

FOOD, LOVE, AND RESISTANCE:
LESSONS ON REIMAGINING SOCIAL REPRODUCTION
FROM EAST BAY HOUSING COOPERATIVES

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Abstract

Western cities are painfully lonely. Their residents are working more, eating worse, and missing community. An ideology that values capital production over human wellbeing has resulted in extensive systems governing the production of economic goods while restorative social practices are squeezed to the margins. In urban housing, this manifests as atomized nuclear households that maximize private resources and a focus on waged work, often sustained invisibly by the labour of feminized bodies. Yet across the San Francisco Bay Area, informal housing cooperatives challenge this trend by building detailed systems of care that reframe residents' relationship with the realm of social reproduction by collectivizing domestic labour. Among the social reproduction practices being organized, the food system stands out for its embodied nature and ability to serve as at once social, cultural, and political – it is the heartbeat of these homes. Using the communal food system as an entrypoint for analysis allows us to interrogate how such housing projects address the challenges of urban capitalism while complicating assumptions across the field of urban studies that such spaces inherently improve the state of urban crisis today.

This research explores the question: *How do food systems in East Bay housing cooperatives model ways to build non-extractive systems of care in the context of contemporary urban crisis?* This investigation is approached with embedded research in two Bay Area housing cooperatives to examine the motivations, counter-politics, and impacts of these spaces on their members. Findings reveal that many residents see the practise of collectivising their home as part of a greater vision for political change, at the same time that unconscious bias limits the accessibility of these homes and can risk reproducing gendered labour struggles. The systems in housing cooperatives are thus not an end goal but an ongoing negotiation that can lead to improved conditions only with attention, care, and critical awareness of the need for social and labour justice to extend into the domestic sphere.

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Introduction

People in western cities are working more, eating worse, and missing community. An increasingly dominant ideology that values capital production above human wellbeing has resulted in extensive systems that govern the production of economic goods while restorative social practices are squeezed to the margins (Bhattacharya, 2017; Fraser, 2017; Fraser et al, 2018; Katz, 2001; Mohandesi and Teitelman, 2017; Rodríguez-Rocha, 2021). In urban housing, this manifests as atomized nuclear households designed to maximize the accrual of private resources by rewarding working over resting, causing a crisis of public health and social isolation that only exacerbates the oppressive status quo (Bhattacharya, 2017; Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Engel-Di Mauro, 2018; Fraser, 2017; Harvey, 2015; Tummers and MacGregor, 2019; Mohandesi and Teitelman, 2017). It is for this reason that “a new generation of urban care infrastructure must be created that addresses the specific forms of insecurity, precarity, and depletion found in contemporary cities” (Madden, 2020) – and alternative housing communities are doing exactly that.

Despite immense cultural pressure to live in a nuclear family unit, recent years have witnessed a rise in shared living, indicating a cultural shift in reaction to (and rejection of) the mainstream value system that valorizes work, capital, and individualism (Bhatia and Steinmuller, 2018; Carrere et al., 2020; Chan and Zhang, 2021; Hudson et al., 2021; Kim, 2017; Kubey, 2018; Lubik and Kosatsky, 2019; Morrow and Dombroski, 2015). The San Francisco Bay Area contains one such culture that has proliferated for decades: a highly politicized and care-centered network of cooperative households. While the internal workings can vary dramatically, the practices of reimagining domestic labour as a collective responsibility in these houses may have the potential to challenge the feminization and devaluation of that critical work which takes place in the home.

Further, they disrupt the predominant value system by intentionally cultivate an ongoing social practice of care, defined as

everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web. (Fisher and Tronto, 1990, as cited in Power and Williams, 2020, p.4)

Research conducted on housing movements around the world indeed observes that "they are united, in their difference, by their effort to use housing as a *gateway* to challenge wider structural forms of violence, including patriarchy, racism, class exploitation, and, of course, deprivation of shelter" (Lancione, 2020, p. 275). It is within such conversations that I situate the informal housing cooperatives of the San Francisco Bay Area as a politicized response to urban crisis. My own experience co-founding one such housing cooperative, Rose House — and then being supported by its systems through nonprofit burnout and the COVID-19 pandemic — has inspired a greater investigation into the opportunity for community resilience that self-governed cooperative housing provides. In this thesis, I aim to interrogate how these houses are motivated, what they accomplish, and where they struggle. Further, I hope to investigate the role and impact of the communal food system and how its model may hold lessons for building ethical systems of care within the context of contemporary urban crisis.

Establishing Terms: Neoliberalism in Urban Space

Throughout academia, the concept of neoliberalism¹ is pointed to for its role in reshaping the way we live. Because it recurs so frequently in the literature, it is useful to

¹ It is important to acknowledge that the term "neoliberal" is in practice deployed in various ways depending on the writer's field and perspective. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore these nuances. Due to the charged nature of this term and its ambiguous formulations across perspectives, I will attempt to maintain clarity by minimising use of the term and will instead foreground the precise forms of crisis relevant to the study. However, the concept will continue to surface throughout relevant scholarship and should be understood as a general philosophy accordingly.

establish terms and clarify that while capitalism refers to the economic system in the US and a majority of the world's countries today,

[n]eoliberalism is a political economic philosophy that asserts the primacy of the market in attending to human needs and wellbeing, and re-orientes the state towards the facilitation of market mechanisms... Indeed, scholars and critics use the term neoliberal subjectivities² to denote the ways that this market logic increasingly pervades individuals' and communities' everyday thoughts and practices as we embrace such ideals as individualism, efficiency, and self-help. (Alkon and Mares, 2012, p. 348)

This ideology reduces all possible resources to their *exchange value*, or the monetary value which can be extracted from them, rather than their *use value*, or the actual function that a resource serves. The proliferation of this philosophy triggers the very urban crisis it purports to solve, an irony referred to as “actually existing neoliberalism” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Extensive research has shown that “whereas neoliberal ideology implies that self-regulating markets will generate an optimal allocation of investments and resources, neoliberal political practice has [in fact] generated pervasive market failures, new forms of social polarization, and a dramatic intensification of uneven development at all spatial scales” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002, p. 352). The high housing costs that result from this worldview have consequences for mental and physical health that “driv[e] up the need for care, even as it undercuts the likelihood of receiving it” (Madden, 2020).

And yet, despite this, attachments to place and the cultures therein cause urban dwellers to “struggle to defend the everyday practices and institutional compromises from which capital has sought to extricate itself” (Brenner and Theodore, 2002, p. 355) through endeavors like the self-governed houses which are the focus of this thesis. San Francisco's housing cooperatives challenge neoliberal ideology as described by operating outside of market logics and centering collectivism and interdependency over

² I will use the terms neoliberalism and neoliberal ideology rather than neoliberal subjectivity in this text.

competitive individualism. Such projects thus operate under a set of counter-logics, or alternative modes of thinking, which challenge the predominant ideology that is systemically imposed and proliferated.

This thesis aims to investigate the practises in these homes to improve our understanding of what their systems are accomplishing and how they are designed. In addition to contributing to the dialogue in urban studies on communalism's potential impacts, these findings are intended to be useful to urban dwellers interested in exploring alternative housing in ethical ways, defined as housing practices that reject privatization as a measure of success. Cooperatives thus offer a framework for addressing urban crisis that exists within, beyond, and in spite of their surrounding capitalist landscape.

Contextualizing the San Francisco Bay Area: Gentrification and its Discontents

It is difficult to overstate the scale of the Bay Area's³ housing crisis. It is the most expensive place to live in the United States, surpassing even New York City, and is also the most unequal. In fact, "rent in the Bay Area has increased at a rate surpassing the U.S. average for over 50 years" (Barton, 2011, p. 861) and patterns of racialized dispossession, typically referred to as gentrification⁴, have become synonymous with the region's housing crisis (Maharawal, 2021).

³ Note that the name "San Francisco" can be used both to refer to the small city of San Francisco proper or as shorthand to refer to the San Francisco Bay Area, a region made up of dozens of cities and about 7 million people. I will be using the terms "the Bay Area" and "the Bay" to refer to this greater region while only meaning the city when using "San Francisco."

⁴ Gentrification is defined as an "influx of middle- and upper-income people to a low-income area" (Glas, 1964, as cited in Hyra et al., 2019), typically resulting in the displacement of non-white communities and worsening their health, social, and economic conditions.



Map 1: Subregions of the San Francisco Bay Area, named according to their location relative to the Bay itself (source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/bc/Bayarea_map.png)

The Bay Area's contemporary housing crisis is characterized by local populations, predominantly low-income communities of color, being displaced by high-income workers in the tech industry. Even though most tech companies are actually based in the South Bay, or "Silicon Valley," insufficient housing options there

led to the housing needs of the technology industry being externalised to San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley and San Jose... through a series of land use decisions by conservative homeowners and neoliberal municipalities, in which South Bay cities zoned for large technology campuses but not for the housing they would require. (Maharawal, 2021, p. 10)

The discrepancy between explosive job growth and the production of housing units is stark; for example, “San Francisco alone added 123,000 jobs from 2009 to 2015 while adding only 11,000 units to the housing stock” (Hwang and Shrimali, 2021, p. 8). As a result, low-income tenants in the Bay Area are now paying a higher proportion of their income towards rent than they did in 1960 (Barton, 2011) while across the Bay Area, one-third of tenants “pay more than 40 percent of their income in gross rent and one-quarter (250,000 households) pay over half of their income” (Barton, 2011, p. 857).

This project is located in the East Bay, which is the Bay’s poorest and most populated region. As housing in San Francisco skyrockets in price, renters have been increasingly pushed to the surrounding regions, and the East Bay is the last one to be impacted due to its perceived undesirability (Barton, 2011; Maharawal, 2021). This means that perhaps more than other areas, the East Bay continues to be home to some of the legacy cultures for which the Bay is famous and illustrates how these cultures interact with the pressures imposed by the urban housing crisis. This is notable because the East Bay is historically the site of a robust activist culture including the Black Panthers (based in Oakland) and the radical anti-war and free speech movements originating on and surrounding the University of California at Berkeley (UC Berkeley) campus. As a result, it is rich with critical discourse about the impacts of the housing crisis and possible solutions (Maharawal, 2021).

One approach to addressing the crisis is projects like Rose House. The San Francisco Bay Area has a robust counterculture of informal self-governing housing cooperatives (“co-ops” or “coops” in this thesis) in which communities establish detailed systems of care that collectivise domestic labour in order to restore attention to the realm of social reproduction, or the practices that keep us alive from each passing day. In these spaces, groups of people share resources and build community in opposition to the culture of atomization that pervades the US. Such houses often require members to

sign contracts upon moving in that agree to extensive policies around finances, labour, projects, and community engagement within and outside the house itself. Processes are discussed and amended at house meetings in a culture that is at once experimental and dynamic, making coop living a lifestyle more than simply an affordable roof.

Having spent years in the space of collective living, within and beyond the culture of the Bay's coops, the most striking part of my experience at Rose was the food system's⁵ transformative impact on my personal life. I cooked dinner for the house once every two weeks and in turn enjoyed a lovingly home-cooked vegan dinner nearly every day. Outside of the sharing economy of communally sourcing all the food in the house, these dinners provided a structure of care and emotional support that offset the fatigue of my work grind and helped me survive burning out in the nonprofit industrial complex. I now want to turn a closer eye to understand what was happening, why it was meaningful, and how it can be implemented elsewhere so that we can learn how to use our homes to better protect ourselves from the harms of capitalism in urban spaces today.

To do so, this thesis ultimately seeks to answer the research question: *How do food systems in East Bay housing cooperatives model ways to build non-extractive⁶ systems of care in the context of contemporary urban crisis?*

The three sub-questions that will help generate this answer are:

- Why do residents feel that these practices are necessary?
- What are the counter-logics informing these practices?
- What is the coops' impact on residents?

⁵ the term "food system" is used by coops to describe their practices of sharing, cooking, and eating food. While "food system" is also a term used to describe the greater agricultural and economic system governing a region's food production, in this context I will be adopting the usage that is agreed upon by the communities themselves.

⁶ The term non-extractive is used to refer to practises which seek a fair distribution of labour that generates social, material, and emotional forms of support, in contrast to the extractive nature of care practises under neoliberalism that lead to urban crisis (see chapter 2).

I explored this topic by conducting embedded research in two different East Bay coops in order to learn from their practices of living, eating, and communing together. Their analysis complicates existing assumptions in the field that these spaces are inherently leading to positive change, at the same time that their model of democratic decision-making may offer us guidance on co-creating a more just urban future. This thesis is therefore also intended to be a useful reference to people in urban spaces with any interest in self-organizing an ethical cooperative home. The study suggests that western cities are painfully lonely, but they don't need to be.

The next chapter of this thesis will review relevant literature on social reproduction theory, private and shared housing, and urban food practices. In chapter three, I outline and justify the methodological approach used and introduce the two research sites. The findings chapter then returns to the four questions above by presenting the themes and outcomes of the study. Chapter five engages in a deeper analysis of the surfacing trends and applies a critical lens to understanding the potential of coops to address urban crises, focusing on questions of access, gendered labour, and self-governance. Finally, the conclusion ties together the ideas of the thesis with suggestions for future research and a call for collective organizing.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This research ultimately aims to better understand the mechanisms and impacts of cooperative living to draw out lessons on how communities based in cities experiencing urban crisis can design more ethical systems of care within cooperative homes. Existing literature on social reproduction theory, urban housing developments, and domestic food practices provide the scaffolding of ideas within which this research is situated. This chapter will set the stage for the study by examining relevant conversations in these fields and identifying the contributions that this thesis can make to them.

Section 1: On Social Reproduction

Using the lens of social reproduction theory (SRT) allows for a critical examination of how the governance structure of the East Bay's cooperative homes may represent a promising form of resistance to the crisis of care by running counter to the extractive, profit-seeking systems of oppression that dominate western cities today. In this section I will give more context to the definition and history of conversations around social reproduction, uncover how it is in crisis today, and look to the home as a potential site of resistance.

2.1.1: Social Reproduction Theory: What It Is and Where It Stands

Cindi Katz (2001) summarized social reproduction as the “fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life” (p. 711). This acknowledges the endlessly overlapping practices which may evade explicit naming but are nonetheless critical to understanding how society is formed. Its work generally constitutes “life sustaining activities, relationships, emotions, and behaviors” (Rodríguez-Rocha, 2021, p. 2) that include “biological reproduction of the labour force, both generationally and on a daily

basis, through the acquisition and distribution of the means of existence, including food, shelter, clothing, and health care” (Katz, 2001, p. 711). These practices are referred to with terms including social care, care work, affective labour, life’s work, and social reproduction, and will be alternately called care and social reproduction in this thesis.

The origin of thinking about social reproduction comes from difference – distinguishing such practices from those forms of waged labour that contribute to economic productivity and are thus valued within neoliberal ideology. The point of departure for this mode of questioning can be found in Marxist theories of capitalist oppression, wherein the labourer is understood to generate wealth for the bourgeoisie and is therefore at once the most exploited and most critical member of society (Bhattacharya, 2017; Corwin and Gidwani, 2021; Federici, 2012; Fraser, 2017; Harvey, 2015; Rodríguez-Rocha, 2021; Tummers and MacGregor, 2019). Bhattacharya (2017) asks,

If workers’ labor produces all the wealth in society, who then produces the worker? Put another way: What kinds of processes enable the worker to arrive at the doors of her place of work every day so that she can produce the wealth of society? What role did breakfast play in her work-readiness? What about a good night’s sleep? (p. 1)

SRT scholars note that many theories of class oppression have repeatedly invisibilized the role of this form of labour in sustaining human life, making them incomplete to imagine a liberated future. As this labour has historically and systemically been relegated to women, SRT introduces an explicitly feminist lens to this discussion. Theorists note that a “key innovation [of capitalism] was to separate the making of people from the making of profit, to assign the first job to women, and to subordinate it to the second” (Fraser et al, 2018, p. 121). This enabled tremendous economic growth because a great volume of necessary labour was suddenly made available for free – as far as wage-earning men were concerned.

The period of industrialization is often cited as the historical turning point linked to the privatization of land and resources previously held collectively, or the enclosure of the commons, giving rise to social reproduction as a separate realm from productivity characterized by both its necessity to maintain society and its systemic exploitation.

Mohandesi and Teitelman (2017) observe that over time,

industrialization tended to physically separate the workplace from the site of social reproduction, a division which contributed to the belief that there existed two separate spheres of activity... [And] as men's work increasingly took them outside of the household, their value as wage-earners was legitimized by the cultural and ideological devaluing of women's domestic labour within the household. (p. 43)

This spatial separation gave clarity to the valued and devalued forms of labour on which this new economic system would depend. Tummers and MacGregor (2019) emphasize that such dynamics manifested at various scales of society because, much

“[[l]ike the enclosure of land, the enclosure of communities into the so-called family home was instrumental to the rise of the capitalist economy because it enabled the development of the roles and relations necessary for the reproduction of labour and consumption of products” (p. 67).

The devaluation and exploitation of these roles is ongoing to this day and requires an ethical revisiting of social reproduction practices.

2.1.2: The Crisis of Social Reproduction

As it stands today, social reproduction is in crisis. But a more accurate framing is that “we are living through [a] crisis of society as a whole—of the economy, ecology, politics and ‘care’” (Fraser et al., 2018, p. 119) that results from the systemic way that capitalism is designed to exploit and extract all available resources to generate profit, its only goal. This manifests as “a culture where it is assumed that each person is only responsible for their own lives, [as the] invisibility of necessary carework is so vital to the myth of neoliberal individualism that it has become even more deeply entrenched to the

point of denial” (Tummers and MacGregor, 2019, p. 68-9). In other words, the predominant ideology in western cities insists that we are all individuals who achieve success or failure on our own, and this is not true — care is in fact a social practice that embodies “the relational interdependence that is the foundation of life” (Power and Mee, 2020, p. 499).

It is possible to maintain this distorted thinking through the invisibilization of care work. Corwin and Gidwani group repair practices into this umbrella category and remind us that “[i]f the work of repair and maintenance is invisible, it is not because everything is working perfectly but because someone, somewhere, is expending invisible and often undervalued labour” (Corwin and Gidwani, 2021, p. 2). The extraction of that labour to generate ever more profit is a key component of contemporary western society. “Part of the neoliberal political programme and ethos in recent times has been to externalise as much as possible the costs of social reproduction on to the populace at large in order to raise the profit rate for capital” (Harvey, 2015, p. 190), leading to an inflated capitalist bubble that is ready to burst.

We see this manifested in a re-centering of life around waged productivity, resulting in increasing amounts of labour being directed towards the generation of capital for others through both growing numbers of hours spent performing waged labour and the ongoing demands of care work being pushed to the margins. Fraser et al. (2018) warn that “social-reproduction struggles are especially explosive today, as neoliberalism demands more hours of waged work per household while withdrawing state support for social welfare, squeezing families, communities and, above all, women to breaking-point” (p. 122). Research conducted back in 2006 by Jobs and Devine found that “[f]eelings of time scarcity are increasingly widespread in industrialized societies” (p. 197) but that the market- and profit-based solution to this problem is to create privatized solutions that do not actually make space for meaningful care (Corwin and Gidwani 2021;

Engel-Di, 2018; Fraser, 2017; Fraser et al., 2018; Jabs and Devine, 2006; Lange, 2021; Mohandesi and Teitelman, 2017; Power and Mee, 2020). This manifests on the one hand as the commodification of such practices for those who can afford to purchase them, such as an industry selling ready-made food or childcare services; these industries are designed to minimize the time spent on care, relegating it into paid work and thus another avenue for profit. On the other hand, privatization manifests as an unpaid burden added to the domestic sphere for women to handle without pay, deepening the crisis of social reproduction. The result is that instead of serving as a lifelong interrelational practice, care work under neoliberalism is carried out unequally and serves to maintain conditions of the affluent at the expense of the many (Power and Mee, 2020).

The Bay Area is a rich example of this trend brought to life, as it is a hotbed of technological innovations that often seem to address problems in the wrong way. Rather than challenging the idea of an overwhelming workload, those in power double down by stripping social reproduction practices of their humanity and treating them as low-worth commodities to be bought as cheaply as possible, as if they are objects without personal meaning. Fraser (2017) presents powerful examples of this in the region:

The first [example] is the rising popularity of egg-freezing, normally a ten-thousand-dollar procedure but now offered free by IT firms as a fringe benefit to highly qualified female employees. Eager to attract and retain these workers, firms like Apple and Facebook provide them a strong incentive to postpone childbearing, saying, in effect, 'Wait and have your kids in your forties, fifties, or even sixties; devote your high-energy, productive years to us'.... [And for those who are already mothers, i]n a context of severe time poverty, double-cup, hands-free pumps are considered the most desirable, as they permit one to express milk from both breasts at once while driving to work on the freeway. (p. 34)

Privatizing the relief of social reproduction in these ways indicates how it can operate in extractive, exploitative ways and increasingly does so under a thriving capitalist system (Mohandesi and Teitelman, 2017). It is important not to fall into the trap

of continuing to devalue and distort practices of care to maintain oppressive systems rather than challenge them.

2.1.3: Home as a Site of Resistance or Reinforcement

Social reproduction is “what keeps the world moving” (Federici, 2012, p. 14), and this means that while these practices can be configured to reproduce the exploitative dynamics that prevail today, “they also hold within them the possibility for resisting, reshaping, and making it anew” (Rodríguez-Rocha, 2021, p. 10). They have potential for transformation.

A key opportunity for these practices to be reorganized is in the private space of the home. One reason for this is that “for most of American history socially reproductive activities have overwhelmingly taken place in and around households, making the home one of the most vital institutions in the reproduction of capitalist relations as a whole” (Mohandesi and Teitelman, 2017, p. 39). Another reason is that as a part of the private sphere, they are not regulated, a fact which can be argued to either be a liberating opportunity or a partial explanation for why domestic spaces can hold and hide as much oppression as they do (Harvey, 2015; Power and Mee, 2020; Tummers and MacGregor, 2019). It is thus critical to keep in mind the ethical dimensions of care while examining alternative housing as an avenue for resistance to oppressive systems.

While the extractive, profit-seeking forms of oppression present in capitalism cross into state, organizational, and even transnational modes of operating, scholars argue that a far-reaching impact can result from changing practices at the smallest, most personal unit of social organizing available to us by beginning with our homes (Engel-Di Mauro, 2018; Mohandesi and Teitelman, 2017; Power and Mee, 2020; Rodríguez-Rocha, 2021; Tummers and MacGregor, 2019). A value system that favors living collectively instead of in a private residence is at its core a rejection of the

individualistic vision of success, instantly making available a community to share in covering domestic labour needs at home through a consensual exchange of labour rather than outsourcing them to the private sector. Projects reframing priorities in this way “can instead foreground care as an alternative mode of cohabiting that is attentive to the tenuousness and interdependence of bodies and systems” (Corwin and Gidwani, 2021, p. 3). The physical sharing of spaces as well as the community-led organizing of domestic labour presents an avenue for care practices to be reimagined. Power and Mee (2020) refer to such organization as an infrastructure of care, defined as “the more or less embedded ‘tracks’ on which care may run, shaping and being shaped by actors along the way” (p. 489). While the financialization of care leads to a robust array of harms, Power and Mee argue that care can only be understood as an ongoing relational practice and that housing itself serves as an infrastructure of care with great potential to improve its conditions. They invite an exploration of the extent to which housing “inspires a sense of care or being cared for” (p. 494), posing the question to researchers, and to which this thesis responds: “is this a housing system that cares?” (p. 501).

While collective living is increasingly heralded as a potential mechanism for radical change that brings care practises to the fore, Tummers and MacGregor (2019) challenge the presumptions of these assessments by emphasizing that “so far no systematic empirical studies support the claim that they actually bring about a transformation of gender norms” (p. 71). They apply the lens of feminist political ecology to assess the conditions of four cohousing units in addressing the crisis of social reproduction. They acknowledge that the opportunity presented is that

“[r]ather than being a taken-for-granted [domain that is devalued and feminized, and from which privileged segments of a group or population are excused, in co-housing there is potential for carework to become a visible requirement of group membership and subject of continuous and democratic deliberation.” (Tummers and MacGregor, 2019, p. 76)

At the same time, their observations in three of the four projects they studied were that the houses embodied “caring-as-usual, with women taking on the bulk of the responsibility” (p. 76) and thus maintaining patriarchal norms. This demonstrates that as promising as these living arrangements may seem, “reconceptualising community is only a start towards collectivising social reproduction” (Engel-Di Mauro, 2018, p. 1383) and that “[q]uestions of power and difference are therefore central to analyses of care” (Power and Mee, 2020, p. 490).

It is within the question of communal living’s transformative potential that this research is situated. What can an investigation of East Bay housing cooperatives reveal about how the organizing practices within shared homes measure up towards designing a more just, restorative system of social reproduction? Do these houses actually recreate the harms of patriarchy and capitalism in unintended or unseen ways?

This thesis will apply the framework of social reproduction theory using this critical feminist lens to complicate assumptions in the field about the inherent benefits of collective living. With the crisis of social reproduction at a breaking point, it is crucial to advocate for solutions that integrate these nuanced understandings of how social reproduction can be reimagined in a restorative, and not extractive, way.

Section 2: On Housing

Home is the primary site in which care practices take place, and thus “[t]he crisis of social reproduction and the politics of care are inextricably linked to housing” (Madden, 2020). This creates a feedback loop in which inadequate housing places strain on social reproduction practices at the same time that both have the potential to support one another (Power and Mee, 2020). This section will situate the research within academic conversations by outlining developments in urban housing discussions,

contextualizing the way that the capitalist system triggers the privatization and atomization of housing units, and exploring the rise of alternative modes of living.

2.2.1: Developments in Housing Studies

Housing has long been a subject of study across a range of disciplines, from urban planning and architecture to anthropology, gender, and public health. A recurrent observation is that “[b]eyond policies and data showing the generative value of housing, people across the world seek a sense of dignity and identity through their homes” (Kubey, 2018, p. 8). This search often extends beyond the need for a physical house – an undeniably critical and ongoing struggle for the urban poor – to include the role that a home can play in facilitating a supportive lifestyle. The fact is that houses are far more than physical structures but “the material structures that provide the scaffolding for emotional investments, social relations and meanings of everyday life” (Dowling and Mee, 2007, p. 161). As housing precarity gets worse instead of better, academics have increasingly pushed for new ways of “registering, understanding, and then producing economies of knowledge around these processes” (Lancione, 2020, p. 274) through which people sustain themselves in domestic space, which begins with bridging the gaps between disciplines to generate more holistic knowledge on the power of home (Bowra and Mashford-Pringle, 2021; Carrere et al., 2020; Dowling and Mee, 2007; Lancione, 2020; Lubik and Kosatsky, 2019; (Power and Mee, 2020).

Key to this is a shift in focus to the social processes within households rather than the external context of the physical house. Within the field of architecture, for example, scholars voice discontent with operating in isolation from the people that their work serves, calling for an end to being beholden to the demands of profit-seeking developers which often worsen the lived experience of residents (Bhatia, 2018; Fishman, 2018; Kubey, 2018; Madden, 2020). Power and Mee (2020) problematize “the

conceptual split between scholarly studies of housing and home [because it] means that care has not been a concern of most housing research" (p. 485). Taking a bottom-up approach to address this, Bowra and Mashford-Pringle (2021) use an Indigenous lens to reject the concept of official residency and center homemaking, which "can be theorized to be the practices surrounding the place or structure that a person has feelings and attachments to in a physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and cultural sense, and where they connect with family, community, and all of creation" (p. 1). And where the former research leans towards spirituality, Lancione (2020) favors political action by insisting that investigating this space, which he terms dwelling, "can provide a more direct way to access the question of how housing acts a gateway to a radical politics" (p. 278). He argues that situating research "closer to the place of action" (p. 279) in this way reveals the power of smaller movements to work towards liberatory justice within and beyond housing itself.

There has been a surge in research on collective living as the practice has become more prevalent in recent years, especially in north-western countries (Bamford, 2001; Carrere et al., 2020; Czischke and Schlack, 2019; Hudson et al., 2021; Lubik and Kosatsky, 2019; Tummers and MacGregor, 2019). One of the prominent disciplinary overlaps is that of public health. A 2020 scoping review by Carrere et al., for example, was designed with the explicit intention of bridging the gap between urban studies, health, and social sciences databases to better understand the impacts of one model of collective living, cohousing, on residents. The review overwhelmingly found positive associations with health outcomes through psychosocial determinants of health, while a study by Lubik and Kosatsky (2019) assessed the health impacts of three different housing models (cohousing, cooperative housing, and Indigenous housing) to similarly reveal that shared living yields consistently positive results on residents, especially as they progress into older age. These are energizing findings that encourage more

research into the internal processes that lead to such health effects, a contribution this study is poised to make.

The current research is most closely situated within the growing body of analysis that examines collective living as a solution to social and political issues. These conversations speak to the fact that the social processes happening inside homes demand more interdisciplinary attention because of their potential to improve our lives. At the same time, the fact that developments in housing studies identify communal living as such a promising solution to urban challenges without closely examining their inner workings invites a greater investigation into whether and how these spaces hold up as described. Before turning to studies of what alternative housing practices may have to offer, I will take a step backward to contextualize the current prevailing standard of market-based approaches to housing that makes these alternatives so necessary to urban dwellers today.

2.2.2: Privatisation and the Alone-ness of Atomized Living

Arguably more than any other country today, the United States is known for its idolization of capitalism and its deployment of market-based solutions to critical social problems (Bamford 2001; Bowra and Mashford-Pringle 2021; Corwin and Gidwani 2021; Fraser et al. 2018; Gardner 1999; Katz, 2001; Loh and Agyeman 2019). In practice, approaching housing with the lens that it can best be provided by a free capitalism market leads it to be “increasingly commodified, privatized, and financialized, making [it] more responsive to the needs of investors and financiers and less attuned to local social conditions and residential needs” (Madden, 2020). The result is that housing has become both less desirable and less accessible than it was before, as “in almost every developed country, housing costs have risen faster than household incomes” (Fishman, 2018, p. 24) and there is broad agreement that “‘urban crisis’ – in the form of massive

displacement, gentrification, and uneven development – is the new normal” (Lancione, 2020, p. 273).

The growth of neoliberal housing policy is not exclusive to the United States but an interconnected trend that follows patterns of globalization across the world. Because wealthy north-western states have been the harbingers of such policies, often spreading them globally through economic pressures such as Structural Adjustment Programs, it is valuable to center them as a site of analysis and avoid treating organizers in different contexts as a monolith⁷ (Fishman, 2018; Kubey, 2018).

One aspect of such market-based housing policy is advancing an ideology that homeownership should be the ultimate goal of the public, rather than a state-backed guarantee of quality housing for all, leading to a prevailing conflation of success with individualism that is realized by living in private households alone or with nuclear family units. The phenomenon of individuals living alone, often called “solitaires” in Europe and “singletons” in the United States, has globally skyrocketed in the last century to levels that are “completely unprecedented” (Snell, 2017, p. 10) such that there are now ten times more adults under 34 living in singletons in the United States compared to 1950 levels (Snell, 2017). This top-down pressure to live in isolation is then compounded with rising housing costs to bring urban dwellers into financial precarity, reinforcing the need to work longer hours and have less time for care practices.

One of the main consequences of the systemic pressures to live in nuclear units “is that loneliness is a main characteristic of urban life” (Lietaert, 2010, p. 577), and yet promising research indicates that people living in communal homes “were significantly less likely to feel lonely than similar members of the general public” (Hudson et al., 2021,

⁷ For example, a study by Czischke and Schlack (2019) that reviewed the drivers of collective housing projects from both a Northern (western Europe) and Southern (Chile) context found that the former context was far more motivated by an explicit resistance to the commodification of housing than comparable projects in the South, even when the practices themselves are similar and both seek to achieve “a reaffirmation of collective self-determination” (p. 22).

p. 5) even when controlling for social connections and activities. Given that growing research on loneliness identifies it as a major public health crisis with “adverse health effects comparable to smoking” (Snell, 2017, p. 3), the role of systemic housing trends in facilitating it should be examined and challenged. While it is important to be wary of inferring causation for experiences that are highly complex, these findings speak to an increasingly present social issue that a reimagining of housing could resolve and warrants examination to better understand which processes trigger such effective results.

This research contributes to the shortage of knowledge on how communities are addressing the crisis of loneliness and other strains on social reproduction caused by market-based housing policy. While “privatisation and commodification of housing have helped to drive massive gaps in income and health outcomes, [they are also] providing fertile ground for alternative approaches to its design and delivery” (Kubey, 2018, p. 8). Now, on to the alternatives.

2.2.3: Imagining Alternatives: The Reclamation of Collective Living

Collective housing is a rapidly growing way of living in the US in which residents reject the concept of privatization not only in terms of homeownership but also in terms of the social isolation which it engenders. This approach is distinct from the capitalist frameworks discussed in the previous section because it does not see the value of housing as a commodity to accrue private wealth, instead using it as an opportunity for sharing and collaboration that expand upon what living spaces can offer (Bamford, 2001; Carrere et al., 2020). This view is a regular feature of grassroots-level organizing:

For progressive housing activists worldwide, the ‘housing struggle’ is rarely seen solely in terms of exchange value, that is, efforts to reduce the cost of housing provision in a market, or to turn that entirely under public control. Instead, it is framed, lived, and embodied as a struggle to affirm a different way of being in the world. This is about the ‘use value’ of

housing: about finding ways to enable what home can do for people in the widest possible sense. (Lancione, 2020, p. 275)

The goal is thus not just to lower the cost of housing but to change the experience of home.

It is worthwhile to note that many names are used to describe forms of communal living and their definitions can vary widely depending on the context. Hudson et al. (2021) observed that because terms are used with such inconsistency, they instead resort to the term community-led housing, or CLH, which they establish as

an umbrella term that encompasses different approaches including community land trusts (CLTs), cohousing, cooperatives, self-help and self-build housing—[which] brings together models that share an emphasis on resident autonomy, community collaboration and inclusion and may have the capacity to reduce social isolation across residents of all ages. (p. 1)

Having witnessed the same inconsistencies, I similarly do not find it valuable to flesh out the intricate distinctions between these models and will instead continue to use the term “housing cooperative” or “coop” to refer to houses in this research, as these are the preferred terms of the communities themselves.

In the history of contemporary shared living, two moments of increased popularity have drawn the attention of many scholars for analysis. One is the rise of collective living in Northern California in the 1960s, when “the free-love and anti-establishment movement in [the United States of] America gave rise to a series of communes, wherein groups of people could more precisely define their own family unit, way of living and politics, that often sat outside or adjacent to the dominant system” (Bhatia and Steinmuller, 2018, p. 125). Given that this region is also the location of this research study, it follows that a local historical legacy of these politics may factor into the prevalence of coops today. The second is the Danish development of a more intensive

model of collective living termed cohousing in the decade following⁸. In its original form, cohousing would involve an entire neighborhood designed to accommodate a culture of spatial, material, and social sharing among families. A third surge is taking place today and these patterns indicate that capitalist drivers of housing culture are increasingly in tension with an alternative, competing value system.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly looked to self-governed shared housing models as spaces that can challenge systems of oppression (Carrere et al., 2020; Hudson et al., 2021; Lubik and Kosatsky, 2019). However, Tummers and MacGregor (2019) challenge the assumptions that such arrangements are inherently radical because “co-housing as a practice of commoning falls short of its transformative potential if it does not address the politics of social reproduction” (p. 64). They advocate for more research on practices within shared living that foreground discussions of feminist political ecology, wherein the material systems of gendered oppression are monitored to be sure that the extraction of care work from feminized bodies to enable capitalism does not simply continue in an altered form. While

the physical infrastructure of co-housing enables residents to share the work of social reproduction[,]... there is no guarantee that this will happen fairly, and in the context of deeply entrenched gender roles, one can expect that without institutionalized equal sharing, ad hoc arrangements... will mean caring-as-usual, with women taking on the bulk of the responsibility. (Tummers and MacGregor, 2019, p. 76).

⁸ Many writers assert that cohousing “was created in Denmark in the early 1970s as an innovative form of collective housing and later spread to other northern European countries, the USA and other latitudes such as Uruguay” (Carrere et al., 2020, p. 2). It is important to observe that such assessments are common in framing modern western actors as leaders in developing communal living schemes, suggesting that these models can be traced to the 20th century. However, such claims are criticized for erasing thousands of years of Indigenous living and ascribing undue credit to colonial cultures (Bowra and Mashford-Pringle, 2021; Lubik and Kosatsky, 2019; White-Harvey, 1998). The fact is that “there was communal living in almost all Indigenous communities across Turtle Island (North America)” (Bowra and Mashford-Pringle, 2021, p. 5). This research recognizes this and thus points to the insertion of privatization into how housing is conceptualized as the point of departure from the supportive homemaking practices that we now seek to restore.

This thesis joins this conversation by extending on Tummers and MacGregor's concerns and aiming to uncover the lessons, positive and negative, that can be drawn from attempts to reimagine housing as a collectivized space to transform social conditions. I will now turn to a key embodiment of how communities support each other by highlighting food practices as a central locus of communal care.

Section 3: On Food

Cooperative houses break from mainstream US culture because their social systems are rooted in the practice of sharing – the sharing of space, resources, labour, ideas, practices, and food – in a context designed for competitive individualism. Chan and Zhang (2021) recognize that “sharing behaviors (or activities) can be the means to, as well as the goal of, strong social relations” (p. 167) and this practice deserves special attention with food because “[e]ating together is ingrained in human history, as is the sharing and division of responsibility for finding, acquiring, preparing and cooking food” (Monteiro, 2015, p. 2319). In a landscape that values using the labour of social reproduction to support the competition-focused capitalist system rather than to build social connection, what does it mean to share instead?

Before diving into the relevant scholarship, I want to acknowledge that the wealth of research surrounding food extends widely into fields including health and environmental sciences, international political relations, and the individual psychology of personal consumption habits. While it is outside the scope of this paper to reflect on the high-level discussions of current food system crises, it is pertinent to briefly recognize that the scale of this issue extends beyond the household level, as do its solutions.

Despite the fervor with which the UN Sustainable Development Goal of achieving zero hunger by 2030 has been touted, hunger has slowly increased since 2015 (Goal 2: Zero Hunger, no date) and even wealthy countries currently have rates of food insecurity

as high as 20% (Pollard and Booth, 2019). O’Kane (2012) warns that “this globalised food system that promotes competitiveness, devalues personal relationships, discourages connections with nature and with food producers and imposes substantial environmental, social and health costs cannot remain sustainable” (p. 270). Significant policy changes are needed to address root causes of this issue, namely inequality generated by a capitalist economic system, but “food is not only a functional and nutritious source for ensuring productive bodies; food is also linked to feelings, agencies and pleasures that extend our conventional understandings of the dimensions of freedoms” (Lewis, 2016, as quoted in Parsons, Harman and Cappellini, 2021, p. 12). To best account for this, Picchioni, Forsythe and Po (2021) advocate for “centring food systems on social reproduction and geographies of care, [in order to] move beyond a focus on capitalist economic relationships towards a more nuanced critique and necessary actions to strengthen future food systems” (p. 6). It is within conversations of these social elements of food and eating that this research is situated.

This section will introduce conversations on the harms of a profit-seeking economic system on household-level food practices today and the approaches communities are developing to reclaim food as a social and restorative practice.

2.3.1: Convenience and Collective Isolation: Food Practices Today

Scholars observe that “[c]olonialism, industrialisation and globalisation have distanced cities from food production and changed the relationships between food and the city” (Haysom, 2015, p. 264). This new relationship can be traced at all levels of the food system, including how and where food is produced, the way it is cooked and consumed, and its impact on human health and that of the environment.

On the health side, global systems have essentially come to treat food “as a commodity, just like any other product in the marketplace... which has resulted in an

acceptance of an anonymous and homogeneous food supply that has contributed to the rise in diet-related diseases across the globe” (O’Kane, 2012, p. 269). This commodity framework that treats food as no more than fuel that must be purchased and ingested to get through the day lies in stark contrast to the historic practices of centering cooking and eating as inherently meaningful social practices. For parents in the US, for example, “one-fifth of all meals are consumed in a car (Gardyn, 2002) with over 12% of all calories of adults coming from fast food” (Jabs and Devine, 2006, p. 199). There is a growth in studies showing correlations between such reductivist approaches to food and alarming health outcomes. Mills et al. (2017) observe that the “prevalence of obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), such as type II diabetes, hypertension, and certain cancers, have been increasing steadily worldwide. These changes have been accompanied by a decrease in the time spent cooking at home in the majority of developed countries” (p. 2). This is a worrying trend given various studies showing a significant correlation between eating home-cooked meals and a healthier diet as well as improved cardiovascular health (Mills et al., 2017).

Historically, the “family dinner has been seen as a metonym of the family itself through which people recognize themselves as families” (Parsons, Harman and Cappellini, 2021, p. 4) but “in recent years, the frequency of eating together as a family has been in decline as progressive individualisation of eating practices has emerged in many affluent countries” (Marovelli, 2019, p. 192). Most of the alternative modes of eating involve “eating on the run at various locations and times throughout the day” (Jabs and Devine, 2006, p. 199) in order to minimize the time spent engaging with food at all. This trend thus corresponds to a deterioration of social relations and physical health while openly devaluing the socially reproductive power of intentional eating⁹.

⁹ Compare this to an alternative view of relating to food outlined in the Brazilian state’s dietary guidelines developed in 2014, which have been widely heralded as a model for how we should be rethinking the food system. The modes of eating section includes advice such as: “Eat slowly,

Modern food practices are thus marked increasingly by convenience, affordability, and a marked detachment from food practices themselves.

2.3.2: The Call is Coming From Outside the Kitchen: The Market's Solution to Food

Issues

As discussed in the first section of this chapter, our neoliberalised landscape leads to social reproduction practices being increasingly shifted from the public into the private sphere, wherein corporations seek to supplant state provisions and personal practices of care with profitable market offerings. Outsourcing the practices that restore our wellbeing makes them vulnerable to being extractive rather than supportive because human needs are reduced to opportunities for profit, incentivizing the market to provide as little as possible in order to maximize returns.

In terms of food, we can see this manifested in the growth of convenience-oriented technologies and an entire movement seeking to remove food from their lives altogether.

“The food and restaurant industry has responded to consumers’ feelings of time scarcity, [for example,] but most foods designed to be quick and convenient do not often meet health and nutrition goals” (Jabs and Devine, 2006, p. 202) and instead contribute to the alarming rise in health problems described earlier (Mills et al., 2017; O’Kane, 2012). Perhaps more importantly, these solutions do not reduce the time demanded of people to be at work, instead seeking to optimize the day by minimizing time allocated to social reproduction so that paid labour can occupy even more of our lives. This mismatch in values is precisely what communities in this research seem determined to resist.

with full attention, and enjoy eating without engaging in another activity” (Monteiro, 2015, p. 2316).

There may be no better example of this than the Complete Foods (CF) diet. Originating in the Bay Area, the very site of this research, this diet is predicated on the idea that the way to solve today's challenges of poor health, dwindling time, and tight finances is to remove the need to consume food from our lives entirely. This is accomplished through meals that

are typically delivered as powdered blends of macro and micronutrients (for example, rice protein instead of rice; oat flour instead of bread; maltodextrin as a source of carbohydrates) to be mixed with water and consumed as liquid shakes. CF products are purported to be nutritionally complete and enable consumers to bypass — fully or partially — the consumption of conventional solid food. (Dolejšová, 2020, p. 3)

The result is a technological approach to food allowing participants to quantifiably optimize their intake of different nutritional components of food without interacting with it in its real form at all.

Participants in this movement were motivated by “their desire to improve their personal health and optimise their daily schedules” (Dolejšová, 2020, p. 8), which is puzzling given that loneliness is a public health crisis often addressed through commensal eating (Dunbar, 2017; Marovelli, 2019; Watson, 2019). While it is not clear how many people participate in this diet, food-tech had \$5.7 billion in investments in 2015 and was announced as one of the world's fastest-growing technology industries (Dolejšová, 2020) and demonstrates a particular approach to solving food issues.

These are striking examples of how social reproduction can be tailored to support the capitalist system rather than to challenge it. Time-saving technologies that seek to minimize our interactions with food at every level act in service of giving us more time to work – just as is being demanded of us. To take a different approach, as done in Brazil's state dietary guidelines, “[i]t is well worthwhile to pay more attention to food and eating. This often implies making new decisions about what is most important in life” (Monteiro, 2015, p. 2316).

2.3.3: Sharing as Caring: Eating Well Through Community

Food presents an opportunity to address time scarcity, social isolation, and diet-based health issues in ways that can challenge neoliberal ideologies rather than perpetuate them. One approach to this is to adopt a culture of sharing that generates more time for collective eating rather than individual on-the-go convenience foods that encourage more time spent working. While food sharing once was highly prevalent, there is now a “decline in sharing within western societies linked to the emergence of mass consumerism, privatisation and greater disposable income” (Davies and Evans, 2019, p. 155) which communal living is uniquely positioned to address (Gardner, 1999; Lee at al.; Lietaert, 2010; Loh and Agyeman, 2019).

In the Peruvian Amazon, food sharing has been shown to play a “role in building and maintaining cultural identity and social bonds” (Lee at al., 2018, p. 254), while Loh and Agyeman’s (2019) extensive research on alternative food sharing networks in Boston underline that “[s]haring is a social, political, economic, and cultural process” (p. 215). One side of this is sharing the labour of foodwork, a term which groups together shopping, cooking, and cleaning. A key benefit to collectivizing practices of foodwork is the saving of time needed for the labour of preparing a daily house dinner, which Lietaert (2010) estimates to take 45 hours monthly – “nothing less than one week of full time work” (p. 579). Collective housing is able to save significant amounts of time while maintaining the practice of eating itself, in contrast to food-tech approaches like the CF diet.

While sharing the labour of foodwork directly addresses time scarcity, the act of shared eating, or commensalism, addresses social isolation. Marovelli’s (2019) research on urban commensalism found that the “ritual of the meal reduces anxieties about encounter of social differences and it is instrumental to the creation of a space of safety”

(p. 200), establishing “bonds within and beyond immediate family groups” (p. 192). This demonstrates the power that shared food practices can have to address the crisis of loneliness that plagues western countries. At the same time, Marovelli observes that “the vast body of literature on commensality, defined as eating together at the same table, has yet to engage with urban food sharing, and does not take into consideration the new forms of sharing meals that extend beyond traditional forms of kinship and friendship in contemporary affluent countries” (p. 191). Davies and Evans (2019) similarly observe that “the relative invisibility of noncapitalist formations of food sharing to date is limiting the potentialities for radical systemic change through sharing” (p. 156), inviting new studies to help enrich this understanding. This thesis contributes to this gap in knowledge by examining urban communities that self-organize around a shared food culture to design alternative ways of being within a city facing a crisis of housing, care, and wellness.

As the pressures of late-stage capitalism lead people to work more hours and have less time available to allocate toward care practices, a range of market-based solutions have surfaced to address symptoms of the crisis in ways that actually worsen it. It is within these conversations about the role of food sharing practices in addressing urban crises that this research is situated. Examining food practices can tell the story of community, resistance, and care. It is an embodied form of social reproduction that serves as an access point to understand and learn from the potential of shared housing practices to reimagine urban life.

At a time when urban spaces are becoming more dense and communal living is growing in popularity, building knowledge on how the organization of collective houses can either challenge or contribute to the crisis of social reproduction will best equip

organizers to do the former. The following section will describe the research methods used to do so in this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This investigation draws heavily on the guidance of decolonial research methods that center reciprocity and community engagement in generating new knowledge. This section will outline the governing philosophy of my research as well as the strategy and analytical methods used in my efforts to conduct ethical, useful research in such a personal space as a community's private home.

3.1: Research Philosophy

This research project is underpinned by the philosophy of interpretivism. Typical of qualitative research, this approach attempts to understand the nuances of experience without reducing them to numerical data (as in the philosophy of positivism, which predominates quantitative research). In other words, "interpretivism aims to decipher the patterns that compound the clues, puzzles, and forces hidden beneath specific cases and/or human experiences, feelings, ideas, values, beliefs, symbols, etc." (Cibangu, 2012, p. 106). This choice is justified because this research is centered on the deeply personal realm of emotional connection and cultural formation. The feelings of care and loneliness which surface in discussions of social reproduction become invisibilized if findings are reduced to numbers. I instead postulate that there is a subjective truth to human experience.

Another layer of the philosophy governing this project is that of decolonialism. Anthropological research has been heavily problematized for its historic tendency to involve a researcher from the Global North traveling to the Global South to study, and publish about, cultures there (Adams, Ellis and Jones, 2017; Paganini and Stöber, 2021; Pham and Gothberg, 2020). Through this practice, colonial power imbalances are reproduced by the academic institution itself as globally marginalized communities are not given agency over their own narratives. To challenge this, "Heshusius (1994)

suggests that researchers should embrace a participatory consciousness — recognising that they are not separate from the world in which the data are produced” (Blair, 2015, p. 14-5) by adopting practices that center ethics in knowledge creation. I have attempted to do so by designing a research approach on principles of autoethnography and reciprocity.

Autoethnography is a term describing researchers who “conduct and write ethnographies of their ‘own people’” (Hayano, 1979, as cited in Adams, Ellis and Jones, 2017, p. 1). By challenging the legacy of extractive research practices, it is argued that “autoethnography is a promising decolonizing methodology which has the potential to inform decolonization and social justice movements” (Pham and Gothberg, 2020, p. 4094) at the same time that the output itself benefits from the critical perspectives that only insider people can contribute (Blair, 2015; Pham and Gothberg, 2020). For these reasons, my research is directed at my own cultural context as someone born in San Francisco, California who exists within the housing cooperative scene.

Reciprocity in research is the antithesis of extractivism. This value is apparent in research strategies such as knowledge co-creation and participatory action research (PAR), both of which lend inspiration to this project. Co-creation is a framework wherein communities and researchers collaborate to produce knowledge on the terms of the culture being studied. A result of knowledge co-creation through reciprocity can be participants finding the research process itself to be more valuable than the final output of the project, embodying a rejection of the extractive role academics play when they seek only to produce a publication (Paganini and Stöber, 2021). Action research posits that “[k]nowledge comes from doing” (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood and Maguire, 2003, p. 14) and encourages the researcher to be reflexive, humble, adaptive, and actively engaged in the practices of interest to the extent that is ethically appropriate. Perhaps most notably, researchers are encouraged to give formative advice to participants when

appropriate rather than attempt to be neutral observers¹⁰ (Lewis and Russell, 2011, p. 404).

Drawing on my insider knowledge of this region's housing cooperative community, I sought to join houses as an equal member of the space by contributing all that would be asked of another resident, namely, paying rent and participating fully in their systems. This dissolves the illusion that academia creates a separate identity of person that is somehow absolved from responsibility or is not implicated in the conditions of where they live and what they do as researchers. By designing this research to prioritize the structures and preferences of the communities themselves, I have attempted to practice a decolonial and reciprocal method of knowledge creation which has meaningful impacts for communities independent of any academic output. I seek to contribute as much, if not more, than I receive.

3.2: Research Type

Given that my research philosophy is grounded in consent and collaboration, it is only natural that my research type be an exploratory one that shifts focus based on feedback from participants. I therefore conducted inductive research, which allows the content shared by participants and experiences in the field to generate theory. This is in contrast to deductive research, in which a researcher tests an established theory and either confirms or denies its presence. Taking a bottom-up approach is an extension of the philosophy of collaboration and fundamental humility that I attempt to bring to this project. It also engenders the more personal forms of connection needed for the deeply personal spaces to which I sought access.

¹⁰ Examples in this fieldwork included my participation in house meetings wherein I would vote on proposals and share concerns or suggestions on the topic at hand. During group interview, I further facilitated inclusive discussions of how each resident would want to change or improve the food system, generating ideas that were consolidated into new agenda items.

Several key moments show the inductive approach to project design in action. The genesis of this research concept was my experience as a community member myself, having founded and lived in Rose House and further lived cooperatively for years in the East Bay and in other parts of the world. Extensive conversations with housemates and peripheral community members focused my attention to the value of the food system specifically as a marker of how impactful East Bay coops are. I conducted three preliminary interviews with coop residents in the months preceding my fieldwork which led to a shift in focus from food security to social reproduction before the fieldwork began¹¹. Adjustments continued to be made throughout the fieldwork based on the suggestions and preferences of residents.

In this way, the inductive approach to qualitative research has been a consistent facet of the implementation of this research. Doing so has allowed members of communities themselves to direct the project design, avoiding the top-down approach to academic research to which I am philosophically opposed.

3.3: Research Strategy

In keeping with best practices for qualitative research of this nature, I conducted immersive fieldwork in order to witness “the spectrum of feelings, emotions, insights, views, beliefs, and values with which participants live in and interact with the real world” (Cibangu, 2012, p. 113). While specific research methods can be used to describe my approach, I would first like to emphasize my resonance with McManimon’s (2021) insistence that getting caught up in the minutiae of academically naming what one is

¹¹ While my original vision had been to focus on the sustainability and efficiency of cooperative living, exploring how the collective use of time and material resources could improve urban food security, it became immediately clear that people did not want to talk about their lifestyle in this way. People instead wanted to focus on the role of these homes in building community, showing care, and achieving spiritual wellbeing in a context that seeks to deprive them of it. These conversations demonstrated to me that I was taking an approach to analysis that used the wrong value system, efficiency, and I instead followed the guidance of community members to frame the project around social reproduction.

doing can detract from the spirit of collaborative research processes themselves. With this in mind, I approached the field with an openness to shift my strategy based on the preferences and comforts of participants rather than bringing in fixed expectations of my relationships to them.

In the end, the research strategy utilized most closely aligns with the framework of embedded research and draws additional inspiration from participatory action research. Embedded research is an ethnographic approach in which the researcher acts as a team member as well as a contributor to the community over the course of the fieldwork itself, including but not limited to the sharing of emergent findings (Lewis and Russell, 2011; McManimon, 2021). PAR is rooted even more deeply in the value of collective power and is centered on a “respect for people and for the knowledge and experience they bring to the research process, a belief in the ability of democratic processes to achieve positive social change, and a commitment to action” (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood and Maguire, 2003, p. 15) which recognizes that “all research is embedded within a system of values and promotes some model of human interaction” (p. 11). Because my research is focused on community-centered, shared housing practices, it followed that the only way to achieve true immersion would be by living on-site as a resident, and the only way to ensure that my presence was not extractive or hierarchical would be by contributing to the houses at least as much as any other resident would – through paying rent, participating in the systems, and taking action as needed.

My strategy was to stay in two houses in the Bay Area as a subletter for one month each. The homes would become the literal center of my life. Doing this would allow me “to experience the mundane and sacred, brash and nuanced aspects of socio-cultural life and, through observations, encounters and conversations, to come to an understanding of [them]” (Lewis and Russell, 2011, p. 404). I chose to explore two

houses instead of one both to generate more rich findings from a greater variety of residents, and to help facilitate the community building and cross-pollination of ideas that could make my research useful to the houses themselves. It was important to draw research from lived observations rather than from interviews alone because while people do not necessarily think to remark on conditions around them, this does not mean that those conditions aren't present (Venkatesh, 2013). This is especially true in the taken-for-granted space of our private homes. Already being a member of the region's greater cooperative community allowed me unique access to these homes in a way rooted in trust that did not disrupt residents' own day-to-day lives. With this in mind, I set out to find a space in interested communities.

3.4: Time Horizon

I stayed at each house for one month: April and May of 2022, respectively. Known as a cross-sectional time horizon, this would enable me to understand the conditions of the houses at a fixed point in time. As cooperative houses are an embodiment of ongoing negotiation and processing, it would not make sense to do a longitudinal study that tracks changes over time because the fluidity of the context would yield too many shifting variables to draw meaningful conclusions.

The decision to stay for an entire month in each house was based first on the need to build up trust with the communities. Trust is built up over time sharing day-to-day space with residents, in which the natural course of life leads to bonding through symbolic trials, celebrations, and shared struggles (Lewis and Russell, 2011). The duration of my stay was also curtailed by academic limitations because "unfortunately, time is a rare resource in the ever-shorter duration of research projects" (Paganini and Stöber, 2021, p. 456). Working between these bounds, I drew from my knowledge of coop processes that most of the house systems (chores, rent, meetings, food budget)

are organized in monthly units and thus determined that staying in each house for one month would be the most adaptive to their existing systems.

3.5: House Selection and Respective Systems

Housing cooperative culture is not mainstream. For this reason, a non-probability sampling strategy was needed to select two houses that would be the right fit for the study; a randomized sample would not suffice because this lifestyle does not represent the population generally. Even within the housing cooperative scene, conducting a truly random probability sample would be inappropriate as it would remove this project's deeply personal form of connecting based in trust and shared community. I had an existing social connection to each house and knew of the high quality of their food systems.

The most important determining factor for selection was a coop being enthusiastic about collaborating on this project, followed by them having strong systems in place for the relevant study focus and, of course, the capacity to host me at all. I disqualified Rose House from consideration because my role as one of its founding members led me to have an overly complex relationship with its systems; it was literally too close to home.

The process of selecting the houses began with outreach to my personal network of coop residents, which included friends, community leaders, and members of a bulk food sharing project I'd been involved in the genesis of. My outreach took the form of emails with an embedded video of myself explaining the project, meetings, calls, informal conversations, and a chain reaction of introductions to new candidates.

While a majority of candidate houses were excited to collaborate, several were disqualified because they no longer had a functioning shared food system due to COVID or else because they didn't have the space to host me. A third option had been to

collaborate in the creation of a new coop envisioned as a safe space for marginalized communities, embodying the spirit of action research most profoundly, but the property manager pulled out of the contract ten days before move-in so this was no longer a potentiality. Two houses especially interested in collaborating offered to create capacity that wouldn't have existed otherwise¹², ultimately becoming the sites used: Milvia House and Berryman House.

After finding these candidates, the next step was to get approval through the houses' own democratic decision-making processes – a not uncommon practice within collaborative research design (Nairn et al., 2020). While I had completed a thorough ethical clearance process within the University of Cape Town's systems before moving forward with the outreach to the houses, it was the internal consent and approval processes of the communities that mattered most. This entailed having one-on-one calls with a house representative, being interviewed by the house as a group, the houses having internal discussions and voting, and them returning to me with their decision and final terms of acceptance for the proposal. Once the houses completed their approval process, a representative signed a consent form that I designed for a house-level agreement on the fundamentals of the project. *Table 1* summarizes the systems at both houses¹³, with more detailed explanations of these processes in Appendix A. For brevity, only the houses' food systems are described in depth on the following page.

¹² Alex at Milvia House offered me his room for sublet while he stayed in the tiny house he had recently built. This arrangement would provide him with some rent relief while he would continue to participate in the house's systems (paying into the food budget, doing chores, and spending most of this time at the house). Dave and Eva at Berryman House invited me to stay in their office room, which could be converted into a bedroom for the month.

¹³ Note that two important pillars of both houses' systems are excluded: COVID policies and the process for bringing in new members. The former was excluded due to its intense level of detail and the fact that its temporal specificity makes it less relevant to the project at hand; the latter is excluded to prevent misrepresentation because it did not occur during my fieldwork.

	<p>Milvia House</p> <p>Downtown Berkeley</p> <p>10 residents</p> <p>Founded 2018</p> <p>9 beds / 3.5 baths, 3200 sq. ft.</p>	<p>Berryman House</p> <p>North Berkeley</p> <p>7 residents</p> <p>Founded 2008, rebooted 2021</p> <p>7 beds / 4 baths, 2,592 sq. ft.</p>
Meetings	<p>Monthly, mandatory</p> <p>Strict timekeeping, Roberta's Rules of Order</p> <p>Primary decision-making space</p> <p>Majority rule (except COVID or finances, which require consensus)</p>	<p>Monthly, mandatory</p> <p>Flexible structure</p> <p>Primary decision-making space</p> <p>Consensus rule</p>
Chores	<p>Fixed 60 chore minutes/week</p> <p>Flexible practices; individuals decide</p> <p>1 cook shift/week (flexible sign-up)</p> <p>2 kitchen clean shifts/week (flexible sign-up)</p> <p>Rotating chores: food shopper, agenda keeper, facilitator, etc. (monthly sign-ups)</p> <p>Permanent chores: finance manager, landlord liaison</p> <p>Modifications: if many negative minutes, can exchange for skipping a cook shift (120 minutes) or clean shift (35 minutes)</p>	<p>Est 90 mins/week of chores</p> <p>Fixed "zone of responsibility" for each resident</p> <p>1 cook shift/week (days assigned long-term)</p> <p>Ad hoc kitchen clean by those who ate but didn't cook</p> <p>Permanent chores: finance manager, food shopper</p>
Finances	<p>Money handled by Finance Manager</p> <p>Shared credit union account</p> <p>Total house rent: \$10,565/month</p> <p>Room rent range: \$845 - \$1,421</p> <p>\$250 "couples fee" reduces everyone else's rent</p>	<p>Money handled by Finance Manager</p> <p>Shared credit union account</p> <p>Total house rent: \$6,000/month</p> <p>Room rent range: \$500-\$1,025</p>
Digital Communications	<p>Slack (app): house news, issues, events, policies, asynchronous voting</p> <p>Groupme (app): urgent messages</p> <p>Shared docs (Google Drive app): house policies, surveys, meeting agendas, emergency contacts and procedures</p> <p>Comments on shared docs for asynchronous negotiations</p>	<p>Slack (app): house news, community channel, dinner attendance</p> <p>Phone texts: urgent messages</p> <p>Shared docs (Google Drive app): house vision, house policies, finances overview, meeting agendas</p>

Food	Dinners: Sunday-Thursday Budget: \$200/month Restrictions: Vegetarian, no alcohol Staples list: surveys, meetings, ethics Weekly grocery runs by food shopper Quarterly bulk food order Chefs get \$20/month to buy extras Guest passes: 3 free, then \$50/10 pack Sources: weekly grocery shop, seasonal community-supported agriculture (CSA) box, quarterly bulk food order Non-residents can join food system	Dinners: Tuesday-Thursday Budget: \$300/month Restrictions: Omnivorous, includes alcohol Staples list: surveys, meetings, shopper insights Weekly grocery runs by food shopper Chefs get \$40/week to buy extras Surplus funds redistributed quarterly Wednesday community potluck: wider non-resident community invited Sources: weekly grocery shop, weekly fish CSA, ad hoc arrangements with local organizations
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Table 1: summary of house systems tracing in Berryman and Milvia. Note that conditions are only reflective of the precise time of research, as residents and systems frequently change.

3.5.1: Site 1 - Milvia House

Milvia House is a 10-person housing cooperative in Berkeley, California. Its organising systems can be understood through the pillars of chores, meetings, food, finances, and digital communications, in addition to the excluded pillars of housemate searches and COVID policies.

Every member of Milvia House participates in the food system. Considered central to the cultural ecosystem of the house, it is intended to be sufficient for every member to meet all of their food needs within the house. It involves payment, selection, sourcing, storage, dinners, and cleanup.





Photos 1-7: External and internal shots of Milvia House, taken by the researcher in April 2022.

The baseline food budget payment for all members is \$200 per month, which is deposited into a shared credit union account managed by the Financial Manager (but to which all housemates have access). Individual reductions are given for residents traveling outside the house for three or more consecutive days. In addition, members can buy guest passes for friends to come to dinner. Three guest passes per month are free for all residents, after which they purchase a pack of 10 passes for \$50 which is paid into the food fund. Another way that non-residents contribute to the food fund is by participating in the system even when not living in the house, wherein they pay for food, join meals, and do the expected chores of a resident without actually paying rent or having a permanent room¹⁴.

¹⁴ Two people did this during my stay, including the person whose room I sublet.

All food bought with Milvia's house funds is vegetarian, with substantial vegan options and a general culture of buying healthy, cost-effective food rather than junk food. Alcohol and meat products are not included. A staples list was determined through collective discussions around diet, preferences, cost, and ethical considerations (i.e. politics, animal welfare, and waste). Data was further collected through digital surveys collating the preferences of members as different constellations of people moved in and out. Members write requests on the kitchen whiteboard for specific items each week, and can also each use up to \$20 monthly to buy ingredients for a particular meal.

Food is sourced from a combination of the grocery store Berkeley Bowl, Costco, Fowler Brothers, and varying individual purchases. A designated food shopper or two, volunteered for monthly at meetings, is responsible for auditing the food supply each week and shopping for needed groceries based on the staples list and whiteboard requests. Every quarter, the bulk food lead coordinates with representatives from six other houses to source high volumes of dry goods from Fowler Brothers in a collective purchase that reduces cost and plastic waste. In addition, during certain seasons produce is bought from a weekly CSA box.

Food is stored across three different rooms: pantry, kitchen, and back of house. The kitchen holds fruit, spices, condiments, and two minifridges for leftovers and dairy (or dairy-like) items. The pantry fridge contains produce and condiments. The back of house contains a fridge and shelf for personal food with designated shelves for each resident, as well as multiple high-volume dry goods storage areas which the bulk refiller distributes to the kitchen when supplies there run low.



Photos 8-9: Dinners at Milvia House.

House dinners are prepared on “school nights”: Sunday-Thursday. Everyone signs up for one cook shift and two clean shifts on the kitchen whiteboard the week prior, resulting in two chefs and four or five cleaners per night. Diets are listed prominently on the kitchen whiteboard and chefs are responsible for ensuring that the lowest common denominator diet will have a sufficiently balanced and healthy meal. Residents text ahead of time to notify chefs if guests will be attending. Dinner is presented as a buffet line on the cabinet next to the dining table, and residents line up to serve themselves whenever they are ready to come eat. Afterwards, cleaners follow the itemized list on the whiteboard to thoroughly tidy up the kitchen and dining room, leaving some items for assigned cleaners who aren’t home yet to insure the labour gets fairly distributed. Leftovers are stored in the leftovers fridge and typically finished as lunch the next day, significantly reducing the need for residents to ever cook individually (though that option is always available). The large dinner served nearly every night of the week is a central tenet of Milvia’s culture. Regardless of the staggered times at which people arrive at the table, the gathering is typically large, as the house alone comprises ten people and non-residents friends are regularly invited.

With these systems, Milvia House has designed a highly structured system for collectivising domestic labour that intends for residents to contribute and benefit equally while maintaining an ongoing negotiation of its policies. The time spent contributing to labour is an explicitly valued contribution around which fairness is determined.

3.5.2: Site 2 - Berryman House

Berryman House was originally founded in 2008, but it was “rebooted” in 2021 when nearly all of its members moved out and were replaced by a new collective. Through this process, some structures were inherited while others were redesigned to suit the new group’s visions. The reboot is colloquially referred to as *Berryman 2.0*. A document outlining the values that Berryman seeks to embody is included in Appendix C. Their systems are designed to be fluid and shift based on the needs of housemates at any given time. This creates a space that is at once more intimate and less predictable than Milvia, which follows a more strict structure.





Photos 10-16: Internal and external shots of Berryman House, taken by the researcher in May 2022.

Berryman residents share food in abundance. The \$300 monthly contribution to the food fund per person covers an unrestricted range of organic food across diets, including meat, snacks, and alcohol. Each member has access to all of the food, which is stored in a spacious kitchen, with a small designated zone for personal food that is not bought with house funds.

Dinners are cooked in pairs three times per week, Tuesday-Thursday¹⁵. Each resident has the same cook shift day per week. After dinner, everyone who ate but did not cook is responsible for cleaning the kitchen. At the time of this research, one housemate whose work schedule does not allow her to assume a weekly cook shift instead is the “Snack Fairy”, preparing baked goods for everyone throughout the week. There are frequent unscheduled dinners which are also shared.

The food shopper gets groceries once per week from Berkeley Bowl. A loose staples list was generated based on a digital survey of housemates’ preferences around food selection and culture (including questions like “What does healthy mean to you?”). Residents make further requests using the app Anylist, and chefs are allocated \$20 per meal to buy additional ingredients. Predominantly, however, it is the shopper’s extensive knowledge of the house’s eating habits that informs the purchasing decisions.

Another food source is a collaboration with Real Good Fish, a sustainable seafood service for which Berryman acts as a local pickup site. A cooler of fish is delivered to the front yard on Tuesdays and left outside for neighbors to trickle in and collect their portion throughout the evening; Berryman then gets to keep a portion for free. Past food sources have also included a CSA box, a farmshare at Riverdog and Full

¹⁵ The frequency of dinners changes based on the time of year and extenuating circumstances such as COVID. This schedule was in place during my fieldwork.

Belly farms, the local farmers' market, and receiving leftover dishes from Spirit Rock Meditation Center.

Eating dinner together is Berryman's central value in food, so much so that there is a Slack channel strictly for checking whether people will attend dinner that evening and the cook shift is canceled if a minority of residents will be present. When dinners do take place, they do not begin until everyone is present. The food is arranged on the table itself. Candles are lit, lights are dimmed, wine is poured, and a grounding exercise often begins each meal. The chefs describe the ingredients of each dish as food is passed around. In keeping with the intimate and spiritual nature of these gatherings, Berryman is not very focused on saving leftovers to be eaten the next day, instead valuing the lived experience of sharing fresh food above its practical functionality.

Wednesday nights are unique because they are often "community dinners" to which members of the wider community are invited. Everyone who joins from the outside is asked to contribute a dish if possible, making these evenings a big potluck that usually requires the backyard to be rearranged accordingly. A community dinner during my field work included residents from seven different coops; naturally, I invited members of Milvia.



Photos 17-18: Cooking dinner at Berryman House, and a Wednesday community dinner in their backyard.

Both of the houses chosen for my fieldwork have extensive self-governance systems that organise their domestic labour. As housing cooperatives, their structures differ but have many fundamental similarities which are based in democratic decision-making to ensure that all residents are in control of their own living conditions. The food systems are central to both house cultures.

This section has outlined how the process of selecting these two research sites was centered on trust, connection, and respect for the houses' own processes. I spent one month living in each house to better understand the embodied practises around their systems of organizing socially reproductive labour. Doing so enabled me to build meaningful relationships with residents while making contributions that fit their culture; including not only rent but dinners, chores, and the vulnerable conversations that bring communities together and keep them close.

3.6: Data Collection Methods

My primary data collection method was interviews, supplemented by participant observation. I conducted field notes on the latter, practices of which included accompanying food shoppers in both houses on trips to grocery stores, joining digital platforms, participating in meetings, and integrating myself in house processes of cooking, cleaning, and sharing meals. While extensive digital resources were also shared with me – such as house documents, policies, and messaging channels – I judged it unethical to include them outside of enriching my knowledge of house culture; this is not an uncommon decision during immersive fieldwork as there are unspoken and unquantifiable understandings of privacy that the researcher must act on themselves (Lewis and Russell, 2011).

I conducted 18 interviews in total. Two were group interviews from each house and the rest were individual interviews. I did one-on-one interviews with all seven current

Berryman residents, seven of the ten current Milvia residents, and two former Milvia residents. Before each interview, participants signed an individual consent form which was more specific than the house-level form¹⁶. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed.



Photo 19: Attaching a lapel mic to Steph for an interview during a cook shift.

Interviews were conducted as late in my residency as possible in order to allow for the most time to build up trust beforehand. They were semi-structured, meaning that I had questions prepared but primarily let the interviewee's answers guide the direction of our discussion (Stuckey, 2013), in keeping with the collaborative nature of this research design. Participants were often invited to look through the questions before or during the interview (see Box 1) to be transparent and invite their suggestions about other directions we should take the discussion. Most interviews were conducted within participants' private rooms, serving as a unique vehicle for me to move through the

¹⁶ One question requested consent to first name usage, with the stipulation that if any resident requested to have their identity anonymized, I would do so for everyone in their house so that other residents couldn't deduce who they were through the process of elimination. No residents requested anonymity.

house and deepen the intimacy of our friendship by moving outside of common spaces. The interviews acted as a social bonding site in themselves and are thus a valuable method to incorporate into community-focused research (Nairn et al., 2020). Many residents gave me the feedback that those interviews were key spaces in which they could reflect on their own context, deepen their relationship with me, and feel more empowered to advocate for certain house processes.

Box 1: Examples of semi-structured interview questions.

- What drew you to live in this house?
- How do you describe this house to people unfamiliar with coops?
- If you didn't live here, what would your other options be?
- Where do you spend time with your housemates?
- How does the food system work?
- Can you tell me about the last meal you cooked here?
- What would this house be like without the shared dinners?
- Do you get all your food needs met from the house?
- What do you think is your most controversial opinion about how the house works?
- Do you think housing is political? If so, how?
- What would you change about the system if you could? Have there been any changes made to systems since you've moved in? If so, how?
- What are the biggest challenges of living in this way? Of eating in this way?
- Have you noticed any changes in yourself from living here?

Both group interviews were conducted over dinner. This decision represents the PAR approach to “embed collective data generation into activities that looked like, were, or could be part of the day-to-day practice” (McManimon, 2021, p. 249) because dinners are key spaces over which group meetings and decision-making occurs in these houses. Food was further present in several individual interviews, as two were conducted while cooking together and four included interruptions by a guest appearance with food. These practices confirmed other research showing that incorporating food into methods has power “not only in engaging the senses or creating spontaneity and serendipitous opportunities for talking... [but sometimes] more directly as a vehicle for bringing people together” (Burges Watson et al., 2019, p. 140). This choice was especially appropriate

given the nature of my research exploring food as a conduit for social connection. Non-residents were also present and participated actively in both group interviews, speaking to the way that extended community is a fixture of cooperative living.

3.7: Analysis Methods

I conducted thematic content analysis to make sense of the data and took an inductive approach to generate codes that gave the findings meaning. Inductive analysis is an exploratory approach wherein the data presented the information that is important rather than it arising from a pre-set determination, as in deductive analysis.

The first step of this process was transcribing interviews. I then created a spreadsheet into which I would copy quotes, concepts, and moments based on patterns that were surfacing. I added a column for codes that corresponded to these patterns in a process of open coding, in which the codes emerge from the text itself rather than a preexisting selection of codes being tracked (as in template coding) (Blair, 2015); this approach was an important component of the collaborative rather than top-down philosophy informing this research. As I went through more interviews, I conducted axial coding in which the codes would shift and consolidate based on my assessment of the different terms people use to describe similar phenomena. My familiarity with the context was key to this process because participants would often reference aspects of local culture or events without going into detail, making their insights meaningless from the text alone but deeply insightful when understood by a researcher able to recognize such context clues (Blair, 2015). Some of the codes that emerged were: capitalism, care, diet, dinners, family, the Bay's housing crisis, impact on self, labour, race, spirituality, and values.

After further reviewing these codes and sorting for those most relevant to my research questions, selective coding was used to group them into greater themes. This

necessitated removing some themes that were less relevant to the research aims at hand. Among the themes that surfaced were: collective power to make political change, food as a vehicle for giving and receiving care in the face of a culture that denies care, and communalism as a return to a more intuitive mode of being.

3.8: Methodological Limitations

During the course of this research, methodological limitations surfaced in the form of my dual role as an embedded researcher and community member, and the challenges of applying the academic process of consent acquisition to cultures with their own systems.

My role as a member of the region's housing cooperative community was critical to making this fieldwork possible at the same time that it complicated my role as an academic researcher. Historically the social sciences have encouraged a firm barrier between the participant-researcher relationship, also called the Standard Model, in which the researcher would attempt to be devoid of personal connection with those being studied. However, "this approach becomes inconceivable when open-ended intimacy *itself* is the premise, and where process and product are enmeshed in both name and deed" (Bell, 2019, p. 21) as was the case in this project. This dynamic leads to what Lewis and Russell (2011) call an "in-between-ness" of being an embedded researcher. I would often find myself favoring the privacy of my housemates rather than seeing unfolding events as potential findings, challenging the idea that the line between researcher and personal relationships should be blurred only in favor of securing more useful data. At the same time, it may have led me to err on the side of including less data as a result of feeling overly protective of those who let me into their personal homes.

Another challenge is that of acquiring consent through formal academic channels during the fluid environment of ethnographic research. For one thing, institutions require

consent to be given before the research itself takes place, which is problematic for this type of research in two ways. One is that the research itself is intended to be dynamic and changing based on the contexts of the field, so it should not be possible to have a predetermined idea of exactly what the research will look like for participants to agree to. Secondly, it is important to build relationships and trust before informed consent can be given, but this is impossible given academia's required order of operations. To resolve this, Nairn et al. (2020) advocate for the academy to reimagine consent into a negotiated agreement that can be ethically revisited on the terms of all parties throughout and beyond the fieldwork process. This is largely what took place during my fieldwork.

Further, I prioritized the internal consent channels to which I was directed by the houses and used those rather than introduce more documents that would appear to be formalizing and inconveniencing our relationship. The houses engaged in their own processes of democratic decision-making to determine whether to participate in the project. I also used their processes to request consent for practices such as taking photos of the house and individuals, posting on Milvia's Slack channel for asynchronous votes, and asking Berryman residents individually about their preferences.

These experiences indicate that the academic frameworks for immersive fieldwork are not reflective of the stated needs and intentions of this method and should be revisited accordingly.

This chapter has provided an overview of the anthropological research methods used. Guided by principles of reciprocity, trust and decolonialism, I conducted immersive inductive research (reminiscent of embedded and participatory action research) on my home context, Bay Area housing cooperatives. I lived for one month as a resident in each of two houses, Milvia and Berryman, conducting individual and group interviews to generate data while participating fully in their systems. Consent was obtained through

the houses' internal processes as well as through house-level and individual-level consent forms. All of this served to generate a collaborative, intimate approach to knowledge generation in the space of social reproduction.

This research method generated a highly personal experience of fieldwork that cultivated relationships and insights beyond the scope of the thesis itself. In doing so, the approach embodies a form of reciprocity that can blur the lines between academic and community member. I suggest that normalizing contributions to the field in this way may offer a more engaged and welcome approach to social science research.

Chapter 4: Findings

The question which this research seeks to answer is: *How do food systems in East Bay housing cooperatives model ways to build non-extractive systems of care in the context of contemporary urban crisis?*

In this section, I will explore this answer by first addressing the three sub-questions to build a foundation upon which we can build this analysis. The sub-questions are:

- Why do residents feel that these practices are necessary?
- What are the counter-logics informing these practices?
- What is the coops' impact on residents?

After using these questions as a scaffolding to understand the culture of cooperative housing, I will return to the greater research question by using the lens of the food system to better understand the lessons we can draw from this way of living.

4.1: Motives

"This is me combating the isolationist individualism that comes from urban living."

- Kaila, Berryman House

Practices don't exist in a vacuum; their analysis must begin with a look at the surrounding context that pressures them to do so. Coop residents frequently juxtaposed

their lifestyle with the alternative options that would be available to them if it weren't for these spaces. Those options entail steep financial costs, a depressing sense of isolation, and engaging in harmful politics. Such findings speak to the question: *Why do residents feel that these practices are necessary?*

4.1.1: Saving Money

Perhaps the most ubiquitous conversation topic in the Bay Area is the struggle to find affordable housing, which is why several coop members postulate that the housing crisis is often the impetus that brings people into communal living. As Kaila at Berryman says, "we can't in this day and age really afford these homes on our own, so we're occupying them with like-minded people." Research by Bhatia and Steinmuller (2018) confirms this incentive, observing that "a new series of communes are emerging in the Bay Area, in part to address the housing crisis, as rent in a commune is typically 35 to 40 per cent of marketrate housing" (p. 125).

However, Hannah at Berryman makes the point that "affordability is what gets people into shared living situations, and I want to distinguish that from a coop." The difference? "In a coop, you sign up to be friends." She contrasted coops with an example of a shared house that she had once applied to live in in San Francisco, in which two of its five residents had not been on speaking terms for five years but neither would move out due to their inability to find another \$800 room in the city. Such social incohesion is unimaginable within the community-centered coops examined in this study, where applicants are often disqualified if they only view the house as a cheap room.

A secondary impact of saving money is that residents save time. Gaby at Berryman described how before living at Berryman, struggling to afford the cost of living even at her past coop kept her so busy working to make ends meet that she was unable to put time aside to advance her career. After being originally flown out to the Bay Area

by a tech initiative to do UX design with mentors at Google and Facebook, the distraction of costs kept her bogged down in working class jobs for years. She shared that

everyone is always asking me 'Why don't you have a design job yet?' And I'm like, 'I haven't had the time to, like, not work.... I'm literally working all the time, when and where am I gonna find the peace to like, cultivate a career for myself, even if I'm talented?' And, like, since I've been here [in Berryman], I've done more portfolio work than I have all year.

At the same time, saving money is not a need that can be extrapolated to all coop residents. High-income tech workers, or “techies,” are increasingly choosing to found or live in coops themselves despite earning enough money to afford independent options. Akshay at Berryman reflected on having “a lot of techy friends that have started coops, and I think it would be interesting to understand that perspective of, like, I'm making a six figure salary but I'm still choosing to live in a coop.”

These findings demonstrate that the cost of living in the Bay Area is an undeniable factor in driving people to live cooperatively, but that it also cannot be understood as the sole reason. Financial savings are not sufficient to explain why people would choose to live in a coop rather than a shared house, nor can they explain the draw for techies to live in coops too. For this, we must further examine other reasons that residents find cooperative living necessary.

4.1.2: Overcoming Isolationism

Members of both houses problematized how cultural views of success in the US are predicated on valuing independence to the point of isolation. This social distancing (if we can forgive the term) is witnessed concurrently among both friends and biological family, a theme which will be explored in section 4.4.3.

Steph at Milvia observes that “throughout our lives, the more we are successful, the more we age, the more isolated we get.... It's time to, like, ‘grow up.’” She argues

that coops reject this idea of adulthood. Eva at Berryman pinpoints this issue as US-specific because

in so many cultures in the world there are extended family systems, and I feel like the US doesn't have that as much, because I've talked to people from other countries who wouldn't relate to the idea of a coop per se because they already have it embedded. So I feel like in part, I see [coops] as a replacement for that, what we don't have here, our isolation.

In this way, an absence of family connection has created a vacuum for social support systems that coops seek to fill. Research confirms that "loneliness and lack of social integration and support in the US 'represented one of the nation's most serious public health challenges'" (Snell, 2017, with quote from Robert Putnam, p. 4) and that "[s]ocial isolation and loneliness emerge undeniably as primary drivers for participating in food sharing initiatives across social differences" (Marovelli, 2019, p. 198). These findings corroborate the presence of systemic loneliness and the emergent practices which seek to refuse it.

From a political perspective, Morgan at Milvia identifies individualism in the US as "a big part of how the ruling class divides the working class" and sees communal living as a way to restore power to the masses. Akshay at Berryman extends the critique by describing isolated living as "the easy way out" which keeps people from developing important skills. "I think that life is about existing in community," he argues, "existing in tension, having your own ideologies challenged constantly, being able to learn and grow from others. And I think there's something about our society – like, being able to separate yourself from others – that I think is unhealthy for your own resilience." As testament to this, many residents spoke to feeling empowered by the lessons in democratic decision-making and self-governance that coops provide. Kaila at Berryman sees these lessons as important building blocks for a more sustainable society because "in the social work world, you just learn how it takes a village, you just learn that we

cannot fend for ourselves. And so I believe in collectivism, I believe that we need every role in a system in order to function and to get our needs met.”

Through these logics, residents articulate that the culture of isolation prevalent in US culture is not only undesirable but actually harmful to its people, and that living cooperatively is a way to refuse this culture in their own homes.

4.1.3: Doing Less Harm

Many people in the houses self-describe as social-justice oriented, meaning that they often ask questions about how to do the least harm in society. This concern is especially prevalent when looking to ethically move to an area with extreme gentrification like the Bay Area, where the housing crisis and racial injustice are omnipresent. Hannah at Milvia House describes parsing her own role in this dilemma:

I think a lot about space, like, my body in space as a white person. Especially in the Bay, where rents are insane, a coop to me feels like the way that I can most exist here in a way that it is mitigating of housing concentration and gentrification. It's a better alternative to me than trying to, like, live in a one-off one-bedroom or two-bedroom.

She emphasized that while she does not feel that this practice is solving the greater issue, it is a form of mitigation that she sees as her responsibility. Her housemate Emil says that they even acknowledge this tension with the term “gentrify-lite.”

This consideration also surfaces in the ethics with which coops approach filling available rooms in order to “counteract the deep gentrification patterns that coops can become a part of” (Hannah at Berryman¹⁷). In both houses, room openings prompt conversations about how to make the space available to someone who would radically benefit from the space beyond saving money. This was especially true in the case of Berryman’s most recent opening, a room that they call “the hut”, which costs an

¹⁷ I have chosen to use this citation style to make clear which house each resident is from, as this is most useful for the reader.

astoundingly low \$500 per month and is thus considered a life-changing opportunity for the Bay Area. They promoted the room on platforms beyond standard cooperative boards to improve access by reaching people outside of their network, getting a whopping 108 applicants out of which Hannah found “only, like, eight were duds.” When deciding between the applicants, their discussions considered privilege, positionality, and cultural fit with the house, and often included tensions over how to define the most need (such as based on racial diversity, historical ties to the Bay Area, or other factors related to class and identity). Akshay described the difficulty they faced :

there’s a single mom with a little kid that wants to move into our hut, or, like, someone who’s been unhoused for the last three years and living in a van and wants to move into the hut, you know? Like, from an equity perspective, it’s a super affordable room, so who do you give it to?

The room ultimately went to a low-income Latinx woman who has been able to overcome housing precarity and focus on career development since the move. In this way, members of cooperatives demonstrate a feeling of responsibility to use their space as a resource that reduces pressure on the housing crisis.

Residents also named environmental concerns such as sharing resources to lower their carbon footprint, buying in bulk to reduce plastic consumption, and adopting strict COVID measures in the interest of public health. Both houses developed extensive policies around adapting to the pandemic to fulfill their “larger social responsibility” (Morgan at Milvia) to slow the spread of the virus by going above and beyond CDC guidelines. These policies address behaviors such as gatherings and mask-wearing and detail protocols for the entire community to give care to a housemate in quarantine after an exposure. The measures are less motivated by personal feelings of risk (members of both houses are able-bodied and relatively young [23-36 years old]) than an understanding of their collective power and responsibility to do less harm to society.

These patterns are an indication that coop residents recognize their household as part of the fabric of greater society and specifically hope to do less harm through alternative living choices. Loh and Agyeman (2019) emphasize that “[a]ny potentially transformative project begins within a neoliberalized landscape” (p. 215), and cooperative houses are no exception. Motivated by the intense pressures of their urban contexts, residents find alternative housing practices necessary because of the steep financial costs, social isolation, and harmful local consequences of atomized living in the Bay Area. What are the logics that guide them instead?

4.2: Counter-Logics

"What it means to be wealthy is community."

- Alex at Milvia House

At the crux of the desire to live cooperatively is an alternative value system. The literature review highlighted how the "predominance of individual housing units reflects the broader cultural belief in the privatism of care and home" (Power and Mee, 2020, p. 493) which obscures the nature of care as a relational practice, yet the design of coops as collective spaces in which care work is intentionally shared and embodied runs counter to this prevailing perspective. Residents recognize that they are socialized into a culture that favors convenience, independence, and capital, and instead go to great lengths to design homes that reject these values and center community. Akshay at Berryman even commented that cooperative living “is not making my life easier, but in a weird way, that’s what I want.” This brings us to the second research sub-question: *What are the counter-logics informing these practices?*

Based on my interviews, cooperative housing practises are motivated by a valuation of community, restoring a pre-capitalist lifestyle, and practicing prefigurative politics.

4.2.1: Community over Capital

Residents often make a point to describe their desire to live in community as a value in itself, contrasting their appreciation of social connection with the mainstream appreciation of capital. Alex at Milvia describes this counter-logic by juxtaposing it with that of his parents' generation:

I think there's a generational shift. I think Millennials and Gen Z have – we've watched our parents get sold that bill of goods, of believing that the richer you are, the more material possessions you accrue. And commensurate with that is the privatization of your whole life. So you don't take the bus anymore, you drive your own car. You don't live with other people, you live in your own big house. You don't talk to someone else unless you have to, you have someone else do all of your chores for you, you outsource all those things. I think there's a subset, amongst Gen Z and Millennials, there's a rejection of that. And there's a deep knowledge that yes, having your basic needs met – shelter, clothing, food, heat, security, all that stuff - is foundational, you need that stuff, and if you don't have those things, none of the other shit's gonna work. But at the same time, the next value on the pyramid isn't 'more stuff' – it's 'community'.

In fact, Alex is speaking to the “long-standing trend within the history of capital for household labour to be supplanted by market-based transactions (everything from haircuts to takeaway or frozen meals, fast foods, to dry-cleaning, entertainment and child and old-age care)” (Harvey, 2015, p. 192), all of which bring more realization of capitalist values into the market by transforming social reproduction into a space for capital accumulation in itself. By rejecting this trend and identifying community as a central value instead, he is demonstrating a counter-logic that cannot be fulfilled by market forces.

Hannah at Berryman extends on how coops provide uncommodifiable aspects of social reproduction by pointing to the limitations of the Complete Foods diet and its

signatory brand, Soylent. She asks, "The fundamental purpose of food is to give us energy, right? Hence, Soylent. But when we sit down together, we're feeding not just on the calories, but also on each other's energy, right? And we're sharing care, and love, and listening, and stories." The uniquely meaningful elements of cooking and sharing meals that Hannah is describing have a name: foodcare¹⁸. It is these social connections which elude markets that give coops much of their perceived value.

This mindset is remarkable because it sees sharing as an asset rather than a loss, questioning the neoliberal supposition that goods must be privately owned to benefit you. Jess at Milvia points to this zero-sum idea of abundance, wherein "in more conservative circles, people really think that poverty is a necessary evil, like, 'I can only get more if people have less.'" She imagines that alternative practises like cooperative living can help people "move into more abundant thinking, where it's like, 'you are creating more by this communal work. It's not like one plus one equals two, but it's like one plus one equals a million.'" The logic is that communalism leads to a more fulfilling life for everyone - one that is expansive rather than contractive as a result of sharing time and space with others.

4.2.2: Reclaiming a More Intuitive, Pre-Capitalist Lifestyle

Jess at Milvia put it well: "Why is this such an unusual thing? This is how humanity has survived for centuries." A recurrent observation is that most residents feel like cooperative living is in keeping with how people have lived throughout history up until western cultures took a turn towards privatization. This feeling runs deep enough

¹⁸ Parsons, Harman and Cappellini (2021) use the term "foodwork" to encompass all of the material and social labour needed to prepare food, such as shopping, meal planning, and cooking, and use the term "foodcare" to refer specifically to its social components as a form of nurturing.

that Ally at Milvia described their systems of sharing as so intuitive that she doesn't even consider them something to be proud of.

At the same time, there is an understanding that these spaces are more controlled and intentional than the ones of our past may have been. Hannah at Berryman articulated that "this just seems like historically the way that humans have always moved through the world, in larger units than the nuclear. And how cool in this era, more so than ever before, that there's some element of choice of who we want to surround ourselves with? But also, there's a little bit of an element of not-choice" in the sense that external factors and communal decisions can lead to living with people that may not have been the choice one individually would make. By creating a thoughtful, values-based structure for bringing in community members, coops are able to recreate aspects of the lifestyle that they imagine was enjoyed by their ancestors while maintaining a sense of social compatibility that makes it emotionally sustainable for its members.

Another perspective is that this practice is not a rejection of western culture generally, but of white supremacy specifically. Multiple residents posited that the culture of isolation that makes cooperative living seem necessary is not actually prevalent in non-white spaces even within the US. Gaby, a Latinx woman living in Berryman, described telling conversations with her Latinx friends:

They were like, 'What's a coop? What's the difference between this and what I'm doing? Because I live with all my friends and we buy all our groceries together and we share everything.' And I'd be like, 'There isn't.'... The POC that I know that live together, they already give and take in their own, like, give-and-take economy. As far as I've ever seen, they cook every night and they cook for everyone, and it's not different per se, but – because they never had to establish that culture. Whereas in other places where that's not the culture, they have to explicitly establish that culture.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to speak to cultural differences among racial groups in the US. However, given the supremacy of white culture within the

western world, it is conceivable to draw the correlation that the counter-logics informing shared housing are fundamentally a rejection of white, colonial, capitalism. This also corroborates Bowra and Mashford-Pringle's (2021) assertion that coops embody Indigenous values around sharing and community and should therefore be understood not as a western innovation but as a return to practises that have "been implemented since time immemorial by Indigenous peoples" (p. 5).

4.2.3: Prefigurative Politics

Many residents see the practise of collectivising their home as part of a greater vision for political change. This practice is also known as prefigurative politics, a theory of activism which emerged in anarchist writings in the 19th and 20th century and was emboldened by feminist inquiry in the 1960s, characterised by "[t]he embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture and human experience that are the ultimate goal" (Carl Boggs, 1977, as quoted in Jeffrey and Dyson, 2021, p. 643). Frustrated with the state of the world in general and the perils of capitalism in particular, residents feel that they are modeling the world they wish to see.

Morgan at Milvia describes prefigurative politics "as both building the system that is horizontally organized and alternative to the state, and also practicing. It's building a system that does the things we need that currently the state has a monopoly on, and also practices you for the end game where there is no state." Eva at Berryman echoes this sentiment, seeing living in a coop as "practice for longer term visions" in which communities put their labour towards serving each other rather than capitalist institutions. This focus on practice as politics corresponds with research on creating commons as "an ongoing process of people coming together to create the environments

they want to inhabit when the state and the market fail to deliver" (Tummers and MacGregor, 2019, p. 63) and corresponds with the nature of prefigurative politics to address existing crises and to anticipate a major change to come, such as systems collapse (Jeffrey and Dyson, 2021). Several residents shared that while they knew that it would take more large-scale systems change to correct the injustices they see in society, transformations at the household level were the first layer of change that could set the foundation for that. Steph at Milvia insists that "in a post capitalist world, if we ever get there, we need these systems to exist already." In this way, Dave at Berryman considers cooperative living "definitely a political act... You're living out your values."

Researchers Jeffrey and Dyson (2021) found that not only do prefigurative politics create a synecdoche, or "a miniature version of the society desired" (p. 646) that is at odds with the surrounding culture, but that their longevity is ensured by systems which institutionalise their practises. This process is demonstrated in the detailed systems which govern the coops studied and make them distinct from casual group houses. To Steph at Milvia, coops are powerful because individuals cannot trigger any action for lasting anticapitalist change - it necessitates a collective movement. She feels that activist practises are only impactful if "you're building something with other people, and they can build that with other people, and those people can build that with other people.... There's big ripple effects." She argues that creating an institution with longevity, even at the household level, is what defines coops as "a way of doing something that's both in line with a revolutionary pathway, but also meeting people's needs at the same time."

These conversations reveal the overlapping logics informing why housing cooperatives are built and negotiated. At once looking to the past while practicing for a better future, residents feel that returning to a community-centered value system that

hearkens back to humans' pre-capitalist tendencies is key to prefiguring a more just society.

4.3: *Impacts*

“Why I live in coops is kind of like why I'm in partnership with anyone: it makes me a better version of myself.”

- Dave, Berryman House

The impact that cooperative living has on residents is simultaneously social and personal. While the communal environment engenders more socializing in the house, residents also spoke to changes that they noticed in themselves as individuals due to living in the space. At the same time, a predictable level of compromise was expressed in order to adapt to collective needs rather than individual preferences. Speaking to the avenues of meaningful connection, self-growth, and collective compromise, many residents articulated that they believe themselves to be unquestionably changed from how they would be in a more atomized home environment. Such reflections speak to the third research sub-question, *What is the coops' impact on residents?*

4.3.1: Meaningful Connection

Living in a home with others is a unique vantage point for social bonding. Alex at Milvia asserts that “the ability to passively hang out with each other is really central” because rather than having to plan to spend time with someone, they exist in the same private space around which the rest of their lives rotate. The result is a vulnerability that many describe as inherently meaningful. Hannah at Berryman reflects that

we all kind of get to see each other in our blurry states and in our not-people-ready states, you know, just kind of have that uncensored rawness that we all get to share with each other. And that's, like, such a sweet way to be seen and loved.

Those connections then include the friends and family of each resident because “you’re immediately a part of their extended web” (Dave, Berryman), allowing for richer and more intertwined relationships to form.

In addition to sharing space passively, residents share space in a structured way through cook shifts and dinners. At Berryman, where the same residents cook together each week, many spoke to the especially deep relationships that they form with their co-chef. Lasha said that she and her partner Kaila “talk all the time, basically do therapy while cooking.” Shared dinners further serve as a space for emotional processing and connection, often including spiritual practises in accordance with big news or life events that might be affecting residents’ wellbeing. By virtue of coming together so frequently for these shared practises, residents develop a social support system which they feel would otherwise require substantial work to establish.

4.3.2: Personal Growth

Outside of the social impacts of shared living, most residents noticed changes in themselves as individuals due to living in the space. Some of these changes seem to be a logical product of participating in house systems such as cooking dinner shifts. In thinking back to the original founding of Milvia, Steph recalls that “none of us cooked that much, but then, we also didn't have to cook for each other. And [living here] really upped the ante. Really, the stakes were high, and we all started being fucking phenomenal cooks.” Dave at Berryman went so far as to say that not only has his cooking improved, but his “relationship with food has totally transformed.” In a similar way, Morgan at Milvia

finds that she has "learned a lot from coops about having difficult conversations and handling conflict" due to the constant practice of democratic decision-making.

Chore structures also inspire changes in some residents. At Milvia, the system of having chore minutes makes visible the amount of labour each person puts towards house upkeep and has triggered multiple conversations around gender disparities. In most US households, the socialized trend wherein women bear most responsibility for household labour is either invisible or openly expected as a facet of domestic life under patriarchy. But in a system where the amount of time spent doing labour is being tracked publicly and the house seeks a fair division of labour among everyone, people who are socialized as men face social accountability for contributing less. In both houses, residents observed that male-socialized housemates would become more proactive with chores over time as a result of the example set by others and the accountability provided by the house's shared labour systems. This confirms theories that "sharing a living space depends on a skill that is acquired through situated learning in practice—where knowledge about sharing is picked up from the people that one shares with and through the situations that prompt sharing" (Chan and Zhang, 2021, p. 163).

Perhaps most profoundly, however, is the inner growth that some residents have experienced. Gaby at Berryman has said that living in a coop is like being surrounded by role models that gave her constant inspiration to grow, while at the same time, she says,

I felt so loved that it didn't feel like I needed to be anything other than what I was. ... It's just made my life so much better. It's made me a better daughter, it's made me a better friend, and it's just made me a better person all-around.

The fact that living cooperatively can have such profound impacts on residents' lives speaks to their power to bring about incremental yet far-reaching change by acting as a supportive system of care that greater society lacks.

4.3.3: Collective Compromise

Making decisions in a cooperative home entails compromises which can be challenging. For example, the convenience of not going to the grocery store is counterbalanced by purchasing choices that may not align with individual preferences. The balance between personal agency and collective preferences can cause great tension when circumstances are especially personal, however, such as when romantic relationships develop between housemates and become subject to collective discussion.

This tension was also felt when developing policies to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Because the houses saw themselves as having a larger social responsibility to slow the pandemic's spread, they crafted extensive rules governing behaviour changes and risk scenarios that involved "trading our public health for other freedoms" (Morgan at Milvia). This resulted in frustrating situations and even led to collective negotiations about whether or not housemates could have physical contact with partners who live outside the house, which is the type of decision that would not otherwise be conceivable to make for others. While the pandemic context is certainly a unique one, it still serves as a demonstration of the challenging types of decisions that collective living can demand.

Another example is the struggle to negotiate ethical house purchases. In the realm of food sourcing, both houses expressed a desire to source their food as ethically as possible by considering locality, health, labour rights, politics, and environmental impacts. When a Milvia resident suggested showing solidarity with the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction (BDS) movement¹⁹ by not buying a certain hummus brand, housemates agreed without hesitation. However, concerns were less easy to resolve when housemates problematized the egg industry. Two residents made a plea for the house to

¹⁹ The Boycott, Divest, and Sanction (BDS) movement is a Palestinian-led movement to resist Israel's occupation of Palestinian land through a popular divestment of funds from Israeli goods and resources (*What is BDS?*, 2016).

either replace eggs with a more ethical alternative or buy significantly fewer of them, but struggled when their concerns did not seem to be adapted to in the same way. The resulting compromise, to purchase eggs from a slightly more ethical source, has gone in and out of implementation and remains an area of emotional struggle for those who raised the concern. Because this is largely a culture that puts great intention and political thought into its purchasing power, these compromises can have a painful and destabilizing impact on residents. They also prompt reflection on the social politics of whose preferences are given most authority over others. The choice to remain in a living arrangement with practises that can cause such emotional harm tracks with cohousing research that determined “most of the residents were willing to make significant tradeoffs for what they regard as a higher overall quality of life” (Gardner, 1999, p. 16) and invites further investigation of equitable self-governance.

These findings reveal that cooperative houses have a striking impact on their residents. Their structures are quick to build meaningful, far-reaching social connections while also engendering personal growth for individuals, at the same time that collective organizing leads to challenging trade-offs. So what can we learn from them?

4.4: Lessons - What Food Can Teach Us

“The reason I stay living in coops is entirely, I think, about food.”

- Lasha at Berryman

The findings so far have been building up to help answer the main research question: *How do food systems in East Bay housing cooperatives model ways to build non-extractive systems of care in the context of contemporary urban crisis?*

Answering the three sub-questions has painted a picture of why residents feel cooperative houses are necessary, what the counter-logic is informing them, and the impact that they have on residents. Given that “the kitchen is the heart of the coop” (Alex at Milvia), turning to the food system offers us an entrypoint to understand how these houses have such a strong impact. They provide a model for building systems of care around which the houses are centrally organized and through which we can see all of the elements of community and collective governance surface. Dave at Berryman names this breadcrumb trail explicitly: “Pieces around food are very indicative of where is the culture of care of the house,” referring to the way that food is a regular thread in the supportive social practises in their home.

Because the food systems are such a powerful component of cooperative housing, they serve as a lens through which to see the story of how social reproduction unfolds. I will now draw on these practices to highlight emergent lessons about building ethical systems of care at the household level that can reject the harmful, extractive approach advanced under capitalism.

4.4.1: The Enjoyment of Food is Non-Negotiable

Every person that I spoke with insisted that the coop would not serve its purpose without the food system. In fact, the critical role that food plays in these homes is evident in the fact that several residents asserted that they would move out without both the practises of sharing food and of gathering for dinners.

Steph, one of the original founders of Milvia House, shared that “the first thing we set up was a communal food system because we felt like that was the thing that made

us a coop instead of just roommates." Both houses have a policy requiring housemates to participate in the food system, reflecting a lesson which arose from challenging past experiences where residents who did not fully join the food system caused disruption to the house's sense of community and overall values. Research by cohousing architect Grace Kim (2017) confirms that the strongest indicator of residents' social connections was how frequently they ate together, confirming how food practices intersect with the social motivations in 4.1.2.

The necessity of shared food appears to be felt in terms of both joy and function. In terms of joy, Lasha at Berryman put it simply that "one of the points of life is to gather around meals.... it feels really hard to imagine not living in a space where that's, like, built into the value system, or, like, feeding and being fed as a way of showing love and care." This value is so ingrained in the Berryman system that there is a Slack channel exclusively for the purpose of checking who will be home for dinner that evening, and if a minority of housemates will be present, then the cook shift is cancelled. The point of the food system is understood to be coming together around the table and connecting meaningfully with each other: dinners do not begin until everyone who can attend is present, lights are dimmed, candles are lit, and someone leads a grounding exercise.

At the same time, these informal and loving spaces work toward the greater function of enabling the rest of the house's systems. Alex at Milvia explained, "I think we ask a lot of each other, and part of the reason we're able to do that is we have a strong social fabric. And I think that's born out of dinner together. That's when we spend time together, we joke, we talk about things." Dinner conversations enable deep connections to build in a wholesome space. As Hannah at Milvia put it, "the dinners create time to connect and grow and bond that are not about airing our grievances with each other. It's just like, 'How was your day?'" The need for these casual spaces to passively build

social connection is confirmed in a lesson from Gaby's former coop before she moved into Berryman. There, they

only had dinner once a week and that kind of resulted in people being, like, more separated and having more problems, because it would have to take longer for people to have conversations and so things would build up, resentment would build in a week.

In this way, coops teach us the value of coming together for informal social gatherings that are not about negotiating the house's business matters and demonstrate that food is a powerful way to do so. I posit that communities designing an intentional living arrangement should integrate such gatherings into the structure of the house to improve its formal processes as a byproduct of a strengthened social fabric.

4.4.2: Food is a Unique Access Point for Showing Care

A recurrent theme that emerged is that food is the singular activity through which residents feel they are guaranteed to see and connect with their housemates. No matter how busy someone is, they need to eat. This also makes it a uniquely available space to give and receive care. As Jess at Milvia said, "there's something about the ritual of coming to dinner at the close of the day, that no matter what happens you have that to come home to." Akshay at Berryman similarly observed the power of dinners for creating a gathering point outside of the workday where "everyone does their nine to five, and they're working all day, and then we come together around eating food and, like, it's defining our relationship as people."

Such spaces are missing from the workplace-focused grind that results from the profit-seeking value systems governing US cities. Given that the average urban dweller is very busy and social reproduction is systemically devalued, how can anyone be expected to make time for social connection? As established in the first subquestion, doing so is discouraged to the point of being unattainable. And yet, because people

have no choice but to eat in some form every day, meals can become a key access point to break people out of that cycle. This is impactful to those receiving care as well as to the housemates who extend care in the only way available. A reflection from Steph at Milvia exemplified both sides of this economy of care:

it was fulfilling to see how the house dinner was making such a big difference in someone's life who was super, super, super busy. Like, when someone was a full-time nanny, she would come home after being on her feet all day and just needed a nourishing meal and would be like, 'Oh my god, this is exactly what I needed.' And it felt so good to hear that.²⁰

This also manifests through the "individualized care" (Meiko at Milvia) that goes into preparing food for different dietary needs. Hannah at Milvia, for example, has a severe allergy to dairy and found that the level of attention paid to ingredients made her feel safe and supported to share food in the house, a practice that might typically not be available to her. Dietary needs are listed on Milvia's kitchen whiteboard for chefs to reference throughout their cook shifts and integrates the practice of seeing cooking as an act of care done for individuals in the community, not a generic process of making food. In Berryman as well, people observed that the entire house culture around food would learn and grow in accordance with the shifting diets of people moving into the space.

²⁰ This culture is especially apparent in the case of Steph because she is no longer a resident of Milvia House but still participated in the food system several times during my stay to extend care to the house; our interview took place while she was cooking one such dinner.

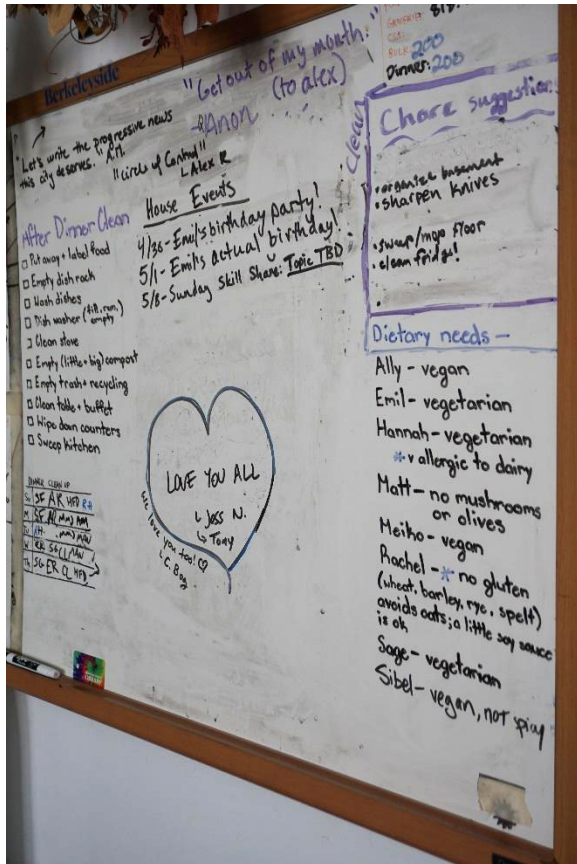


Photo 20: Milvia's kitchen whiteboard listing dietary needs.

The lesson that we can draw from this is that social reproduction reveals the cracks between neoliberal pressures to work constantly, and it is in these spaces – such as eating food – that resistant systems can be organized. It is important to have a system that reaches every person in some way on a consistent basis. A culture around food is able to connect us as humans in spite of the systems at work to divide us. As Kaila at Berryman summarizes, "eating cuts through so much bullshit. Dining together is such an important way to be in solidarity with all kinds of people, and to care for people, and to care for yourself. And cooperative living is built around that."

4.4.3: Sharing Food Creates a Chosen Family

Over and over again, residents expressed that their home felt like a family. Often using the terms “chosen family” and “alternative family structures” to describe their social vision for the coop, they described the inexplicable closeness borne from eating together every night as a reconstruction of their relationships with parents and siblings. This is not an accident. When founding Milvia House, Brett recalled that the initial intention of the food system was not only “to feed each other and feed ourselves, but also to come together once a day for a meal and sit down as a family.”

Shared meals are in fact a central pillar of traditional family systems, enough that “[f]amilies have conventionally been regarded as ‘commensal units’” (Marovelli, 2019, p. 192) linked to important social support systems. This means that historically, the very conceptualization of a family unit was based in practices of shared eating not unlike those being observed in coops today.

Morgan at Milvia imagined that outsiders likely project their experience of being controlled by parents in their family homes to what they envision happens in coops, failing to recognize that in this alternative system, all members have equal agency. While several residents used their experiences growing up in a nuclear family as a reference point for how they wanted to live as adults, that could manifest as either recreating or branching away from practices enacted by their parents. This is because the level of control each resident has over their cooperative system is distinctly horizontal compared to the dynamics of their childhood homes. The balance of intimate vulnerability with agency is what distinguishes coops as a self-organized familial system. Kaila at Berryman draws the parallel that “it’s like a family system in that you get to see and feel all your edges, but in this case, we have meetings to talk about the edges.”

The level of social intimacy that is generated from this approach to the house, in which the food system is used as a mechanism to recreate familial intimacy and bring

the community together, is arguably one of the key intentions of the entire cooperative project. From this we can glean the lesson that it is valuable to have meaningful, familial connection at the heart of systems of care in order to give them the power, energy, and love needed to maintain the other structures of ethical social reproduction – and family dinners are a tried and true way to achieve it.

All of these findings demonstrate the immense power that cooperative living can have to reimagine social reproduction by self-organizing systems of care that resist the values imposed by urban capitalism. Residents see these projects as necessary because the US's predominant culture around atomized living creates financial hardship, social isolation, and does political harm by exacerbating the housing crisis. Their counter-logic is a valuation of community over capital, restoring a pre-capitalist lifestyle, and prefiguring an alternate way of living that will be resilient if today's governing systems collapse. The impact is a household that at once engenders collective intimacy and individual growth, with bumps along the way due to the challenges of collective compromise. Using the lens of the food system demonstrates how a culture of sharing food stimulates these new ways of thinking and understanding our role in society – and, perhaps, in building a new one.

The main research question of this thesis looks to these systems as guidance for action: *How do food systems in East Bay housing cooperatives model ways to build non-extractive systems of care in the context of contemporary urban crisis?*

The first of three lessons distilled from the research is that the enjoyment of food is non-negotiable, speaking to the need to design spaces for informal gathering that strengthen the community's social fabric enough to make the house's formal systems run smoothly. The second is that food acts as a unique access point for giving and receiving care, emphasizing the way that practices of social reproduction operate within

the cracks of capitalist productivity which we should expand rather than minimize. And lastly, shared meals are creating an intentional, chosen family system amongst communities without biological relations, offering an avenue to recreate critical support systems which residents of western urban cities often lack. Having established these findings, I will now politicize and problematize the inner workings of these coops.

Chapter 5: Discussion

It is now pertinent to review how much potential these spaces have to be truly transformative given the greater context of urban crises today. I intend to challenge the assumption across urban studies that collective living is inherently transforming exploitative constructions of domestic labour. While existing literature seems to herald communalism as a way of living that can transform – perhaps even save – urban spaces from the brink of crisis, they do so without critically deconstructing the internal processes governing social reproduction within these homes. A closer examination suggests that these practices in fact risk reproduction of harmful dynamics unless intentionally designed with ethical social reproduction in mind and constantly renegotiated to ensure its presence.

5.1: Homogeneity: Who Are Coops Helping?

The findings reveal that residents of Berryman and Milvia houses feel that they are benefiting from the experience of living in a housing cooperative, which triggers a related concern: who, if anyone, is being left out of these spaces?

Studies by Tummers and MacGregor (2019) concluded that "as currently realized, co-housing provides adequate housing primarily for white, middle income, well-educated residents who are not necessarily interested in transition to a post-capitalist, post-carbon society" (p. 77). Aspects of the current research corroborate this finding. Residents of both houses admitted that a certain level of privilege and homogeneity helps their systems run more smoothly, identifying race, class, and education level as axes upon which unconscious selection bias takes place. This can be a problem because "we cannot dismiss the possibility that the promotion of this [housing] model may increase social and health inequalities" (Carrere et al., 2020, p. 25) and one of the risks of prefigurative political projects is that they become "inward-looking and

exclusive" (Jeffrey and Dyson, 2021, p. 654). Knowing that the least privileged members of society are the ones who have the most need, how can we understand these living arrangements as spaces to achieve radical change that improves conditions of society as a whole if those who would benefit most are the least able to access them?

One determinant of this access is higher education, which Alex at Milvia muses is a big factor in the social unity of his housemates. A majority of residents in both spaces shared that their initial exposure to cooperative living either came from their attendance of a prestigious university, such as Stanford University or UC Berkeley, or through friends who attended them. This leads to a homogenous culture not only because residents likely share parallel life experience and academic exposure, but also because access to academic institutions is in itself often predicated by a degree of racial and economic privilege. The relatively high rent at Milvia (compared to other coops in the region) doubly confirms this bias towards a homogenous culture through the axis of class, as the lack of rent equity measures means that new members tend to fall into the same socioeconomic bracket. Meiko shared that because of this, even the process of weighing in ethical considerations when considering new candidates to move in can't overcome the fact that Milvia isn't "particularly accessible to low-income people."

At Berryman, where rent is lower and residents represent a wider range of demographic backgrounds, the challenge of making their space more accessible is also identified openly. Dave described the unconscious bias that can inform why so many coops look homogenous:

When you're trying to pick someone you get along with, subconsciously you're gonna pick someone who you have a shared experience with, where you feel like, "you get me." And what does it mean to "get" someone? Maybe because we went to the same summer camps that cost money, or these other pieces.

His housemate Hannah similarly recognized that "the dominant prototype of a coop-er tends to be a highly educated, usually a white ally or activist or somehow, like, adjacent

to the 'right politics' but not actually representing those groups." This skewed representation is then reinforced in passive ways, as Sarah at Milvia theorized that "the more of us are white, the harder it's going to be to find a person of color who feels comfortable living in this house." Residents recognize these patterns as a problem and actively seek to counter them, a challenging process which can cultivate a more inclusive home.

It is important to note that not all coops reflect on their potential role in society with such critical awareness. Gaby, the woman who moved into Berryman's "hut", juxtaposed their culture with that of the coop she had just left; as a pseudonym, I will call it Redwood House. She had been forced to move out of Redwood when getting COVID threw her into financial crisis: she missed two weeks of work, making her unable to afford rent. She then noticed a stark difference between the radical politics with which her white, high-income former housemates self-identified and their inactive behavior when it came to her need for financial support in order to keep her housing:

I will never forget that that night, I think everyone was kind of like, 'Oh, that sucks,' but no one thought, 'Oh, we could just solve this problem for her'.... They're in theory considerate people, I know that it genuinely didn't cross their mind and I forgive them for that because I get it. Like, if you don't understand that me losing housing could mean me falling in a way that you don't understand, then you just don't understand.

This experience is a reminder that while "sharing is a social process;... it does not presuppose sociality or positive social relations, nor is it automatically conducive to a more just [re]distribution of resources" (Davies and Evans, 2019, p. 155) and must be complemented with political awareness and intentionality. One example of how such a crisis could be addressed is through what Bamford (2001) calls a solidarity fund "to which all households contribute and from which anyone may draw in time of accident or emergency" (p. 3). A version of this idea was under active discussion at Milvia in the

months following this research wherein all members would contribute to a rental assistance fund from which a resident in need of rental support could draw discreetly.

In Redwood, the lack of awareness had made Gaby feel overwhelmed by a dystopian view of the difference between this life and the challenging one she came from. Her housemates didn't seem to recognize their own privilege and the extreme inequality in their own backyards, leading to a powerful moment in which Gaby watched sunset on the rooftop overlooking her old neighborhood:

I was looking around and I just started bawling because I was like, "What did I do to deserve this?" I just know white people. I didn't do anything and if I hadn't known them, I wouldn't be here. And I think they probably thought I was crying because it was, like, a beautiful sunset, but I was crying because I was like, "I don't deserve this anymore than anyone else does. Everybody deserves this. Why do I get to be here? And I'm so alone here. Nobody here looks like me." And I'm looking around and we're just seven people in this huge fucking house that could technically house more people and it's like, no one has any concept of what's happening right down the hill. It's not even, like, five miles away, it's just right there. I can see it, like, I can still feel it. Like, it's not gone, but if I wanted to choose to forget about it, I could just do that and live in ignorance forever. And it's so sad to me that, like, they live forgotten by all the people that could help them the most.

Gaby shared that she hopes to use her access to build funnels²¹ to bring more people of color into coops so that they can benefit from the wealth of resources that these spaces have to offer – not only more affordable rent, but cultural privileges that could lead to them getting better jobs and securing a more promising future. Her story draws attention to the need for coops to be more accessible, both in how members are selected and in the internal culture identifying privilege and seeking to put their systems towards the work of a more just society.

This also brings attention to an additional shortcoming of coops, which is that their power is inherently limited. Coops are not addressing the root of the problem at hand: a capitalist system that demands long work hours for low pay, generates a crisis of

²¹ Her ideas include spreading awareness in BIPOC communities that coops exist, where to find them, and what language to use to get in the door.

gentrification and housing precarity, and actively shifts needed social services from state provision into the private sector – all of which disproportionately harm people of color. Coops can instead be understood as orienting towards survival within the current system, or harm reduction, and can thus be criticized for mitigating a harmful system by placing the burden on its victims (the often-racialized working class) to solve issues of care while maintaining the current order. It will take greater systems change for these problems to be truly resolved. However, in the meantime, the organizing theory of *building dual power* offers a more optimistic lens with which to understand these projects. The Black Panthers described dual power using the "metaphor of being stranded on a life raft—the community must take practical steps to stay alive in the present, but never forget that the real goal is to make it to shore, to revolution" (Colón et al., 2016, p. 18). This vision aligns with the counter-logic of prefigurative politics described in section 4.2.3, wherein residents acknowledge that they live within an oppressive system but can still practice a more just way of living within the spaces available to them until greater systems change occurs.

In this way, coops that reimagine systems of social reproduction with equity in mind can help communities make it through the capitalist grind while also establishing ways of being that can be ready to take the place of neoliberal individualism should the current system collapse. They are not inherently radical without this orientation, which researchers and urban dwellers alike must bear in mind as people increasingly shift into collective living arrangements in the years to come.

5.2: Gender, Labour, and Justice: What's Working and What Isn't?

At the heart of the crisis of social reproduction is a gendered struggle. The literature review established that there is a "vast amount of unpaid labour absorbed in social reproduction, most of it, as feminists have repeatedly and quite correctly pointed

out, traditionally and even to this day being done by women" (Harvey, 2015, p. 189). Because of this, "co-housing as a practice of commoning falls short of its transformative potential if it does not address the politics of social reproduction" (Tummers and MacGregor, 2019, p. 64) by ensuring that labour is actually distributed equally and fairly amongst members. So how do the houses in this study measure up, and what insights can we draw from their different methods of approaching this concern?

While both houses seemed to succeed in equally sharing the labour of the food system, there were informative discrepancies in the distribution of labour for cleaning up the house, also called the chore system. Residents shared concerns about gendered inequity but were unsure of how to correct the problem, confirming that "reconceptualising community is only a start towards collectivising social reproduction" (Engel-Di Mauro, 2018, p. 1383).

At Berryman, the chore system divides the house into zones for which each resident has long-term responsibility. The chore breakdown originated during the founding of Berryman 2.0²² (the house's current iteration). Everyone agreed to do 90 minutes per week of chores, but despite outlines of the chore zones confirming this amount, in practice residents experience a very different amount of labour being allocated. Hannah identifies that the issue is "I don't feel like I'm really held accountable to doing my chores" because some chores are far more visible than others, such as the food shopper. If food shopping doesn't get done on time and sufficiently, everyone notices and the house is thrust into a state of crisis until it is addressed, but if the laundry room isn't cleaned for weeks, it might not garner attention at all. In addition, multiple women residents confirm that they often do labour which feels invisible such as tidying,

²² Residents spent the first three weeks cleaning what they wanted to, embodying a general ethic of responsibility and care for the space, and then met for a review meeting to see if these organic preferences led to the house being tidy enough to meet everyone's needs. With some adjustments, the permanent chore assignments were solidified from those preferences and get revisited whenever a new housemate moves in.

doing dishes, and cleaning surfaces. For this reason, some residents acknowledge that they are doing disproportionately more labour than others and that the current system does not account for this involuntary burden.

The design of the Milvia chore system appears to take positive steps towards addressing this issue. One example is that rather than assigning fixed tasks, the house assigns 60 “chore minutes” per week for each resident to spend cleaning up however they see fit. These minutes are publicly displayed in the kitchen and adjusted by each person after cleaning, with 60 minutes added weekly by the month’s “chore bottom-liner”. The flexibility of this system gives members the freedom to do whichever chores fit their capacity or the house’s needs while centering around the valuation of people’s time and trust that others will document their labour fairly. This gives credit to nuanced cleanup tasks that can unconsciously be invisibilized and relegated to those who have been socialized to do more domestic housework. It is possible to have far more than 60 minutes on display if someone doesn’t do their expected amount of chores, or to have negative minutes if someone goes above and beyond them, further giving flexibility to residents to work more or less on different weeks in accordance with their capacity. Discrepancies in domestic labour are thus externalized on the public whiteboard and can be discussed openly. Milvia’s house meetings already begin with a reading of all residents’ current minutes, but at the April house meeting which I attended, gender differences had become so egregious that it was a dedicated agenda item discussed with the help of the graph in *Figure 1*.

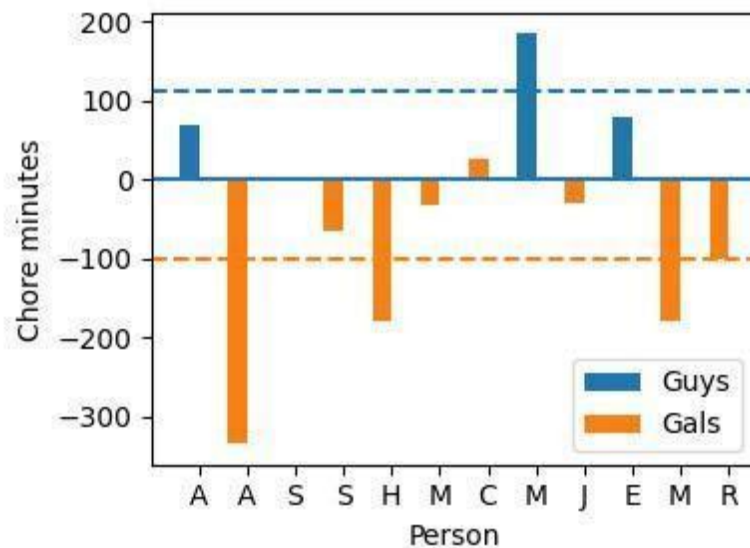


Figure 1: April Chore Minutes at Milvia, displayed by gender, with average shown as dotted line (source: Milvia House Minutes running doc).

The graph shows that every man in the house has an excess of minutes, meaning that they had spent less time cleaning than agreed, while nearly every woman has negative minutes, meaning that they had done the opposite. As Meiko shared, even though she likes that the transparency of chore minutes "externalizes what's going on.... sometimes externalizing something, and then if you can't take action on it, it just makes it worse." As of this writing, this topic and its corresponding graph resurfaced in two later months with a more equitable (but still unequal) discrepancy (*Figures 2 and 3*).

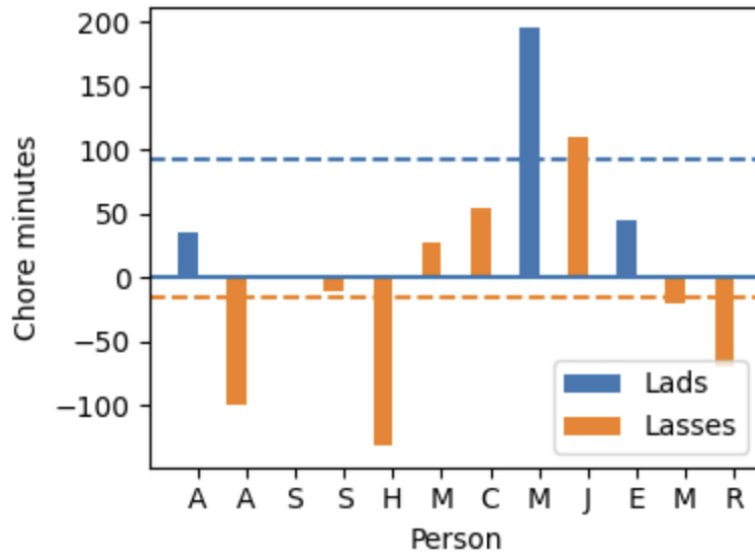


Figure 2: May Chore Minutes at Milvia, displayed by gender, with average shown as dotted line (source: Milvia House Minutes running doc).

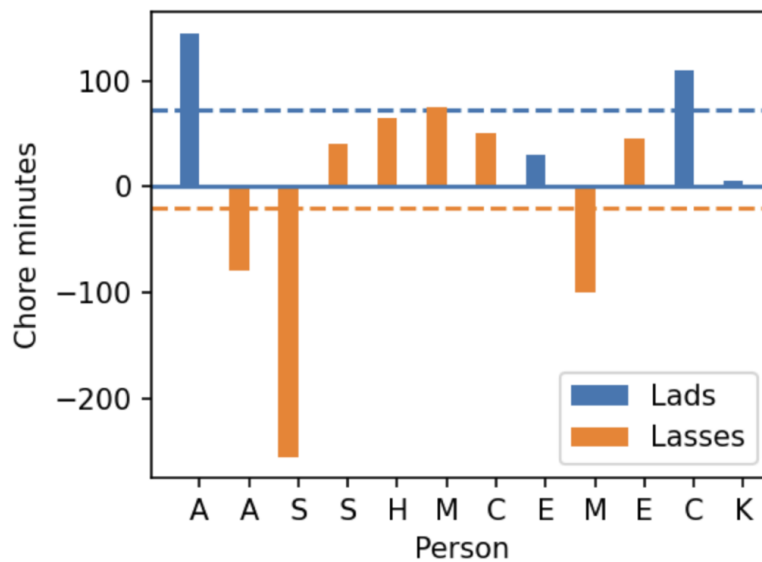
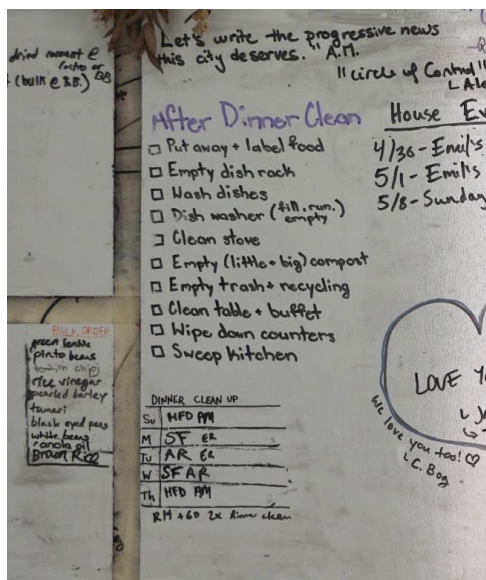
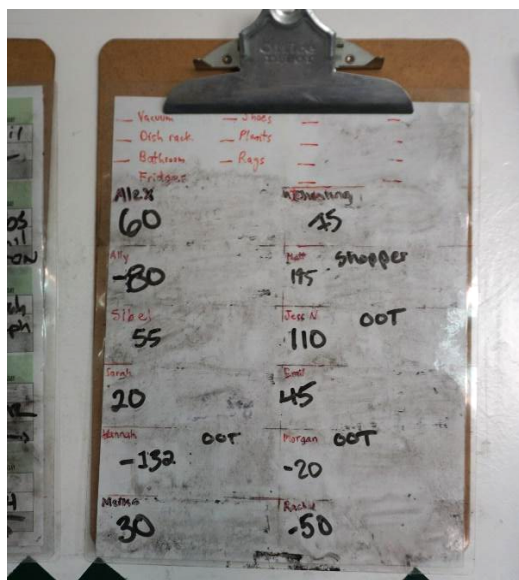


Figure 3: August Chore Minutes at Milvia, displayed by gender, with average shown as dotted line (source: Milvia House Minutes running doc).

Confounding variables like resident turnover and summer travels make it unclear how much of an impact this graph and related discussions have had on gendered labour discrepancies at Milvia. However, this case does clarify the need for a system which

accounts for invisibilized labour rather than allocating only specific jobs that leave much of gendered work to continue to be done by those who may be more socialized, or otherwise pressured, to do so.

A second example is that of Milvia's system for kitchen cleaning, which is the only component of chores managed with specificity rather than minutes. The kitchen whiteboard bears a checklist of all necessary chores constituting a complete kitchen clean. Each resident signs up to do two per week, resulting in 4-5 cleaners per cook night – a new system to improve labour equity over its predecessor, wherein everyone who ate dinner was expected to clean the kitchen afterwards. This is because that arrangement would often lead to there being too many people to clean at once and those who ended up standing around were consistently those socialized to do less labour while women assumed the majority of the work. Sarah recalls that in their house discussions, “We asked ourselves, ‘what can we do to make this less unequal?’” They then designed the new system and have been satisfied with the change since²³.



Photos 21-22: kitchen whiteboards displaying chore minutes, kitchen clean duties, and kitchen clean sign-ups.

²³ Other practises demonstrating this is in absolving the food shopper from accruing any chore minutes to counterbalance the job's high demands, and allowing those with significant negative minutes to get relief by skipping a clean shift (add 35 minutes) or cook shift (add 120 minutes).

I highlight these examples to emphasize the practices of attentiveness, reflection, and improvisation with which Milvia's systems are modified to ensure an ongoing culture of fairness. Returning to Tummers and MacGregor (2019), these practises demonstrate the unique capacity of these spaces:

Rather than being a taken-for-granted domain that is devalued and feminized, and from which privileged segments of a group or population are excused, in co-housing there is potential for carework to become a visible requirement of group membership and subject of continuous and democratic deliberation. (p. 76)

The practice of externalizing the labour practices of residents in a shared quest for an equitable distribution of labour allows for a process of deliberation necessary for a more just organization of the labour of social reproduction. The systems in housing cooperatives are thus not an end goal but an ongoing negotiation that can lead to improved conditions only with attention, care, and critical awareness of the need for labour justice to extend into domestic spaces.

5.3: Centering the "Self" in Radical Self-Organization

Informal housing cooperatives don't design themselves; they result from a constant process of experimentation and adjustment. Self-organization enables communities to make their own decisions about what they value and collectively negotiate how to achieve those goals, rather than participating in ones that have been designed by others.

Recognizing the need for communities to design their own systems is important because "[h]ome is as much a process as it is a thing" (Dowling and Mee, 2007, p. 161) and, unfortunately, "[e]ven some of the more vibrant forms of prefigurative politics seem liable to co-optation" (Jeffrey and Dyson, 2021, p. 652). Researchers and community members alike must be cognizant of a growing industry of businesses seeking to profit

off of the rising popularity of shared living by removing the process of self-organizing from the framework entirely. One is the company OpenDoor, which began in the East Bay and now creates "plug-and-play" coops in the Bay Area, Seattle, and Portland wherein it buys properties, redesigns them for cooperative living, organizes their internal systems, and then rents out each room on an individual lease (Bowes et al., 2018). This is striking for cooperative homes because the "defining feature of these complexes is that residents plan and manage their communities collaboratively to build social support networks" (Lubik and Kosatsky, 2019, p. 3), and yet in OpenDoor houses, residents don't actually control the conditions of their home. The result is that radical negotiations, such as the financial equity systems discussed in section 5.1, become impossible to develop. The home instead serves the greater purpose of earning profit for an owner, reproducing exploitative systems and co-opting a promising alternative movement.

Community-led systems allow for extreme flexibility of the houses' systems, which were identified to shift frequently based on the constellation of residents and thus ostensibly represent the needs and interests of members themselves at any time; as Akshay at Berryman puts it, "a coop is just the accumulation of the people who are here". This observation was also made by Bhatia and Steinmuller (2018) in their research on the Embassy Network, a collection of similar houses to the ones in the current study. They determined that "[u]nlike most contemporary membership-based living models, the Embassy Network is created and controlled by the residents themselves (not a corporation), providing a promising template of how to strategically scale up the commons, while retaining local control" (p. 125). Further, Lubik and Kosatsky (2019) observe that collective decision-making, especially by consensus, "promotes a sense of belonging and shared identity" (p. 3) and that "[b]ringing disparate groups together in decision-making builds trust and social capital" (p. 4). These benefits

are among the great perceived values of cooperative living in the context of the social isolation of western cities.

Morgan at Milvia spoke with incisive clarity about the power that lies in being able to reclaim and redefine value systems, saying that

in normal life, or in the life that the state has built for us, someone else makes the decision for you, like your boss makes the decision for you. You don't really practice decision-making in the workplace a lot of the time, group or democratic decision-making.... [But in coops,] we live in this way that is helping us not rely on the state and the state's narrative of who we are and how we relate to each other.

In the context of a culture which prioritizes efficiency over intimacy, choosing to restructure social reproduction in a way that is supportive, shared, and joyful is an example of a reclamation of narratives around how we can live. These explorations show us "how life's work might shape production in friendlier ways, rather than reproducing exploitation" (Morrow and Dombroski, 2015, p. 96). Residents also pushed back against the cultural value of efficiency, naming the idea of convenience as a misnomer because it presupposes that the slow, intentional process of getting things done is undesirable. The inefficiency of making more time for collective activities was emphasized as one of the central joys of their homes, with Eva at Berryman naming a resistance to western thinking by "trying to get away from seeing all my time as money." This is especially significant because it is through the hyper-valuation of time savings that many of the extractive capitalist takeovers of social reproduction take place.

The reclamation of the value of slow gathering over efficient independence is an indication of the power of self-managed systems to resist and challenge the competitive ideology designed to permeate the western world today. Residents are able, actually encouraged, to question the value systems around them and assert new ones instead. Kaila found that living cooperatively led her to question social norms by asking, "what are the qualities I've internalized as my role in a family system or in society? What are the

qualities I like and make me feel good, versus the ones I'm just doing based on socialization?" Challand (2011) asserts that "[a]utonomy, in my view, exists when a given social group is able to choose both the institutions to govern itself and the cognitive ways through which this group thinks and speaks of itself" (p. 275). The East Bay's informal housing cooperatives thus model autonomous self-governance through their systems of democratic decision-making.

This finding is at once a lesson and a call for caution; as cooperative living becomes more popular, it is at risk of co-optation from the very capitalist systems which it originally sought to resist. Organizers should take care to ensure that the conditions of the cooperative home are controlled by its current residents rather than an external body, whether for profit or otherwise, so that it acts as an autonomous node of alternative living. Through self-organizing, coops are able to reclaim narratives surrounding how we should live to build ethical systems of care which are precisely tuned in to residents' needs and can scale horizontally.

This section has made clear that while cooperative living holds great promise for engendering a more healthful model of social reproduction, it does not do so automatically. This complicates the pattern of urban studies scholars to espouse communalism's positive health impacts without examining the internal governance systems necessary for them to actually improve social conditions (Carrere et al., 2020; Hudson et al., 2021; Lubik and Kosatsky, 2019). Analysis of Milvia and Berryman's cooperative systems offers several lessons on best practices for building non-extractive systems of care that can guide people hoping to design alternative living communities. Attending to concerns over the accessibility of coops, particularly with regards to marginalized communities, will be key to keep the benefits of this form of living from only reaching those with the most privilege to begin with. Externalizing and addressing

inequities in labour is also a process that should be centered in house deliberations to protect against reproducing gendered labour issues. And in order to maintain autonomy and community resilience, the houses should be self-organized by the communities themselves rather than by a corporation or other external entity which imposes a governance structure onto residents. By following these lessons, cooperative living can radically change the experience of urban life and protect against the growing, pressing harms of the neoliberal systems which pervade western cities.

Conclusion

We are living through a period of urban crisis caused by the pressures of a capitalist system. People in western cities are experiencing more time scarcity than ever before, costs of living far exceed incomes, and high levels of stress, loneliness, and housing precarity have become the new normal (Barton, 2011; Bhattacharya, 2017; Corwin and Gidwani, 2021; Fishman, 2018; Fraser, 2017; Harvey, 2015; Katz, 2001; Kubey, 2018; Lancione, 2020; Lietaert, 2010; Madden, 2020; Mohandesi and Teitelman, 2017; Morrow and Dombroski, 2015). While this should be a moment in which more attention is invested into the meaningful social practices that sustain human life, "the modes of urban living that capital typically produces... are not very conducive to the creation of mutually supportive social networks that can encourage more adequate and fulfilling forms of social reproduction" (Harvey, 2015, p. 191). At the same time, forms of alternative living such as cooperative housing speak to the fact that the "pursuit of a more equitable society and the creation of new forms of housing have long gone hand in hand" (Kubey, 2018, p. 13) and offer insights into how we can reimagine systems of care to be supportive rather than extractive. Findings from this embedded research in two East Bay coops is a modern illustration of how "households have historically served as bulwarks against capitalism and even as organizational nodes in class struggles" (Mohandesi and Teitelman, 2017) by collectivizing the labour of home in ways that build meaningful social connection and protect residents from the harms of profit-seeking systems of oppression. This thesis responds to the invitation of Power and Mee (2020) to ask, "is this a housing system that cares?" (p. 501).

The two houses studied are located within the belly of the beast: the most expensive and unequal region of the United States, the San Francisco Bay Area. Residents are motivated by the high costs of living, the isolationism that characterizes US cities, and the pressure to do less harm to an already devastating local housing crisis

and have taken it upon themselves to reject the status quo and design alternative modes of living in their stead. Their houses embody an ethos of community over capital as residents seek to prefigure a new form of society, resulting in spaces that balance compromise, cooperation, and care. Among the social reproduction practices being organized, the food system stands out for its embodied nature and ability to serve as at once social, cultural, and spiritual – it is the heartbeat of these homes.

Using the lens of shared food practices offers rich lessons on the need for centering avenues of social reproduction that can act as access points to support urban dwellers subsumed in an otherwise capital-focused landscape. These practices then recreate family systems and act as a buffer against the pressures of an extractive, and exhausting, economic system. While “changing the spaces and structures in which people live together cannot achieve gender justice or resolve the care crisis by itself ” (Tummers and MacGregor, 2019, p. 78), self-organized systems of care present opportunities for regular deliberation that can apply a critical feminist lens to ensure the just redistribution of labour in ways that improve our lives. As shared living becomes more widespread, further research is needed to examine equity in access to coops and their labour organization as well as to track developing challenges and take an active role in connecting communities with helpful resources, guidance, and each other.

The way that we live matters. It is in this taken-for-granted space of dwelling that we can

hold together, as a way of being in the world while caring, both the status quo and the potential to break through it. This is a politics open to determination: one can care and build things that can repress (our current habitus) but one can also, upon the same ground, care and build things that can liberate. (Lancione, 2020, p. 279)

While existing scholarship indicates a growing interest in the generative potential of these homes, this study provides a nuanced insight into the risks, benefits, and strategic approaches to managing the sharing of socially reproductive labour in cooperatives. With

urban crisis proliferating and the crisis of care at a breaking point, I invite us to continue to turn a critical eye to these spaces so we can learn from them, because cooperative housing projects are bigger than themselves – they create an alternative form of living within dense urban regions through which we can keep each other loved, well fed, and ready for revolution.

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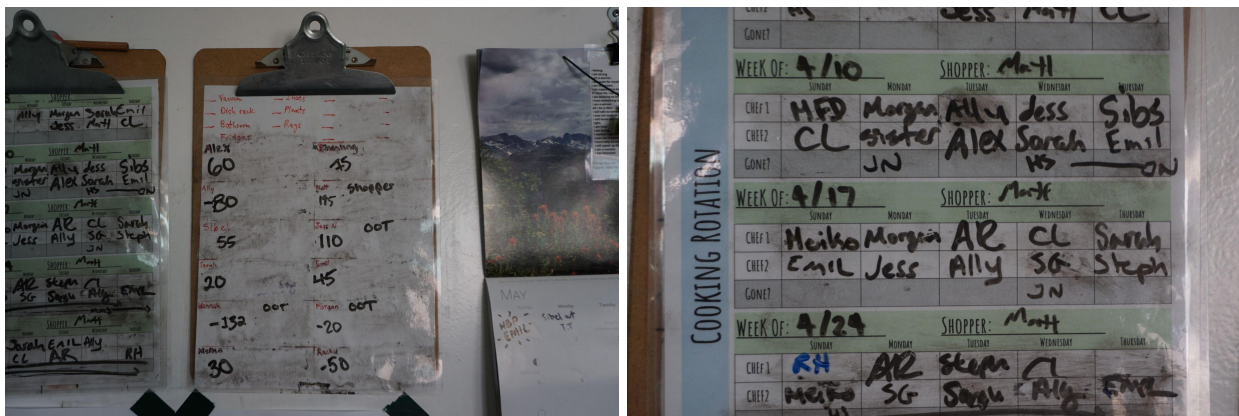
Appendix A - House Systems for Milvia and Berryman House

MILVIA HOUSE

Meetings: Milvia’s house meetings take place every month. All residents are expected to attend unless extraneous circumstances prevent it, as this is the central decision-making space for house systems and democratic self-governance is at the house’s core. (The secondary decision-making space for proposals that can be voted on digitally and asynchronously is the “asynch-voting” channel of the house’s Slack, an organisational communications application.) Voting outcomes are determined by majority rule except in the case of COVID- or finance-related issues, which require consensus.

The meetings follow Roberta’s Rules of Order (*Roberta’s Rules*, no date) and are carefully timed and facilitated. The responsibilities for smoothly running the meeting itself such as facilitator are volunteered for at the start of the meeting. The meeting agenda, a shared digital running document containing the meeting template and notes from all previous meetings, is projected onto the wall while the notetaker documents the discussion live. The meeting structure can be seen in *Appendix B*.

Through these meetings, members of Milvia House have an ongoing space to negotiate their governing rules in ways that they agree are fair, efficient, and democratic.



Photos 21-22: Milvia’s chore minutes tracker and cooking sign-up sheets.

Chores. Milvia House organizes its domestic labour with a system of “chore minutes”, cook and clean shifts, some rotating responsibilities, and individual duties.

The majority of housework is accomplished through “chore minutes”. In this system, rather than specific tasks being allocated, members are expected to spend 60 minutes per week doing chores in whatever way they see fit. A white board in the kitchen lists the names of all members and their respective minutes. Each week, the chore bottom-liner adds 60 minutes to each person’s number except for the food shopper. When someone does a chore - such as unloading the dishwasher, sweeping the floors, or cleaning a bathroom - they then lower their number of remaining chore minutes by the time it took to do so. For crucial tasks, whoever does it will write that chore by their name to alert everyone that it has been done already.

The flexibility of this system gives members the freedom to do whichever chores fit their capacity or the house’s needs, centering around the valuation of people’s time rather than explicit tasks. It also gives credit to the more nuanced cleanup tasks that can often be invisibilized and unconsciously relegated to those who have been socialized to do more domestic housework. Because it is possible to have far more than 60 minutes if someone doesn’t do their expected amount of chores, or to have negative minutes if someone goes above and beyond on a given week, discrepancies in domestic labour are externalized and can be discussed openly if desired.

In addition, each member signs up for one cook shift and two kitchen clean shifts per week. A second, bigger whiteboard in the kitchen has the signup calendar and a list of kitchen clean duties. If someone is not home at the time of cleaning, others will use the list as a reference for choosing duties to leave for the returning person to do. If someone is unable to do their cook or clean shift, they can request getting

corresponding minutes instead (120 for a cook shift, or 35 for a clean shift). This practice is discouraged.

Lastly, there are individual duties. Some responsibilities rotate monthly and are volunteered for at monthly house meetings, such as food shopper. Others are given to housemates to do long-term, such as finance manager, bulk food lead, and landlord contact.

Finances. Milvia House's Finance Manager is responsible for keeping rent, food, and other payments in order.

The total monthly rent for Milvia House is \$10,565, with rent per room ranging from \$845 - \$1,421. When two people share a room, a "couples' fee" of \$250 is added to their total room cost, reducing the rent of everyone else in the house. There was one shared room during my stay, resulting in a monthly rent per person of \$700 - \$1,398. The finance manager pays all of the rent to the landlord and gets paid in turn by each housemate via the moneysharing app Venmo.

The food budget is \$200 per person monthly. The finance manager keeps this pool of money in a separate bank account under their name and writes the account balance on the kitchen whiteboard every month. Residents transfer their payments through Venmo. Adjustments are available if people are going out of town for a minimum of three consecutive days, in which case their payment is prorated. The food fund surplus is occasionally used to buy kitchenware. The debit card is left in the house and accessible to all.

The app Splitwise is used to tabulate smaller payments which are paid out of residents' personal bank accounts and reimbursed via the app Venmo. This process also applies to utilities, which are first paid for by the Finance Manager.

A spreadsheet of the rent breakdown is shared in Slack every month as well as reminders for sending in payments. During my stay, multiple conversations were underway about establishing other funds for emergency use, deposit relief, and more equitable rent payment systems.

Digital communications. Milvia House uses several digital platforms for communication to maintain clarity and cohesion of its practises. These platforms are the applications Slack, Groupme, and Google Docs and Calendar.

Slack is an app conventionally used to streamline staff discussions at workplaces. It is highly organized to reduce clutter, separating conversations into different “channels” and allowing every message to be responded to in a separate thread or simply with an emoji. Milvia’s Slack channels include “general”, “finances”, “foood”, “covid19-test-results”, “random”, and “asynch-voting”.

Groupme is a straightforward messaging app for residents to share urgent matters. Content typically includes dinner announcements, asking about misplaced items, emergencies, and social events. It is used sparingly to keep from reducing the notification value of its messages.

A shifting collection of digital documents serve to codify Milvia’s systems. These documents include the running meeting agenda, house policies, COVID safety rules, finance spreadsheets, emergency contacts, and surveys relating to food preferences and applicants to join the house. The Google platform allows all participants in a shared doc to edit text and add comments, allowing for asynchronous negotiations of policies. In addition, Google Calendar is used to track information such as upcoming events, birthdays, and out of town notices.

Food. Every member of Milvia House participates in the food system. Considered central to the cultural ecosystem of the house, it is intended to be sufficient for every member to meet all of their food needs within the house. It involves payment, selection, sourcing, storage, and dinners.

The baseline food budget payment for all members is \$200 per month, with individual reductions based on travel time outside the house. In addition, members can buy guest passes for friends to come to dinner. Three guest passes per month are free for all residents, after which they purchase a pack of 10 passes for \$50 which is paid into the food fund. Another way that non-residents contribute to the food fund is by participating in the system even when not living in the house, wherein they pay for food, join meals, and do the expected chores of a resident without actually paying rent or having a permanent room. Two people did this during my stay, including the person whose room I sublet.

All food bought with Milvia's house funds is vegetarian, with substantial vegan options and a general culture of buying healthy, cost-effective food rather than junk food. Alcohol and meat products are not included. A staples list was determined through collective discussions around diet, preferences, cost, and ethical considerations (i.e. politics, animal welfare, and waste). Data was further collected through digital surveys collating the preferences of members as different constellations of people moved in and out. Members write requests on the kitchen whiteboard for specific items each week, and can also each use up to \$20 monthly to buy ingredients for a particular meal.

Food is sourced from a combination of the grocery store Berkeley Bowl, Costco, Fowler Brothers, and varying individual purchases. A designated food shopper or two, volunteered for monthly at meetings, is responsible for grocery shopping at least once per week. Every quarter, the bulk food lead coordinates with representatives from six other houses to source high volumes of dry goods from Fowler Brothers in a collective

purchase that reduces cost and plastic waste. In addition, during certain seasons produce is bought from a weekly CSA box.

Food is stored across three different rooms: pantry, kitchen, and back of house. The kitchen holds fruit, spices, condiments, and two minifridges for leftovers and dairy (or dairy-like) items. The pantry fridge contains produce and condiments. The back of house contains a fridge and shelf for personal food with designated shelves for each resident, as well as multiple high-volume dry goods storage areas which the bulk refiller distributes to the kitchen when supplies there run low.

House dinners are prepared on “school nights”, Sunday - Thursday. Everyone signs up for one cook shift and two clean shifts on the kitchen whiteboard the week prior, resulting in two chefs and four or five cleaners per night. Diets are listed prominently on the kitchen whiteboard and chefs are responsible for ensuring that the lowest common denominator diet will have a sufficiently balanced and healthy meal. Dinner is presented as a buffet line on the cabinet next to the dining table, and residents line up to serve themselves whenever they are ready to come eat. Afterwards, cleaners follow the itemized list on the whiteboard to thoroughly tidy up the kitchen and dining room, leaving some items for assigned cleaners who aren't home yet. Leftovers are stored in the leftovers fridge and typically finished as lunch the next day.

BERRYMAN HOUSE

Finances. Berryman house has one Finance Manager and a support manager who are responsible for collecting and remitting the house's payments in four categories: rent, food, utilities, and house items. They present on the state of the house's funds at every house meeting and in shared documents.

The total rent for the house is \$6000, which is divided among the seven residents at a cost of \$500-1,025 per room. Two residents share a room and pay for a second one as their office. All residents send their rent to the Finance Manager via the money transfer service Zelle, and the Manager then transfers it to the landlord through the platform Korman & Ng.

An additional credit union account in the Finance Manager's name is used as the food fund. Members transfer \$300 monthly into the fund via Zelle and access the funds using the shared house debit card. Every three or four months, the surplus in the food fund is redistributed to all residents. This practice is intended to be economically fair while still allowing a culture of abundance to bring rich food options into the house. In addition, the app Splitwise is used only for nonessential items for which housemates can then request reimbursement.

Security deposits are kept in a savings account to which the support manager has access. They are left untouched because upon move-out, a housemate gets their deposit returned to them by the incoming resident. There is a proposal to have 3% of each person's deposit left in the account to cover future costs to the landlord, pending approval.

Digital communications. Berryman uses several digital platforms to communicate and codify its systems. Like Milvia, it uses Slack to organise many different types of conversations into channels that streamline discussions and allow for management of privacy. While only current residents are members of all Slack channels, some channels additionally contain subletters ("long-term-guests") and another is the community channel containing all friends of the house. In the community channel, members and friends alike share details about events, resources, and other news that community

members can support with. Residents send texts to the collective only for urgent matters in order to respect the digital space of others.

Berryman externalizes its systems into an extensive series of digital shared documents. These include a House Visioning Doc (*Appendix C*) which speaks to the different values that the cooperative's practises seek to embody. There is also a housemate agreement which members must sign before moving in. Other documents include the house handbook, running agenda notes, chore descriptions, financial information, and various policies which can be commented on and amended by members. To maintain the privacy of these digital spaces, Berryman only shares its documents with current residents. A shared Google Calendar is also used to track house events and travel notices.

Meetings. Berryman's house meetings take place once every month after dinner. They are firmly capped at two hours long and are the only official space in which decisions are made regarding house systems. Berryman uses a consensus-based decision-making model wherein all members must agree to a proposal in order for it to pass.

Each meeting has one facilitator which is decided at the end of the meeting prior. It is their job to set up the agenda. The "house-meeting-agenda" Slack channel is where residents add proposals for agenda items, which are often discussed informally over dinner and around the house prior to the meeting. The facilitator checks in with those who have added items to get a sense of how long the discussion might take, build a framework for the discussion, and organise a productive agenda. The meetings include a presentation of house finances.

At the end of each meeting, each resident is paired up with another for a feedback check-in. It is the pair's responsibility to meet up sometime during the month to discuss any issues that they are having in the house. These spaces are intended to

create a more intimate format for discussing sensitive issues as well as to bring housemates together in a one-on-one way. They may then decide to bring up arising topics at a house meeting.

Chores. Berryman maintains its cleanliness and logistical needs by assigning permanent responsibilities to each housemate. They have agreed to put in 90 minutes of chores per person per week, though residents describe doing more. The house itself is divided into seven different zones that become the purview of one resident who keeps it tidy. These do not rotate, instead shifting only when a new person moves in and the house revisits the chore assignments to best fit the needs of the new constellation. In addition, there are tasks like food shopping and finance management which are assigned to one or two people.

The chore breakdown originated during the founding of Berryman 2.0. Everyone spent the first three weeks cleaning what they wanted to, embodying a general ethic of responsibility and care for the space, and then they met for a review meeting to see if these organic preferences led to the house being tidy enough to meet everyone's needs. With some adjustments, the permanent chore assignments were solidified from those preferences.

Food. Berryman residents share food in abundance. The \$300 monthly contribution to the food fund per person covers an unrestricted range of organic food across diets, including meat, snacks, and alcohol. Each member has access to all of the food, which is stored in a spacious kitchen, with a small designated zone for personal food that is not bought with house funds.

Dinners are cooked in pairs three times per week, Tuesday-Thursday²⁴. Each resident has the same cook shift day per week. After dinner, everyone who ate but did not cook is responsible for cleaning the kitchen. One housemate whose work schedule does not allow her to assume a weekly cook shift instead acts as the “Snack Fairy”, preparing baked goods for everyone throughout the week. There are frequent unscheduled dinners which are also shared.

The food shopper gets groceries once per week from Berkeley Bowl. A loose staples list was generated based on a digital survey of housemates’ preferences around food selection and culture. Residents make further requests using the app Anylist, and chefs are allocated \$20 per meal to buy additional ingredients. Predominantly, however, it is the shopper’s extensive knowledge of the house’s eating habits that informs the purchasing decisions.

Another food source is a collaboration with Real Good Fish, a sustainable seafood service for which Berryman acts as a local pickup site. Fish is delivered on Tuesdays and neighbors trickle into the front yard to collect their portion throughout the evening; Berryman then gets to keep a portion for free. Past food sources have also included a CSA box, a farmshare at Riverdog and Full Belly farms, the local farmers’ market, and receiving leftover dishes from Spirit Rock Meditation Center.

Eating dinner together is Berryman’s central value in food. There is a Slack channel strictly for checking whether people will attend dinner that evening, and the cook shift is canceled if a minority of residents will be present. When dinners do take place, they do not begin until everyone is present. The food is arranged on the table itself. Candles are lit, lights are dimmed, wine is poured, and a grounding exercise often begins each meal. The chefs describe the ingredients of each dish as food is passed

²⁴ The frequency of dinners changes based on the time of year and extenuating circumstances such as COVID. This schedule was in place during my fieldwork.

around. Given the intimate and spiritual nature of these gatherings, it is no surprise that Berryman is not very focused on saving leftovers to be eaten the next day, instead valuing the lived experience of sharing fresh food above its practical functionality.

Wednesday nights are unique because they are often “community dinners” to which members of the wider community are invited. Everyone who joins from the outside is asked to contribute a dish if possible, making these evenings a big potluck that usually requires the backyard to be rearranged accordingly. A community dinner during my field work included residents from seven different coops; naturally, I invited members of Milvia.

Appendix B - Milvia House Meeting Structure

Explanatory comments are added in italics.

1. Personal check-ins (4 minutes): *each willing person shares a high and low of their month*
2. Appreciation fest (4 mins): *people commend actions of other housemates that they've appreciated in the past month*
3. Review of agenda and action items from previous meeting (3 mins): *go through list of action items from past meeting and disclose if they were accomplished or if there are updates to note*
4. Chore check-in (3 mins): *read overview of chore minutes left for each resident, and invite general comments on chores*
5. Sign-ups for additional roles (3 mins):
 - a. food shopper(s): *does weekly grocery run for house, including auditing food supply; shopper is recused from gaining chore minutes or doing dinner cook*
 - b. Chore bottom-liner: *adds 60 chore minutes to whiteboard weekly, checks in with individuals who are not doing their chores properly*
 - c. Trash
 - d. Bulk refiller: *refills dwindling dry food containers in kitchen from larger pantry supply*
 - e. Plants
 - f. CSA order pickup *(when applicable)*
6. Discussion of Agenda Items *(varies; bulk of meeting): discuss each agenda item. The items must include the proposer's name, priority level (high/medium/low), minutes allocated for discussion, description, and a proposal if vote is expected. It is expected that proposers have discussed the issue informally with other housemates to refine the proposal before submitting it to the meeting agenda.*
7. Summary of Action Items (3 mins): *notetaker compiles action items into one list with a deadline for each action and reads them aloud*
8. Determine Next Month's Agenda Keeper (1 min): *agenda keeper sends out the meeting agenda one week in advance requesting agenda item proposals; finalizes agenda 24 hours before meeting, making sure there's time for all items in priority order; and confirms attendance and reschedules the meeting if needed.*
9. Determine next meeting date (1 min)
10. Meeting Feedback (10 mins): *everyone shares their thoughts on the meeting itself, such as how it was facilitated, sensitive discussions, or feelings on outcomes.*

11. Brief Announcements/Requests (2 mins)
12. Traveling/Out of House Notice (1 min)

Appendix C - Berryman House Visioning Document

Berryman Co-Op 2022:
Our Vision/Values

Thanks for reading our vision! It's a working, changing document, and we'd love to hear about your vision too.

OUR CORE VALUES

- 1) **Family Feel:** We aspire to cultivate a family feel where everyone feels fully accepted, safe, and happy in the home. We believe in cultivating generous spirits towards one another. We live together as friends, inviting each other to be participants in our own narratives and lives. We work to support each other, and to be gracious and generous to our wider community, in connection with these values. We also, bluntly, have fun with it. We share stories, make each other laugh, cry at the news, and hang out together when we can. We live with our friends, and it's a blast. We offer to help make each other's lives easier if we're able -- to share what we have if it feels appropriately convenient and right to do so. We want to make it feel comfortable for people to live and stay with us who have varying access to resources. If some of us are able to give time, energy, or concrete resources to help each other out, and the help is welcomed, we do so. If we are having a particularly hard month or have a certain budget we need to stay within, we communicate that to each other.
- 2) **Playful Spirit:** We have a playful spirit, welcoming spontaneity and adventure, while also forming and sticking to clear systems that help our home be an efficient and enjoyable place to live.
- 3) **Building Community:** We welcome people who identify as extroverts and medium energy and even some more inward energy (like lots of people we love). The most important thing is wanting to spend *some* time together and build community, while also respecting personal space and recharging time. In other words, we strive to have our individual needs met, while also serving the collective wellbeing.
- 4) **Sharing the Work:** We work together to take care of the house and help everyone out. We foster a culture of spontaneous participation but also have delegated shared chores totalling approx. 3-4 hours/week, buy all our food collectively, and cook 4 house dinners each week. We envision each person having a specific chore that stays consistent, so you can get really good and efficient with it, and there's no need for a complex rotation schedule. Chores would include cleaning, shopping, etc.
- 5) **Beautiful Space:** We seek to have beautiful, dreamy, and functional space. We keep things clean and classy, but not obsessive.
- 6) **Body and sex positivity:** Our home is a place where people can feel comfortable in their bodies and around the topic of sex/sexuality. We negotiate together on what feels appropriate and welcome!

7) **Delicious Foods and Meal Connection:** We make and eat delicious food. Again, we have dinners a week where it is not at all required to be present (but delicious food will be provided for you anyway). We support sustainable food sources as much as possible. All dietary preference/restrictions are respected and supported. Everyone is welcome to buy some personal food too (we have a personal fridge), but the house shopping easily covers all your needs.

8) **The Personal is Political:** We choose to live in a way that steps outside of the norms that can divide and separate us -- the ethic of individualism, the drivers of materialism and capitalism, the power structures of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Living together intentionally and communally is an exercise, experiment, and challenge of living out these values. We have seen for ourselves personally that when we share more of our resources, we are better off, and when we share our lives with each other, we feel supported and strengthened as we work on our own personal, professional, artistic, and/or spiritual growth. We are intensely supportive of each other and what we are striving for towards self care and personal growth. We value taking care of ourselves and each other through living as healthfully and mindfully as we can.

9) **Equity and Justice:** We value and embody diversity, in many forms, whether it be racially, economically, geographic origins, cultural background, age, gender, sexuality, interests, mindsets, personalities, etc.

10) **Conflict/Communication:** We are deeply kind and respectful to one another and act with as much maturity as possible, but are also forgiving when people make reasonable mistakes. We're only human after all. Clear, frequent communication is essential! We believe in bringing up feedback directly to one another and avoiding gossip/drama, and for issues that affect the group, bringing them up constructively in house meetings. We are communicative about praise! Open, direct, and honest conversation is incredibly important to us and is the basis for our relationships with each other and as a house. Many people say they want to live in "a peaceful home environment" -- to us this includes the very likely possibility of confrontation, which is worked through to resolution. We are not conflict-avoidant, but we are fiercely loving through any potential conflict. It is important to us that we all work to know and understand our own personal needs, navigate them, and make requests of each other when appropriate. Avoidance can often lead to disinvestment and disengagement, which is exactly what we don't want in our home. We want to be always working to create a safe home environment for each other, treating home as a refuge. These are all difficult things to learn and skills to acquire, and while we have compassion for each other when we may not always do it perfectly, it's grounding to know we do have a similar goal and hope in mind.

OTHER IMPORTANT VALUES

1. **Covid Safety:** We take this very seriously. We have all been fully vaccinated since early spring 2021. We follow agreed upon protocol to limit risk. We actively monitor the public health situation on a regular basis.
2. **Cuddly:** We are cuddly - both in spirit, and hopefully physically too in ways that are aligned for the folks in the home.

3. **Engage in Community Action Together:** We engage in community action together- such as organizing, mutual aid, and political engagement- when it is fun, purposeful, and aligned with our house capacity. We take responsibility for living in the Bay Area as folks with relative privilege (and continuing on the progressive legacy of Berkeley!
4. **Group Projects:** When we need to undertake a group project to get something important done in the home, everyone pitches in. We support each other's individual endeavors, but also put on things collectively, like events, birthdays, etc. Otherwise, group projects are optional but encouraged.
5. **Spiritual Practice;** Those of us who wish to engage together in other shared interests such as spiritual practice or ritual have an opportunity to do so and make magic.
6. **Meetings:** We have a formal house meeting once a month. This helps us feel closer as a whole house, address any issues that might be up for people, and plan for coming events, guests, or other ideas for our space. Outside of formal meetings, we plan fun hangs and adventures, which we try to do all together if schedules allow.
7. **Guests and Subletters:** We enjoy being generous and gracious hosts. We will offer up our home to trusted friends and guests, usually hosting between 1-3 individuals/couples/small groups per month, depending on the season. We've found that for the most part, the physical space is so accommodating that this frequency of guests is hardly noticeable (really). We make sure to clean the space before and after our own guests' stay. When one of us is away, we are happy to accommodate subletters, and have met some amazing people this way that have lovingly become connected to our house community. All of this said, we always ask each other first and get approval from the house before inviting guests or making agreements with subletters. Depending on the length of stay of the guest, we will negotiate additional food and utility costs. We also share our space with the wider community to host events, workshops, rehearsals, concerts, small-ish parties, dinner parties, barbecues, and anything else that we think would be fun. We always get approval from the whole house before offering up the space.
8. **Shared costs:** We share all the costs of groceries and household supplies. We have a house bank card (Patelco). You end up paying once a month for all utilities, groceries, and supplies. We may buy occasional specialty items but keep costs in mind. If we purchase something extremely outside these parameters without buy-in from the group, we opt to pay for it on our own. If we have food we want to set aside for ourselves, we put it in our personal fridge.

If you've taken the time to read through all of this, we most definitely value you. THANK YOU for the time, energy, and heart it takes to consider these questions and this possibility. Housing in the Bay can be an absolute pain, and we very much

appreciate the effort. We also try to be mindful of everyone's timelines and scheduling needs. We look forward to getting to know you!

Please **apply via the google form** or pass this on to folks you think would be a great fit! If you have any other questions/comments, *contact us at [redacted]*.