old documents written by the community's founders that the current residents had recently unearthed. The co-op does not keep records regarding, for example, demographic information of its members, and so the data I collected is qualitative.

On each visit, I spent between three and five hours at Haymarket. Individual interviews took place before and after the community meeting and dinner. Interviews ranged in duration from half an hour to an hour and a half, averaging about 45 minutes. In total, I interviewed ten of the thirteen residents, or about 75% of the group.

Because of the travel required and time constraints, this ethnography should be considered a short-term one. A longer continuous stay at Haymarket would have allowed for much more observation and participation in the daily routines of the house. Despite the practical limitations on my field work, my interviews with residents yielded a great deal of information.

I prepared some general questions for each interview (see Appendix A), designed to begin open-ended conversations. I encouraged the participants to talk at length about the topics they felt were important in creating a picture of their social group. The conversations focused on the participants' motivations for applying for membership, how they define what makes their living arrangement different from most, and what they perceive to be the benefits of membership. Longtime members often talked about memorable past residents, events, and changes they've seen in the community over the years. Newer members often spoke about their period of adjusting to the community, which for some was still in progress.

From my very first visit I noticed that the way the interviews unfolded demonstrated something about the culture of the household. It was typically easy to solicit volunteers for interviews, and all interviews took place at Haymarket in a location of the participant's choosing. All but two participants chose common areas: the common living room, kitchen, or dining area. I conducted one interview in the attic and one in a member's bedroom, but these places were chosen because of their low noise level or for convenience. No one insisted on a private area for the sake of confidentiality, even though every member has a private bedroom. Most interviews were conducted at the table in the dining room, a very high-traffic area. There were almost

always other residents nearby, preparing the area for dinner, doing laundry, or exiting and entering the house.

These conditions made for an interesting interview setting as other residents sometimes jumped in with their own answers to questions or responded to something the interviewee had said. One interviewee pulled a passerby into the conversation (“can we ask Michael what he thinks?”). More than once, something in the interview sparked a conversation between the interviewee and someone else in the room, and I moved my recording device back and forth to capture the interaction. Although all were one-on-one conversations, they were not private. Eight of the ten interviews were overheard, and some temporarily joined by others who wanted to add their two cents. What this demonstrated to me was the open, nonjudgmental nature of the house that several participants went on to mention explicitly as a characteristic of the residents.

While this environment made interviews interesting, it raised some concerns. Because of the sensitivity of some information learned in participant observation, and because anthropologists have historically worked closely with politically disenfranchised communities, protecting the identities of research participants is often a major concern in ethnography. Permission to do this project would not have been granted without the promise of confidentiality for the research participants. Yet almost every measure of ensuring confidentiality was thwarted by the participants themselves. They invited others’ opinions on interview questions; they named other members on the audio recordings. I realized that in such a small group, it would be nearly impossible to hide the identities of those I interviewed. By March, I had for the most part abandoned an ideal of total confidentiality, which was a factor in my decision to ask permission to use the house’s name, Haymarket, in this paper. That request was granted after a very short group discussion; residents are proud of their community and want readers to know about it.

The fact that only two interviews were private and uninterrupted certainly has implications for the findings of this project. Throughout the process I was concerned that the interview conditions people chose would affect their truthfulness or what they were willing to share. On one occasion a participant did indicate that she decided not to reveal something because others were present, and there were certainly a few moments when background noise became distracting. It would have been within my power to insist on a private location for each interview, but I chose not to do this. I wanted the project to be conducted on the residents’ own terms even if they weren’t what I expected. My insisting that all interviews be confidential would

clearly clash with the culture of openness in the group. I was also concerned that it would imply something about what I expected from the conversation in a way that could be distracting.

Additionally, I soon realized that the open nature of the interviews could be a benefit to the research. For one thing, on some occasions an interrupter would provide clarification of a fact or further details that the interviewee didn't know. Second, the interactions and interviews-within-interviews were valuable demonstrations of how the residents interact as a group and gave me insight into some of the relationships between individuals. Finally, I considered the lack of concern about privacy significant in itself as an element of Haymarket's social environment.

It is possible that some members would have been more forthcoming had interviews been completely private. However considering the abundance of personal feelings and experiences that were shared with me in spite of the presence of others, I believe the interview process was successful for the content it yielded and as a reflection on the culture of the house and the social relationships within it.

A more intensive ethnographic study of Haymarket would certainly reveal more about members' routine interactions, the rhythm of the community, and special events such as work holidays (planned events when people work together on a project such as planting a garden) and holiday celebrations. The institutional board that oversaw this project placed limitations on the amount of time I could spend at Haymarket. For example, I was not approved to visit overnight. Long term fieldwork at Haymarket would reveal unspoken or unconscious patterns of behavior. One example might be gendered patterns of responsibility. Are women more likely to pick up the slack when housemates neglect their chores? Do men dominate certain types of discussion in house meetings? These questions are relevant in a community of progressive-minded individuals who collectively aim for an egalitarian household, but interviews would not likely reveal the answers. More comprehensive observation of the community would provide these insights. This project may establish a foundation from which to proceed with more elusive ethnographic questions.

### **III. Introduction to Haymarket**

*Do you know the Haymarket story? ... The story is that there was a labor gathering that was supposed to be a peaceful rally. It was related to a strike, and so the police were there. And a bomb went off -- someone threw some kind of explosive. And the police said it was the anarchists*

*who were rallying who threw the bomb, and the anarchists said, “No, it was the police, trying to make a justification to put us all in jail!” And no one really knows what happened, but this bomb was sort of integral to the story. So on our sign out front it says, “Haymarket House, Qumbya Co-op.” And on the one side it has the twin pines logo, it’s a co-op thing. Co-ops all over the world use this logo, it’s two pine trees in a circle. And the other thing on our sign is a bomb. So when I first moved here, I sent a picture of myself standing in front of the house to my grandma. She was like, ‘What’s the bomb about? Is this violent? Are you anarchists?’*

*Gabe, November 2012 field notes*

The Haymarket Riot, for which the first Qumbya house was named, took place on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1886 in Haymarket Square in Chicago. Thousands of protesters were there supporting the strike for an eight-hour work day, at the time the most massive nationwide strike in American history. The explosion and ensuing gunfire killed at least seven people and wounded dozens more. In the months that followed eight local anarchists were convicted in a sensational trial and later executed for the crime despite a lack of evidence. These individuals came to be regarded as martyrs of the labor movement (see Green, 2007). Haymarket was named in honor of this piece of local history, and in reference to the spirit of justice and solidarity that co-ops uphold.

### *Physical Space*

The three houses of Qumbya are located in Hyde Park, a neighborhood on the south side of Chicago known to many as the former home of the Obama family. It is also home to the University of Chicago, a prestigious private research university with a \$6 billion endowment. Chicago’s south side is ethnically and racially diverse but highly segregated and also high in income disparity. Here, Hyde Park is known as a sort of enclave of the white middle class and is home to one of the only significant white populations for miles.

Haymarket House has twelve bedrooms, four bathrooms, a recently finished attic, and common areas: a living room, kitchen, and dining area. The dining room also serves as a “meeting hall” and is the most spacious area of the house. It completed a year of heavy renovations in June 2012. The original house was over a century old and replete with structural damage. Residents worked with an architect to completely redesign the floor plan. The lengthy

renovation process was a trial of the community's social cohesion and commitment to the future of the house, as is discussed in more detail in section IV.

### *People*

As of March 2013, Haymarket is full to capacity with thirteen residents: six women and seven men. They range in age from 20 to 43, with most members in their mid-twenties. All except for one member of part Mexican heritage identify as white. They are a politically conscious group and all have received at least some post-secondary education. A majority came to Chicago from out-of-state to pursue work or education there. Two are students from Germany. The longest current member has lived at Haymarket for eight years, and the newest member joined in autumn of 2012. Of the ten members I interviewed, all identified as politically left-leaning, though their religious beliefs vary from Anabaptist Christian to atheism to a Buddhism-inspired set of spiritual beliefs. There are undergraduate students and graduate students. Among the occupations represented are teachers, nonprofit employees, a community organizer, and artists. Each resident has a single bedroom with the exception of one married couple who rent a larger space together.

Membership requires applicants to send in an application, which includes general information and eighteen short-answer questions (see Appendix B). The group invites each applicant to visit the house for an interview over dinner. Members discuss the potential applicants at the next meeting and reach a consensus on whom to make an offer. Subletters must also be approved in this way. Upon joining, each member commits to about one hour of assigned household chores per week and to cooking two meals per month for the group. Members are expected to attend 75% of Sunday night meetings.

### *Routine & Business*

Haymarket, like its two partner houses, is designed to be free of hierarchy. Decisions about the community are made by consensus at weekly Sunday night house meetings. These meetings have a list of agenda topics, including chore go-around (everyone confirms that they have completed their chores for the week), in-house announcements, out-of-house announcements, kudos (shout-outs of appreciation for particular housemates), feelings (everyone in turn says something about their feelings at the moment or in the past week), and blackboard

(before meeting, members write a topic they want to bring up on the blackboard next to the table). I found meetings to be quite informal: typically starting a little late and facilitated by whoever volunteered first. They did not last more than half an hour, and one member told me Haymarket prides itself on the efficiency of its meetings.

The community makes use of an organized chore system in which members share responsibility for physical maintenance and bureaucratic tasks. The list of chores is divided and assigned to individuals. Some are actual chores (cleaning a bathroom, taking out the recycling); others are roles like the membership coordinator or various positions on the Qumbya board. Chores are designated “small,” “medium,” “large,” or “huge,” and each member’s assignments add up to about one hour and fifteen minutes per week. Assignments are the same week-to-week. They can change by request, but they do not rotate regularly. In addition to chores, each member is expected to cook dinner for the group twice a month. The residents have busy lives and dinner is the main thing that brings people together, so the cooking rotation is essential to the community.

Some of the most important chores are related to purchasing food for the communal kitchen and pantry. These members purchase fresh produce weekly in addition to bulk items like rice and flour. Haymarket is officially vegetarian, though members can buy their own meat products.

The cost of living at Haymarket consists of rent which is between \$400 and \$600 for a single room (depending on its size) and \$175 for “food group” which goes toward utilities, groceries, and other household needs. Haymarket is not an income-sharing cooperative. The house budget is used for maintenance and to buy appliances and furniture for the common areas. Residents furnish their own bedrooms. An affiliate of North American Students for Cooperation (NASCO) owns the house and sets the rent prices, though the co-op as a group effectively controls the space. Property costs in the surrounding neighborhood have risen steeply in the last twenty years, but Haymarket’s rent costs have not changed significantly since the 1990s even after its renovation. In 2002 Qumbya Housing Cooperative became a registered nonprofit organization, or 501(c)3. This gives Qumbya tax-exempt status and the opportunity to apply for grants.

### *Other Bodies*



Residents identify more as members of Haymarket than as members of Qumbya, the co-op system. Wednesday nights are community dinners, though these tend to have less attendance than house dinners. Residents of the three houses do not frequently mix socially, except for the Qumbya board which is made up of three individuals from each house.

Qumbya is a member of North American Students for Cooperation (NASCO). At least one Qumbya representative attends NASCO's annual conferences.

Haymarket has no ties to political, religious, or educational organizations, though it has always had a strong presence of University of Chicago students and alumni.

### *At Present*

In 2013 Haymarket will turn twenty-five years old. It is necessary to say a few things about where Haymarket was in its own history at the time that this project was conducted. 2012 saw many changes in Haymarket. Some of the older members have noted that the house seems to go through cycles of boom and bust, patterns of crisis and re-stabilization. They can point out particular years that were marked by social or economic trauma.

Memorial Day in 2012 marked the end of the most significant transition that Haymarket has gone through in its history, the massive year-long renovation of the house which forced its residents into apartments. The building was gutted, the floor plan redesigned, and the house rebuilt from the ground up. Residents remember this period as hard on everyone, some more than others. There were setbacks in the construction, the apartments were too small, and the lack of control over the space wore on community dynamics. A point of pride for the house is the fact that despite the impending transition, no one decided to "bail" and leave the community in the months leading up to the renovation. In the summer of 2012 the new building was officially completed and the members were able to move back in. Several members who had stayed on for the sake of the group had made plans to move as soon as the renovation was over. The community had spent the later part of the renovation interviewing potential members, five of whom moved in over the second half of 2012.

That is to say that I became familiar with Haymarket at a time when several things were happening. The group was recently stabilized after a major transition. Membership had just undergone a sort of revolution. Five out of the thirteen residents had lived there for less than a year. Some of them were still in the process of settling into the routines of the community or had

gone through this recently and remembered it well. Membership as of spring 2013 is a mix of the older members who weathered the renovation and new ones, for whom it is their first time living in a co-op. Both groups have gone through a state of adjustment, and obviously the culture of the house changes as the people change. My visits to Haymarket were during this newly-reached period of stability.

#### **IV. Interview Findings**

The interviews I conducted with Haymarket residents yielded far more information than this project can encompass. Numerous themes and commonalities emerged from the interview portion of the research. This section will discuss five of the most significant conclusions that can be made from the values and attitudes expressed by Haymarket's members. As there was a great deal of variety in members' experiences with the co-op, these conclusions are not meant to represent the opinions of all members, but of a significant number of interviewees.

First, people were drawn to Haymarket for the community it promised more than the low rent and other practical benefits. Social support, the familial dynamic, and the opportunity to meet interesting people are the most important benefits Haymarket provides its members. Some were looking for community because they were new to Chicago, some were tired of living on their own or with a roommate with whom they had only a shallow relationship. For example Leah, an artist originally from Seattle, Washington, explained, "I had gone through a lot, and I really wanted a sense of community. I'm not really close with my family, so maybe that was another reason why I was really craving it." Ana, a teacher, said, "I was really ready to have a social life outside of work and a community I could come home to, and people I could spend time with." A similar perspective came from Elliot, an undergraduate studying fine art and American Sign Language. "If I were living alone," she told me, "I would get lonely and possibly depressed. If I shut myself in my room for five days straight, people are gonna come and say, 'Hey, what's wrong?' And I feel really supported by my community. I think that's probably the most important thing about living here." Social support is clearly a major part of the appeal of housing co-ops such as Haymarket.

The interactions I observed spoke to Haymarket's familial dynamic. Naturally, they know each other's names and greet each other when they enter. After being called to dinner, people filter in gradually without waiting for each other to start eating. Dinner conversation is lively and

it flows easily from plans for the next work holiday to pop culture. The chef receives compliments. Conversation carries on as people finish eating and begin to go into the kitchen, where everyone washes his or her own dishes. The residents have a great deal in common in terms of cultural knowledge of movies, music, and celebrities. They also share a Haymarket “lore” which includes stories about former members (a man remembered as “the Viking,” or “the girl who lasted one day”) or memorably bad dinners (one member, after a stressful day, presented the group with a plate of three sliced avocados). They come together around inside jokes which I was promised to be let in on, if I could wait until I interviewed the member who tells them best. Of course some relationships are closer than others, but I experienced a general sense that the members enjoy talking with each other and learning about each other’s lives.

Members of Haymarket, as a rule, are also friendly to guests. Occasionally they might be considered a bit too friendly; one resident admitted this was her first impression from her membership interview. One night in March a member’s friend came as a guest to dinner. When it was her turn to share feelings, she offered, “I feel weird about sharing what I’m feeling with a bunch of strangers.” This was cheerfully accepted, and it was on to the next person. It is not surprising that the inclusive atmosphere extends to visitors. Active inclusion is an unspoken standard.

Appreciation for the principles underlying the cooperative concept is more likely to develop over time. I frequently heard residents say that they didn’t know exactly what they were getting into, didn’t know what they were looking for until they found it, or that it took them a period of time to understand what the community was about. Adrian, a biology student who has lived at Haymarket for less than a year, told me, “when I moved in I didn’t really think much about community ... and I don’t really have strong philosophical feelings [on cooperative principles] either way. I would say that I like it a lot more now and have stronger feelings about it now than I did then.” This appreciation might develop slowly and might remain unspoken for many people. Drew, an ordained pastor, said, “There are some things we don’t often talk about that are ethical or theological priorities for me that I really appreciate about the house. Among those is living with people who care about the things I care about.” Though the values of the cooperative model were sometimes characterized as unspoken, members are often acutely aware of its advantages. They respect the established systems of the house. They believe the procedures are there because they work. Even if some conventions of meetings (surveying brand preferences

of anything from soy milk to soap, reporting to the whole group that one's chore is finished, taking turns sharing feelings) might seem awkward or silly to outsiders, they are taken as important to the operation of the community.

Residents also share a belief that housing cooperatives are misunderstood. Haymarket members perceive the general public to be uninformed about what a co-op is and how it operates, and upon learning about it, they are skeptical of its benefits. As Melinda, a seminary student, said, "I think most people don't really understand it ... the American mindset is like, 'Wow, you don't have your own space? You probably go crazy.' And I find that if I ever have a gripe, people are like, 'Oh, that's why I could never do that,' and they super support the gripe, but if I say good things, they're really suspicious." Nearly everyone I spoke to was able to recite a list of questions they often hear from people unfamiliar with co-ops. Joaquin, an eight-year resident of Haymarket, said, "A lot of people I talk to, when they hear that I have twelve roommates, they're like, 'I could never do that. I could never deal with that. How do you get any privacy? Do you have to eat their food? Are they good cooks? What's going on here? Somebody's gonna slack off. Somewhere it's gonna break down and it's not gonna last.'" If people do not outright dismiss co-ops, they often consider it an option that only college students or "hippies" would choose.

Haymarket members are well aware of more embellished stereotypes related to communal lifestyles. Elliot said that she always tries to mention that she has housemates of all different religions because "sometimes people are like, 'Are you a cult, or...?'" Leah is used to answering people's questions. "You know, it's a really foreign thing for them," she said. "Somebody even asked me if we swap partners." These associations probably come from popular representations of cults and communes in the media. Residents of Haymarket are aware of these stereotypes but do not feel that their community is particularly threatened by them. In fact, they use stereotypes as a source of self-deprecating humor. It is common to hear facetious comments by members about Haymarket as a cult or themselves as hippies. "We're not allowed to talk to outsiders alone," joked one member as we began his interview with two others working on laptops nearby. Several residents expressed a wish that the public was more familiar with the idea of housing co-ops, but myths and stereotypes do not really pose a threat and are more a source of amusement for the majority of people I interviewed.

Haymarket members share certain critiques of mainstream housing practices or American culture in general. In particular they critique wastefulness, materialism, and an overemphasis on

independence to the point of social isolation. Ana's opinion on this developed during the four years she spent teaching in Guatemala:

U.S. culture is so individualistic, and our ideal is that you have your own apartment, and you have your own job, and you do your own thing. And you're self-sustaining, and you can do everything by yourself. I think that's a value that our culture espouses, and if you need other people you're seen as kind of weak, like you couldn't make it on your own. I really appreciate Haymarket because it recognizes that we need other people, and that's good. And there's another model of living that means that you don't have to do everything by yourself.

Sharing a house with twelve people means that individual members have to give up some measure of control over household decisions. "It's something that's countercultural in America, where we just expect to have everything our way," said Melinda. In Leah's words, "It's definitely a positive thing for people to start thinking more in terms of supporting each other rather than just me, me, me. I feel like American culture is so full of that. That, if anything, I think is the most important part about community living."

Members also seem to share an opinion that living in a co-op is more beneficial for the environment. Michael, a Ph.D. student, considers this one of the co-op's most significant purposes:

We have limited resources on planet earth, and how are we gonna feed 7+ billion people? ... Not everybody can live the same lifestyle they're living now ... You have this problem of resources scarcity -- what solutions can you generate, and is communal living one way in which you can try to tackle this? I mean, not everybody can live in co-ops, but I think it's a good way of thinking about some of those things.

Other members agree that a co-op is a more sustainable way to house a dozen people than individual houses or apartments. Haymarket also follows sustainable practices like composting, recycling, and purchasing local produce.

Members of Haymarket tend to hold progressive, left-leaning political beliefs including a respect for multiculturalism and diversity. Co-ops in general are quite conscious of social justice issues, though modern intentional communities in America have are made up primarily of members of the white middle class (Kozeny 2000). Yearly NASCO conferences usually feature

several workshops dedicated to making the co-op movement more inclusive to communities of color.

Haymarket is fairly homogenous and its residents relatively privileged in terms of race, class, and education. They are conscious of this and some consider it a weakness of their social group. One member I interviewed had recently taken a position on the Qumbya board as outreach coordinator. As the only self-identified nonwhite member of Haymarket, she expressed her desire to spread awareness of cooperative housing options to communities of color in Chicago.

Sometimes I do think, ‘why don’t we have more minorities in the house?’ I wonder why that is, and I think it’s just part of living in Chicago. I don’t know. The fact is, we just don’t have a lot of minority applicants ... The other thing about Chicago is that it is very segregated. You just can walk a block in Chicago and be in a completely different neighborhood. You can go from all black to all white just by crossing the street. It seems to be very divided here, and I think that also keeps the exchange of ideas from taking place. So I think the segregation may be a reason why.

There is a scarcity of academic literature on the reasons why co-ops and intentional communities seem to lack racial diversity. In Haymarket’s case, this is likely related to the segregated nature of Chicago. Additionally, the house has always had a strong representation of University of Chicago students and alumni, who tend to be an economically privileged demographic.

Some of the “veteran” residents of Haymarket spoke with satisfaction about challenges they have faced and overcome as a community. Haymarket’s major renovation in 2011 has been its biggest trial to date. When the co-op was established in 1988, the house was already in poor condition. Just a few years later the city required an inspection of the house, and the residents received the devastating notice that the house was so unsafe, they had to make renovations or move out. The young community could not afford the level of renovations required to bring the house up to code, so they made the difficult decision to sell the house. Then, the city miraculously lost the record of the inspection. The group continued to live there, making their own improvements to the house when they could afford it, until another inspection was due in 2008. The group was again forced to make the needed repairs or leave, but by then Qumbya had enough funds to undertake the renovation.

Construction began in the summer of 2011 and the community, then fifteen people, moved into two apartments in a nearby building. The year that followed tested the community's strength and its members' commitments to each other. There were constant decisions to be made regarding the construction, which resulted in lengthy house meetings. On top of that, it was frustrating to have to deal with landlords when the group was used to having collective control of their space. The apartments weren't quite large enough for everyone, and one couple had to use bookshelves to section off a living room as their bedroom. The group tried to keep routines of chores and cooking as consistent as possible, but it was a difficult adjustment. This quote from Elliot sums up the feelings that filled the community during that time:

We missed this house. There were some people who had been living here for almost ten years. There was a lot of sadness. And then [the apartments] just always felt temporary. You had to walk outside and up to get to the other people. People were living in rooms that weren't really rooms. The walls were all white, there was an awful echo. It just wore on everything that we did ... A lot of people were staying on just to go through with the move because it would be really hard to find new people to live here during the move. And it was actually a really beautiful thing because it was evidence of how much people care as a community, that people would stay on through that. It was awful, and people stayed on just because it would be good for the future of Haymarket. And then as soon as we moved back here, people started leaving. Basically, it was just time for a lot of people. There were two couples that just got married, one couple that decided they wanted to live alone together. So it was just time, and they were holding out. I don't really know why that works ... I guess that's just a thing about this house.

It was a relief when the group finally moved back to the house in June 2012, and almost immediately the members who had planned to leave moved out and were replaced by newcomers. Haymarket residents remember it as the biggest house crisis of their time, but they are proud for having withstood the trial as it revealed the strength of their commitments to each other.

Haymarket members disagree over whether or not they live in an intentional community, but they generally do not consider their household utopian in any way. They are conscious of the principles underlying Haymarket's conception as well as the practical constraints (for example, zoning codes) on their control over the space. One of the co-op system's benefits is that private

ownership is preserved in single bedrooms, and the community does not demand an extreme level of investment from its members. The members tend to agree on social and political issues, but is that solidarity the purpose of the community? The members I interviewed are almost evenly split on the question. Melinda is one resident who does consider Haymarket an intentional community:

This was my first time living in community without there being a faith base, and at first I thought that would be strange for people to not gather around certain ideas. But then I realized that there is a very distinct idea set, and almost like its own structure around those things, and common things that people do together, and ways you get to know people. I'd say it's intentional.

A few members' answers could not be classified as a yes or no. Joaquin's opinion was that "in a broader sense, in terms of communities that are organized around a certain ideal, I don't think [the term] is a good fit for us. But in terms of people who just want to live with other people I think that's a good term for us." Gabe, a local barista and Haymarket's bulk grocery shopper, said:

I would say that my vision of the co-op is almost *anti*-utopian in that nobody's perfect, and it kind of sucks at times. It's really hard and it takes more work than when you're in an apartment because you have to deal with people all the time, and while people are great, I don't think that we all agree about enough things to say, "Yes, we're going to withdraw from society, and close our doors."

My use of the term "utopia" in interviews was usually met with laughter. Haymarket residents, like members of cohousing communities, do not think of their lifestyle as utopian in any way. This is unsurprising, as most societies scholars deem utopias would not self-identify as such. That would be claiming an impossible standard of perfection. Members associate "utopia" with "wishful thinking," claims that "someone's figured it all out," or "a bubble." Certainly with its location in the middle of Hyde Park, Haymarket provides no sense of escaping the real world. It is neither self-contained nor self-sufficient, but there is still something significant about the alternative ways in which community life works. In her study of anti-utopian attitudes among cohousing groups, Sargisson (2000) argues that there exists a false dichotomy between utopianism and pragmatism. A real perfect society has never been built. Real (as opposed to literary) utopias are populated by groups of people with criticisms against society who find it



worthwhile to imagine alternatives, or what Sargent (1994) called “social dreaming.” Haymarket members vary in terms of which needs Haymarket fulfills for them. Some seek a very casual or limited change in lifestyle (“I wanted to be around people”; “Living in a co-op makes me more accountable in keeping up a household”) while others hold very real convictions that cooperative living could solve a number of society’s problems. Additionally, individual members sometimes shift from one opinion to another over the course of their stay.

## **V. Analysis**

This project seeks to understand the character of people’s lived experience with co-op living and the relationships of the people of Haymarket to the “built in” ideologies inherent in their everyday practices. Though ethnographic research revealed that members differ in their attitudes about the concepts of utopia and intentional community, they share a desire to live differently than their neighbors do, and Haymarket allows them a space to imagine alternatives.

Haymarket’s approach to housing is idealistic and pragmatic at the same time. Like the cohousing movement, it resists dogma. Like all intentional communities, life at Haymarket is marked by a blurred distinction between what is traditionally considered public, political affairs, and private, domestic life.

In discussing her notion of “transgressive utopia,” Sargisson (2000) considers this one of the most important contributions that studies of intentional community make to social science. They create new conceptual space, outside the mainstream yet inside of it, and allow members to transgress boundaries of what has become normal social life in terms of the American values of privacy and individualism. The values of cooperation and community are part of our history as a nation, but cooperative housing today presents a challenge to the status quo. Intentional communities problematize the longstanding idea of the dichotomy between public and private life – an undertaking that is central to contemporary ecologism (concern for the conservation of the natural environment) and feminism.

There is a long tradition, present in both liberal and conservative political thought, of separating life into the conceptual arenas of public and private, and this division dominates political thought. The content of the public and private sphere is historically and culturally specific. In western European and American society, the private sphere is conceptually associated with the home, family, children, and women’s labor. Accordingly, the public sphere is

associated with paid work and business, men, and politics. A consequence has been the exclusion of women from the political agenda.

Politics, according to traditional thought, refers to the structures, institutions, and spaces in which publicly binding decisions are made. Accordingly political actors would be individuals like government leaders or members of interest groups. In contrast, a feminist approach argues that political spaces are where privately-binding decisions are made, meaning that everyone in society is a political actor and political issues might include domesticity, sexuality, and the family. Sargisson (2000) argues that in intentional community, the home is a consciously and intentionally politicized space, and therefore stands as a challenge to traditional liberal thought (56).

Making the decision to live in a housing cooperative is an act of political significance. Inside the co-op, daily routines are based on principles that have meaning in the larger society. These ideas are built into the way members do things. In the co-op, they take the form of the everyday and the banal. Haymarket is environmentalist; they compost, recycle, and eat vegetarian. It is egalitarian; there is no hierarchy, anyone can fill any working role, and decisions require everyone's approval. It has socialist elements, like the house bank account to which everyone contributes an equal monthly amount. No one makes a profit from the co-op. Sargisson (2002) notes that in communitarian settings, "these actions are politicized partly by their context: the fact that they occur in a consciously created and alternative space; partly by the impact they have on the wider community; and also by the consciousness of the actions themselves" (60). Crossing this unspoken boundary can be difficult for new members to get accustomed to. It is unconventional for decisions about domestic, everyday matters (what brand of ketchup to buy, what color to paint the common room) to be settled as part of an agenda in a weekly meeting or by a committee formed for that purpose, but within the co-op it is normal. In turn, the community considers its actions politically relevant, and they are, for example, their commitment to buying local produce and fair-trade products whenever available. Finally, the process involves social and political "work" that occurs away from meetings. With larger issues, a member often proposes an idea one-on-one to several housemates, so that by the time it is brought up in the meeting, it is accepted more quickly.

The attitudes of Haymarket's members display the essence of utopian thinking: holding a shared social critique and creating a space to practice an alternative. However, co-op living does

not seek radical change. It does not require its members to sever ties with those outside the community or commit to anything more than an hour of chores per week and weekly meeting attendance (even though most members commit much more in terms of loyalty to the community and the relationships it houses). The structure allows its members, most of whom are busy students and workers, to choose their level of involvement beyond the general level of participation built into the cooperative system. Ana told me, “It takes a real commitment to the community. And it takes a different form for each person ... We don’t get angry at each other if we miss dinner, you know? There’s enough room in that commitment to allow for some freedom and diversity of lifestyles.” In contrast to more isolated communities, Leah said, “It’s a way to do something without being too intrusive or too absorbing like it was in the 60s, when it was a real lifestyle you had to commit to. It’s not like that anymore. It’s not nearly as all-encompassing and absorbing of your time. It’s kind of a different way of being able to give back without doing something so drastic.” *Doing something* and *giving back* refer to making some sort of positive change in the world through the cooperative model. Gabe considers his decision to live in the co-op “an idealistic statement that this is a thing that more people should do, and you can be kind of square and do it. You don’t have to smoke pot and want to destroy the government to want to live with people and use all the same washer and not waste resources.” That the co-op does not require radical beliefs has likely been a reason for its success. Sargisson (2002) surmised the same thing regarding the growing popularity of cohousing in the United States.

Members agree that the community has “mellowed out” since it was first established. Though its founders had the idealism and passion for cooperative values that inspired its creation in the first place, as members have come and gone over the years it became harder to transmit these values to new residents. In addition, older members often told me that the house has experienced a demographic shift over the years and members became older, with more stable lifestyles. They told me about how, as recent as five years ago, parties were wilder and more frequent. The culture was more boisterous. Dinner conversation was full of taboo subjects. This was when a higher percentage of the residents were undergraduates or people in transition who needed a place to stay temporarily, as opposed to now when the group as a whole is older and more responsible. One member explained that this came about in part by a conscious effort of some of the more established members. After a failed attempt to acquire a fourth house, a

Qumbya financial crisis in 2003 left the co-op with an uncertain future, some of the more active members began making an effort to stabilize it as an institution. As Joaquin put it:

That trauma lingered in a lot of people's minds, and because of that everybody was aware of how volatile the co-op was -- like it could blow away at any instant, that's the impression that I remember having. And it's because we didn't have a very good institutional memory. We didn't have any official policies written down, and everything was made at a very much grassroots level and [policies] only lasted as long as people could remember them or cared to enact them. People would just come in and come out; we didn't have a good way of transmitting the stuff down. So people who stayed here a while started feeling that, and we were like, 'We like this space. We like this institution. How are we going to make this last?' That was a desire that was at least expressed on the board level, and I think that desire shifted over and could bleed into who we considered for candidates and things like that.

Furthermore, he said, the quick turnover in those years made it hard to form close relationships between members. Joaquin went on to say:

When I first came here I fell in love with the people in the house ... And four months later they were gone. They just left, and it hurt. And so after that it didn't make sense to invest too much in people at the time, and that still haunts me a little bit even though the people here have been staying for so long. I just didn't invest myself as much as I did those first four months... Because they were going to leave. That's the way it was.

Concerns for the financial stability of the group, institutional memory, and the strength of interpersonal relationships contributed to the co-op selecting new members who were stable and responsible over those who were passionate about the ideology the system was built on. This in turn resulted in a social group more removed from the passions of its founders.

That is not to say that current residents are unaware of political significance of their everyday practices. They are aware, and they perceive benefits from this. Most of the members I interviewed gave nonpolitical reasons for why they wanted to join a co-op. They answered that they wanted to move into a co-op to meet new people or to gain a support system in an unfamiliar city. Later in the conversation, however, residents often spoke with conviction about how the co-op has enabled them to make a small difference in the world by living more consistently with their values. Clearly the fact that co-ops like Haymarket do not have strict

ideological requirements (and effectively cannot, due to fair housing laws) does not mean that they are insignificant or effective.

Cooperatives are often fragile. They are in an economically precarious position, dependent entirely on a membership base that is constantly changing. Consensus-based decision making, that only takes one member to block an action, is fragile, too. The co-op's existence requires a level of commitment from its members in every aspect of its operation. Establishing a housing co-op, as the founders of Haymarket learned, is a tumultuous process full of setbacks and a constant possibility of collapse. Membership is constantly evolving and residents become further and further removed from the original founders to the point where there is disagreement over whether the community's intentionality even exists. Jef, a Qumbya board member who has also been actively involved in NASCO, had no simple answer to the question of whether or not Haymarket is an intentional community as it currently exists:

We like to say that we don't have values, or it's convenient enough to say that we're not such an ideological organization. It makes it very easy to get along. But [we need] to recognize, actually, there are values baked into the way we do things. There are reasons that things work well, and those things work well because we're adhering to certain values and principles, and let's acknowledge those and speak those. It's kind of like ... working back. I think the intention is latent. There's a lot more intentionality in the community than we give ourselves credit for.

There is no doubt that there is an ideology built in to the cooperative housing model. It may become easier to overlook after years of member turnover, but it has guided Haymarket's success through the crises it has faced. Now that the co-op has again reached a period of stability, there may be a process of recognizing that the community has the power and resources to launch a new intention.

## **Conclusion**

In important ways Haymarket is unlike most intentional communities that have attracted the attention of anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists. Most people, if they are familiar with the idea of intentional communities, think of them as isolated communes of people in a self-imposed exile from the surrounding political, economic, and social environment. Or, they think of religious extremists with strange rituals, loyal to a charismatic leader who demands

that converts cut all ties to the outside world. Haymarket, in contrast, strictly resists doctrine. It offers members a space to restructure their domestic lives according to certain principles to which all members subscribe in varying degrees.

Haymarket is not affiliated with any political party, ideology, or religion, but at the same time its members find that they agree on most political topics. This is both self-selective and deliberate. People who are not interested in cooperative principles generally do not seek out housing co-ops, and co-ops choose applicants based on what they promise to will contribute to the community. Haymarket members characterize the house's values as "in the water," "baked in," or an undercurrent. They did not join this community to live with others who share their opinions on feminism or fair trade. They joined so they could be with others who share their desire to live with a higher degree of connection and intimacy than typical roommates.

Sargisson (2012) writes, "utopias are all about dissatisfaction and desire: dissatisfaction with the now and desire for something better... they can have a transformative function: stimulating people to question their values and sociopolitical arrangements" (30-31). In light of this definition, Sargisson would probably say that characterizing Haymarket House as anti-utopian is an oversimplification, as members share common critiques of American culture and state that living at Haymarket helps them live more according to their ideals. "Utopia" is not reserved for communities who consider themselves to be perfect (if any actually do). The members of Haymarket may in fact be engaging in utopian thinking. At the same time, their resistance to the term is illustrative of their non-oppositional philosophy.

This research aims to make the idea of intentional community more accessible to the population by providing an example of a community that lives with principles but without dogma. Stereotypes of intentional communities as hippie communes or cults obscure their diversity. They also prevent people from considering housing cooperatives as an option when they could in fact be solutions for people seeking solutions to problems such as scarcity of affordable housing, waste of resources, materialism, and social isolation. As one member put it, "I've been here for eight years and I can say that it's worked. That's empirical evidence, and I don't want that to be dismissed. I want that to be taken and I want that to be appreciated. And I want people to know that yes, this can happen, and if it's something that you want, you can find it." Part of Haymarket's success may be related to members' refusal to identify as "utopian" or, in some members' case, to refrain from calling their community an intentional one. In distancing

their community from the association with cults, communes, and radical utopias, they affirm that this type of community is without oppressive standards of behavior and belief. It can be an option for almost anyone, not just hippies and activists.

Even if they would not choose to live in a co-op, many readers of this paper are likely to share some of Haymarket members' philosophies and their criticisms of mainstream American culture. Living cooperatively is part of our nation's history and its value is embedded in our culture, but we simultaneously emphasize the importance of the individual, making one's own way, and resisting conformity. We desire two contradictory things at once. Haymarket is an example of a group of people who has found an alternative way to balance these two needs.

Since at least the nineteenth century, there have been people longing to return to a more collective way of life, a form of community in which close interaction with neighbors is the norm and people and families depend on each other. Today there are countless examples of grassroots efforts to bring back some aspects of a communal society, for example tool sharing libraries and community gardens. Haymarket members' critiques of society are shared on some level with an increasing number of people. What makes Haymarket unique, and what makes housing cooperatives worthy of further ethnographic attention, is that they are an example of a group who have chosen to live these values in everyday life, through the most mundane parts of their daily routine. They have chosen to live with other people at a time in their lives when (especially for the married couples) everyone is expected to be on their own. Co-op residents find this balance between living in a politically and socially conscious way without alienating the larger community, and potential members, by espousing a strict ideology. Distancing their purpose from utopian thinking serves this purpose. Evidently, in members' commitment and the community's resiliency over almost twenty-five years, they have found success.

### Notes

1. One resident estimated that the house, since its renovation, is currently worth between \$400,000 and \$500,000. He guessed its pre-renovation value may have been around \$300,000 but I was unable to find a reliable source of what the original founders paid.
2. The official purposes of the co-op, as listed in the original 1989 Articles of Incorporation, were (paraphrased):
  - 1) To reduce housing discrimination
  - 2) To educate of others about cooperation
  - 3) To own and operate residential property
  - 4) To increase cooperative living in the neighborhood



## Appendix A

Interview questions:

How old are you, and how long have you lived at Haymarket?

Can you tell me the story of how you became a member?

What is your educational background?

What are your political and religious affiliations?

Did you have any previous experience in housing cooperatives?

What was difficult to adjust to about living in a co-op?

What do you like best about living in this community?

What are the challenges of living in this community?

How do you describe this community to someone who has never heard of it?

Do you see Haymarket as an intentional community?

Do you see Haymarket as a utopian community?

## Appendix B

## QUMBYA CO-OP APPLICATION

Name:

Phone:

Email:

Mailing Address:

Emergency Contact Info (required for move-in)

Name:

Relationship:

Phone:

Email:

Address:

**Application date:**

**How did you find out about Qumbya co-op?**

**When do you want to move in? How long would you like to stay? Are your dates flexible?**

**Do you have any special preferences or needs? (Pet, pet allergies, quietest or cheapest room, floor you prefer to live on)**

**References** You need at least one good rental reference and can also list employment, internship, school, or volunteer references. No personal references please. If you list fewer than three references, please explain why.

Rental (list two of these)

address of rental unit:

dates you lived there:

company/contact:

phone:

Rental

address of rental unit:

dates you lived there:

company/contact:

phone:

Current Employment

Name:

Company:

Relationship:

Phone:

How long have you known this person or when were your dates of employment?

*The questions below are for you to get to know what we are expecting, and for us to get to know you. Please answer the questions thoughtfully and try to enjoy them!*

**1. Tell us about your work or your studies:**

**2. What do you do in your spare time:**

**3. Why do you want to live in this co-op?**

**4. What is your current living situation and why are you leaving it?**

**5. Please tell us your favorite joke:**

Dinners are held at: *Bowers* -- 7:30 every day except Saturday, when brunch is served at noon instead of dinner; *Haymarket* -- 7.30 every day except Sunday, when it's at 6:30; *Concord* -- 7:00 every day except Sunday, when it's at 6.30.

House meetings are every Sunday at 7pm at Haymarket and Concord, 7:30pm at Bowers.

**6. How does your schedule mesh with these events? Would you be able to attend at least 75% of the house meetings? Will you be able to attend most dinners? If not, tell us why.**

You don't have to be a cook when you apply, but when you live here you will need to learn to cook vegetarian meals for up to 25 people (with some help of course).

**7. Tell us about your experience and/or interests with cooking.**

**8. The food we purchase collectively is vegetarian. Do you have a special dietary requirement? (please specify)**

**9. If you were an animal, what would you be and why?**

**10. How familiar are you with housing cooperatives? Please describe your experience.**

**11. What kinds of skills would you bring to the co-op and what new skills would you want to learn?**

**12. Will you be able to contribute about two hours per week to house responsibilities as well as several hours every two weeks for cooking?**

**13. How do you make your opinions and concerns known in group settings?**

**14. What issues have caused conflict between you and people you have previously lived with? What have been your grievances with them? What have been their grievances with you?**

**15. Managing conflict is something that every member of a co-op must be able to handle effectively. Give an example from your own life about your abilities to resolve conflict, either between your self and others, or between others.**

**16. Will you be able to pay your monthly charges for food, rent, and utilities? Will you be able to pay the one-month rent security deposit and \$66 membership dues before move-in? Do you have a reliable source of income? If so, what would you do if you lost that source and how long could you pay for rent, food, and utilities?**

**17. To maintain our tax-exempt status, we must collect statistics on the income levels of our membership. If you were to move into the house, would you be willing to confidentially disclose your income level to Qumbya annually for this purpose (do not tell us your income now)?**

**18. Last question: fill this space (half a page).**

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