

INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES: PLACE-BASED ARTICULATIONS OF
SOCIAL CRITIQUE

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to understand the processes through which intentional communities (ICs) embody and articulate critiques of society at large. To do so, I have researched two communities: one in the United States, named “Kashi”, and a second in India, named “Auroville”. Drawing on theories of place, space, performance, and place-making, I analyze the multi-layered ways in which these two ICs make place through the physical bounding of space, the material and ideological manifestation of place, and the daily making and re-making involved in performing place. Second, I observe the ways in which place is deployed as social critique, specifically through the lens of their two central critiques of environmental exploitation and community disintegration and inequalities. Lastly, I contemplate the role of ‘self’ at all levels of intentional community living. While the portrayal of both Auroville and Kashi are typically associated with their spiritual foundations, my project will deviate from these depictions. This project will ask more socially critical questions regarding their commitments to environmental sustainability and challenging community fragmentation and inequities.

Primarily, the body of my research comes from field research and primary sources. Qualitative methods including one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and participant observation have been used for their ability to unpack the ideological motivations of intentional community members, offer insights into the daily making and re-making of place, and to understand the subtle complexities of a place-based social critique. Ultimately, by observing two intentional communities with stated ambitions to integrate collectivism, social equality, and environmentally sustainable design, this research will contribute to the growing body of literature exploring alternative avenues to development and human and environmental welfare. It is my hope that this study will also contribute to our understanding of the capacities of intentional communities and will speak to geographers interested in the significance of ‘making-place’ for the purpose of mediating social critique and transformation.

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Chapter #1

Introduction

Buckminster Fuller famously said, “In order to change an existing paradigm you do not struggle to try and change the problematic model. You create a new model and make the old one obsolete”. Today, there are hundreds of communities around the globe working to embody this sentiment and create localized models of systemic change. They are known as ‘intentional communities’ and they represent a long transnational history of people who have chosen to reject mainstream society, and live communally in order to reinvent the ways they live and interact with both the human and natural world. As a phenomenon, intentional communities typically offer constructive visions and realities for humanity and the planet, while serving as experimental campuses for individuals to explore possible and transformative futures.

According to Bueren and Tarlow, all intentional communities are founded upon two fundamental precepts: dissatisfaction with mainstream society, and the idealist belief that there is an alternative life possible (Bueren and Tarlow, 2006). ICs are also typically identified for their dual approach to community building in which they both physically and ideologically create the world they want to live in (Van Wormer, 2006). Physically, they turn space into an identifiable place with boundaries, a distinct ‘inside and outside’, and a built environment fit to facilitate their mission and ideals. Ideologically they organize social, cultural, political, and economic bodies which both personify and promote their values. Intentional communities are also distinct, as they are both spatially bounded by shared living quarters, and theoretically bounded by commitment to a mutual concern or value system. As a geographer, I observe this phenomenon as an act of ‘place-making’. Here, ‘place’ in general is regarded as fluid and dynamic, constructed through social, cultural, and environmental practices that respond to interconnections with other places (Agnew, 1987). For intentional communities, producing place is essential to creating a stage from which residents can both explore themselves as well as articulate their critique of society. By producing a distinct and bounded place,

the community as a whole can better mediate the various components of their community and its expressive practices. Theoretically, by personifying their critique, individual participants and the community as a whole are both imbued with agency through their construction of alternatives to the ideologies and institutions of mainstream society.

There is also a growing body of research postulating that community-based and idealistic projects such as these are of increasing relevance to contemporary social and environmental issues, with some dubbing their varieties as ‘islands of counterhegemonic practice’ and ‘sustainability’ (Sargisson, 1996; Brown, 2002; Fernando, 2003; Kirby, 2003; Mohanty, 2003; Bueren and Tarlow, 2006). Some are even calling intentional communities in their contemporary, sustainability-oriented manifestations, a form of developmental utopianism. Irrespective of how you refer to them, it is clear that their community-based articulations of social critique are of mounting significance to society today. This development utopianism is also not limited to environmental issues and, in fact, articulately addresses larger social issues of exclusion, individualism, inequality, and injustice. In a time when global climate change, sustainability, and socio-economic disparity dominate international discussions on development and social change, the work of intentional communities has become increasingly relevant (N.A. MDG’s and Beyond 2015, Action, 2015).

Fernando (2003) and Harvey (2000), among many others, argue that a utopian vision, in combination with practical community-based initiatives founded on eco and social justice centered paradigms, are an essential preface to creating the necessary conditions for ‘sustainable’ development and human welfare. This requires the willingness to engage in a counterhegemonic vision that is structured differently from the one that underpins capitalist accumulation, and which actively experiments with this vision in the context of community (Agyemen and Evans, 2002). In this way, ICs are able to engage in a *responsive* place-making project that is manufactured through the discourse of *aspiration* and the belief that there is a better way of ‘being’ possible. Here, my analysis hinges on the assumption that ICs are one form

an embodied utopian aspiration that can offer important insights into the theoretical compatibility of these visions with lived reality.

Many intentional communities are also experimenting with integrated, community scale solutions to the world's (and their own) most pressing problems. As they evolve, many work to refine social and environmental tools to both transform their own community but also to educate others. In fact, alternative education models are experimented with on most intentional communities and offer archetypal examples of the active critiques intentional communities make on society at large. Typically, intentional community education models, in their various forms, are broadly drawn to explore a style of education which acknowledges that social change begins with each individual, and encourages deep self-exploration within a community environment. Advocates believe that this unusual educational environment has the opportunity to facilitate deeply transformative development. In the context of a world rushing towards an unsustainable future, communities based on the principles of holistic and sustainable change offer attractive possibilities for education and the future (Fernando, 2003; Van Schyndel Kasper, 2008).

The concept of 'intentional community' is also a form of social critique that can highlight the ways in which community functions within complex societies. Intentional communities are intrinsically embedded in larger social and political-economic contexts, and can help us understand the mechanisms through which communities and large state societies interact. Their contemporary and explicit responses to changes shaped by the development of industrial capitalist political economies can help to inform us of the social and cultural effects of such developmental processes (Lockyer, 2007).

According to Mohanty, in all industrializing and urbanizing nations, traditional forms of community coherence are further subject to fragmentation and degeneration, and the concept of intentional community increasingly relevant (Mohanty, 2003). Nonetheless, comprehending the prospective role of ICs in the world today still requires a greater number of investigations into ICs that redress their typically Western

focus and lean towards historical analyses. Thus, it is the work of this analysis to address this discourse and contribute one voice to literature on ICs in an international and contemporary framework. To do so, this research project considers two different ICs: one in India named “Auroville”, and a second in the United States named “Kashi”. These communities were chosen for their similar ideological roots in inclusive belief systems on human unity, equality, peace, pluralistic acceptance, and environmentally conscious practices. Both communities also heavily stress the importance of fostering education and life-long learning environments.

This is also a comparative study; Kashi is a veteran, yet presently transforming and localized community, while Auroville is a long-standing, world-renowned and globally connected community. The utility of this comparative analysis is evident in its ability to highlight the intentional community critique as a trans-national ‘phenomenon’ of distinct ‘place-making’, as opposed to a single incident in one place and time. It is an unfortunate truth that the majority of ICs (80%) do not survive the challenges that they meet within the first two years of existence (Christian, 2003; Forster and Wilhemus, 2005). Thus, Kashi’s 38 years and Auroville’s 46 years of history are significant indicators of resilience. It is clear that their abilities to adapt and evolve to the challenges of shifting socio-cultural and political climates, as well as sustain through generational evolution, is strong. This project spanned a period from early July to early November of 2013, during which I resided and participated on both Kashi and Auroville for approximately two months each. In order to answer my research questions, I employed one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and participant observation.

As centers for education and social, spiritual, and environmental experimentation, these intentional communities have stated goals of extending these lessons to their larger societies. Thus, in the course of this document, I suggest that intentional communities create their *own distinct* form of “place” in order to mediate both the ecological and social dynamics of the community. Further, through their place-based

facilitation of ecological, social, and personal transformation, they are able to deploy place as a site of learning, self-reflection, education, and theoretically scalable models for society. By nature of their place-based strategies, these two intentional communities are rooted in a strategy that presumes these same social critiques could not be made as a disparate network of individuals, and that manufacturing a place-based community is essential to their mission. In this way, the intentional community critique also becomes theatrical and is assisted by expressive performances and symbolism in the built environment.

In the spirit of observing the systemic functions of intentional community building and living, this project is less interested in the so called ‘successes and failures’ of these two communities, than it is interested in getting at the fundamental motivating factors, operations, and consequences of building intentional communities across space and place. Naturally, the degree to which the intentional community endeavor is successful is arguable and variable. But it is not subjective superlatives that I debate here. Rather, it is the theoretical underpinnings of creating intentional community, and both the conscious and unconscious ways in which this ‘place-making’ endeavor interfaces with society at large that I wish to contemplate. In order to best describe the discursive unfolding of intentional community living and practice, I will employ a conceptual framework that focuses on the ‘process’ to better comprehend the ongoing and iterative processes of the intentional community critique. ‘Change’, ‘progress’, and ‘process’ are the operative words here, and the subsequent relationships and transformations that develop as a result will hold my attention.

The main objectives of this analysis are to first, observe the act of creating intentional community as an act of place-making, and seek to understand why it is necessary to both bound and perform ‘place’. Second, to explore the ways in which ‘place’ is both embodied and deployed for the purposes of expressing social critique as well as where and how they interface with society at large. Third, to understand the role of the individual within the context of a collective endeavor of critical place-making. The three central

chapters (# 5-7) of this text are divided along these same thematic lines. The central research questions are as follows:

1. How do intentional communities use the attributes of spatial boundedness to create 'place' and ultimately, embody their critique? How are the inherent social critiques bound up in intentional communities, written into the built environment, programs, practices, and services?
2. How porous are their 'boundaries' and how does this quality affect their interface with larger society? What role does performance play in both place-making and the articulation of their social critiques?
3. What is the role of the individual within the context of each respective IC and what inspires individual members on a daily basis to choose IC living? What is the relationship with 'self' throughout all stages of IC building, deploying, and transforming?

This research speaks to anyone interested in community building, projects of social critique, performance theory, intentional communities, and geographic conceptions of place, community, and society. For communalists themselves, my research is particularly relevant; intellectuals must complement the activists in order to better understand the significance of their projects, to provide new ideas, act as harbingers of possible dangers and contradictions, as well as suggest alternative mechanisms for manifesting their said critique (Kanter, 1972). By observing two intentional communities with stated ambitions to integrate social equality with sustainable design and experimentation, this research will contribute to the growing body of literature exploring alternative avenues to development and human and environmental welfare. It is my hope that this study will contribute to my own understanding of the conceptual underpinnings of the intentional community-based critique and will speak to geographers interested in the significance of creating 'place' and community for the purpose of mediating social and environmental change. Ultimately, by investigating these spatially bounded areas of idealistic practices, this project will

contribute to our understanding of the interplay between place, community, and social critiques in society.

Chapter Structure:

Chapter One has introduced the concept of ‘place making’, defined ‘intentional community’, briefly discussed the conceptual framework for this body of research, introduced the two specific communities under analysis, and outlined the main objectives and research questions of this thesis.

Chapter Two traces the histories, literature, and central arguments relevant to my project, as well as outlines the theoretical framework I employ to define ‘intentional community’, place, space, performance, and place-making. The meanings and debates around theories of performance and performativity will also be discussed in this chapter. I will situate my own investigation in the larger scope of history, theory and research that has preceded my analysis.

Chapter Three provides descriptions of Kashi and Auroville; their history, their founders, their principles, their material manifestations and practices, and their contemporary demographics.

Chapter Four outlines the overall methods used for this project, the site-specific methods used in Kashi and Auroville respectively, and the empirical challenges that arose in the course of this research. It also discusses the role of positionality, situated knowledge, and my own position in both Kashi and Auroville.

Chapter Five deals with the process of bounding space and creating ‘place’ in the making and daily re-making of intentional community. I work to complicate the intentional community project as one expressive of various social critiques that are both inherently bound up in their built and lived environment, as well as in ways that are explicitly critical. In this project, both articulations of critique are understood as either performative or as literal performances.

Chapter Six moves on to examine the ways in which ‘place’ is actually deployed for the purposes of

expressing social critique and its potentiality for inspiring social change. In both Kashi and Auroville, these critiques primarily speak to issues related to community fragmentation and social inequalities as well as environmental exploitation. Although there are myriad other critiques that can be extrapolated from the performances of these two communities, for the purposes of this project, I will focus on their expression of these two central and critical conversations.

Chapter Seven deals with the role of ‘self’ at all levels of intentional community building, deploying, and transforming. In this chapter I contemplate how my participants are developing a relationship with ‘self’ through reflective practices, self-seeking, and ethical negotiations. I also contemplate the role of ‘place-making’ in supporting the development of both personal and social transformations. Ultimately, I suggest that it is this relationship with the ‘self’ that is the foundational motivating factor behind both of the intentional community projects and all social critiques can be traced back to this foundational precept of ‘self transformation’.

Chapter Eight first summarizes the central findings of this project. Second, it considers the implications of these findings on the wider scope of theory and praxis, as well as puts forth suggestions for further research on intentional communities and related theories.

Chapter # 2

Literature Review & Theoretical Overview

“Utopia challenges by supplying alternatives, certainly. It shows what could be. But its most persistent function, the real source of its subversiveness, is as a critical commentary on the arrangements of society” (Kumar, 1991: 87)

This research is primarily situated within the theoretical approaches of critical geography, feminist epistemologies, and an interdisciplinary collection of communitarian studies. The theoretical framework of this project is informed by literature on intentional communities, theory on place and space, performance and performativity, utopianism, communitarianism, ‘sustainability’ oriented development, and social critique. The purpose of this chapter is to trace the histories, literature, and central arguments relevant to my project, as well as discuss the theoretical framework I employ to define ‘intentional community’, place, space, performance, and place-making. I will also situate my own investigation in the larger scope of history, theory and research that has preceded my analysis.

A Brief History of Intentional Communities

Historically, intentional communities (whether built from religious, political, social, or environmental impulses) have all sought social change through the construction and manifestation of an alternative lifestyle. For many, the term ‘intentional community’ immediately evokes thoughts of the ‘hippie communes of the ‘60s and ‘70s’ – a notion that is extremely misleading, as the communes of that time were only one small phase of community building in an impressive and long history of intentional community building around the world (Kozeny, 2009: 2). The communalist endeavor dates back centuries, but has largely varied in regards to the volume of these projects at any given time in history. In fact, many scholars have identified various ‘phases’ of communalism in the United States, and directly traced their appearance to unsettled or volatile times in western societies (Zablocki, 1980; Miller, 2013). According to

Zablocki (1980), communalism in America can be broken into four distinct ‘waves’: The Colonial Period (1620-1776); The Shaker Influx (1790-1805); The Utopian Socialist Period (1824-1848); and The Turn of the Century (1890-1915). Today, scholars typically add another wave in the late 1960’s and 1970’s during the counter-culture movement of the time (Miller, 2011). Both Kashi and Auroville originated in this last wave period. Although Auroville is in India, it was heavily influenced by the western make-up of its residential body and its founder, as well as its international focus.

According to Bueren and Tarlow, the history of intentional communities founded in North America began with a fascination of utopianism in the Western world during a move to the ‘new world’ in which European settlers sought refuge and envisioned a place in which they could improve upon or correct the shortcomings of the European world. They argue that there has been little uniformity in their visions since, but that the one common trend among the volumes of communities throughout history has been a strong foundation in morals and ‘ethics’ (Bueren and Tarlow, 2006) Brian Berry also proposes that the long-term rises and falls in utopian projects can actually be traced by their correlation to long-wave economic crises in the United States. Berry’s central thesis argues that, throughout history, there are traceable long-wave economic troughs where economic activity is at a low point in which there is an overall decline in prices, asset values, and real wealth. These periodic troughs also trigger parallel periodic utopian responses during which an observable spike in utopian projects can be witnessed. According to Berry, these utopian resurgences are significant, as they are expected to support those who have been hurt by the economic trough. In theory, by offering a safe-haven during hard times, utopian projects are able to experiment with social and cultural innovation while simultaneously offering a safety net for vulnerable members of society.

Although Berry *does* demonstrate parallel timelines, he does not thoroughly explain how the two phenomena are connected, and why these communities should be considered as responses to economic crisis. In fact, for the most part, the communities he refers to, articulately address many other relevant

cultural and social issues, but rarely address economic troubles. Interestingly, Bohill (2010) counters that intentional community building has not always necessarily hinged on a crisis. In fact, she explains that there was an evolution during the 1980's and 1990's, when communities began to form around a set of 'positive values or goals' as opposed to being formed around the rejection of a set of perceived 'negative' social norms. As opposed to escaping aspects of their culture with which they disagreed or disliked, building intentional communities in this period was supposedly more focused on striving for something 'constructive', 'positive', 'better', or 'improved'. Robert Scher (1997) also argues that, rather than isolated and singular spawning's of a social movement or 'moment', ICs represent a long line of interconnected social resistances, linked by their belief in change, their willingness to live it, and their experimentations with social, environmental, economic, cultural, and religious practices. According to Kirby, today, community reformers have also been increasingly drawn to a non-violent, self-critical, and responsible forms of critique, as they have witnessed amounting failures of individualistic dissent, political reform, and revolutions that have proven inadequate in creating deep-seeded change (Kirby, 2003). Ultimately, it seems that intentional communities, no matter what era they show up in, are formed from a complex array of interacting forces; both push and pull factors; both positive and negative influences; both inner and outer experiences, etc.

There are also many other contemporary forms of 'intentional communities' which are both interest and place-based. Although not typically dubbed 'intentional communities', communities such as gated communities and retirement homes all constitute a form of 'intentional community'. Although their critiques are generally not as explicit, encompassing, or theatrical, it cannot be denied that their fundamental characteristics constitute a form of intentional community. For this reason, it is important to situate this research in a larger body of research on the transitioning role of 'community' in a globalizing world.

Gated communities are one illustrative example of how the concept of community building has been manipulated through modern discourses of 'safety, security, and standardization'. By placing distinct boundaries around the community, erecting 'gates' to monitor the comings and goings, and inscribing distinctive characteristics into its architectural designs (identical homes, color schemes, etc.) gated communities manufacture a sense of security and 'equality' among its members by way of aesthetic uniformity and guardianship (Low, 2001 & 2009). One can derive from this, that gated community members (whether intentionally or not) are critiquing a social phenomenon of increasing concern to American social theorists who observe an evident decaying of the American neighborhood community and increasing sense of mistrust, fear, danger, and detachment among individuals (Putnam, 2000). In light of these congruencies, this research might speak to a larger set of debates around the significance of place-making, community building, and social critique. Nevertheless, in order to distinguish between the type of intentional community under analysis in this project, and those of the 'gated-community' variety, I must reemphasize the unique aspirations or 'utopian' commitments of these intentional communities involving ecologically conscious development, social equality, ethics, spirituality, experimentation, and human intimacy.

Defining Community, Place, and Place-Making

Intellectuals and activists across disciplines are also increasingly calling the very role of 'community' into question. Now the site of many contesting discourses, the very definition of community is the subject of impassioned debate. Over the past 40 or 50 years, factors such as globalization, intensifying environmental degradation, rising information technology, vast privatization, consumer-based orientations, and the social and environmental changes that result from these phenomena, have all deeply shifted our perceptions of space, place, and the role of community (Harvey, 1989; Putnam 2000; Brown 2002; Kirby,

2003; Carr 2004; Lockyer, 2007). Simultaneously, there is a seemingly ubiquitous challenge to traditional forms of community as the age of information gives increasing power to ‘interest-based’ communities that defy place or geography. These interest-based communities generally depend on information technologies, social media, or modes of global capitalism. There is a burgeoning sense that ‘the world is increasingly placeless’, and that place has little meaning in a globalized world in which space-spanning connection is everywhere (Agnew, 2011). Some even argue that the decline of the geographically place-based community can be compensated for by these interest-based communities developed through the Internet and social media (Bellah et al, 1996; Putnam, 2000).

In contrast, Agnew argues that previous waves of technological advancement, which have done relatively the same thing for human connection on a smaller scale (i.e. roads, railways, telephones, ships, etc.), did not eliminate the relevance of place in the slightest. Rather, these innovations worked to reconstitute and reorganize the spatial relationships that mediate the character of a ‘place’ (Agnew, 2011). Communitarians and proponents of ‘place-based’ community building also concur that the power of place-based interdependence, mutuality, and human interaction cannot be compensated for by a strictly interest-based community (Shenker, 1987; Ezioni, 1998). In fact, some argue that it is this very disintegration of place-based community that has led to the growing number of social and ecological crises that are manifestations of the spatial and temporal tragedies of ‘the commons’ (Burger et al. 2001; Lockyer, 2007).

In light of the building debate on the role of ‘community’ in shaping society, it is significant that there are groups of individuals who have made the everyday practice of communal living a central focus in their lives. Uniquely, ICs embody a belief in the essentiality of *both* ‘place-based’ and ‘interest-based’ community and have harnessed these characteristics into geographically and theoretically bounded operational sites (Kanter, 1972; Brown, 2002; Kirby, 2003; Lockyer, 2007). In this way, intentional communities are also spatially bounded by shared living quarters and theoretically bounded by social intent

and commitment to a mutual concern or value system. Often, this 'mutual concern' constitutes a set of wider social practices which intentional community members have chosen to reject, in an effort to manifest something altogether different. Intentional communities also focus on interconnectivity and an active fellowship, in order to effectively facilitate their purpose (Brown, 2002; Lockyer, 2007).

Intentional communities, as projects rooted in manifesting place, also demand a deeper understanding of 'place' and the meanings we ascribe to it. Defining place is essential to understanding the varying routes through which one can consider how geography matters to the intentional community phenomenon. As a fundamental concept in geographic theory and inquiry, the various meanings of place can actually be used to trace the intellectual trends of the geographic field. Disputes between more geometric conceptions of place and the more phenomenological understanding of place define the two prominent divisions in the discipline (Cresswell, 2004). In common parlance, place generally refers to either a location somewhere in space or to the occupation of that location. According to Agnew's more nuanced and popularly accepted definition, place can be broken down into three elements: (1) locale: place as a setting for social interaction; (2) location: place located in geographical space; (3) sense of place: attachment between people and place (Agnew, 1987).

I draw on Agnew's definition and argue that place is not wholly defined by either its relationship to measurable spatial metrics (latitude, longitude, elevation, core-periphery, region, etc.), or by the impacts of such a 'placement' on earth. In this research project, 'place' will be regarded as fluid and dynamic, constructed through social, cultural, and environmental practices which respond to interconnections with other 'places'. In this way, places tend to have permeable boundaries as opposed to the hardened or fixed boundaries we often imagine them to uphold. Further, 'place' is imbued with history and cannot be removed from the political climate in which it functions (Cresswell, 2004; Agnew, 2011). Agnew explains this well when he says, places "are usually and perhaps increasingly in a globalizing world located in a series

of extensive economic, political, and cultural networks with varying geographical scopes. They are best thought of relationally” (Agnew, 1987: 5). ‘Place’ exceeds its mere location in space and affects what we think abstractly as well as what we do and how we function practically.

In this same context, it is in fact our complete immersion in place, and not the vastness of space, that dictates our experiences of life and the ‘real’ (Miller, 1996; Escobar, 2001; Martin, 2003). Ontologically, place is where life happens. Scholars propose that it is the historical intensification of our disembeddedness from place, caused by the increasingly transient movements of people, materials, and capital that comes with modernity, which have brought us full circle to our reclaiming of the ‘local’ and ‘place’. According to Escobar, “this feature would seem to push people to invest place and home with personal agency to counter these tendencies” (2001: 148). In a similar vein, for Harvey, this means that the effects of global capitalism “will provoke resistances that increasingly focus on alternative constructions of place” (2000:302). It may be, in fact, that it is the growing alarm of ‘placelessness’ in the world that intentional communities intend to critique with their very rooted place-based approach. Ultimately, this conversation suggests that perhaps contemporary ICs are partly phenomenological reactions to an increasingly placeless global culture in order to be more grounded in local socio-natural practices (Escobar, 2001).

Intentional communities, as places, also demand an analysis that takes into account the practices through which people construct, articulate, and deploy place within the larger context of translocal and global networks. As emphasized by Agnew (1987), place must be considered in a relational context. Therefore, each intentional community should be considered within the wider context of the societies and places in which they function, as well as the ones with which they interact. Escobar argues that today, “Locality and community cease to be obvious, and certainly not inhabited by rooted or natural identities but very much produced by complex relations of culture and power that go well beyond local bounds” (2001: 146). In *Querying Globalization*, J.K. Gibson-Graham (1996) similarly suggest that, although localization

may sometimes involve resistance to global processes, overall, places are contained within the global system and are indeed a part of globalization themselves. Therefore, this project considers the larger context within which this place is acting, as the local cannot be separated from the global. Here, I employ 'local' and 'global' as terms of scale and levels of analysis, whereas "place refers to the experience of, and from, a particular location with some sense of boundaries, grounds, and links to everyday practices" (Escobar, 2001: 152).

With this in mind, it becomes clear that intentional community designers, participants, and proponents also uphold an inherent belief in the power of 'place-making'. By nature of manufacturing a bounded space, with the capacity to host a microcosmic society within its borders - a space where culture, social life, politics, and ecological processes are all mediated - is a tremendous display of trust in the power of 'place'. According to Doreen Massey, place specificity is constructed out of a particular set of relations, which are collectively articulated at a specific locus (Massey, 1994). Her emphasis on the collective articulation of place speaks directly to the process of creating intentional community, and implies that it is possible for a collectively conscious group of people to 'make place'.

It is not only intentional community builders who believe in the power of place to mediate social change. A growing number of scholars suggest that striving for sustainability requires a grassroots process in which localized communities play more central roles in working towards environmental and social justice (Jason, 1997; Murray, 2002; Fernando, 2003; Pretty, 2003). Fernando argues that sustainability requires "the practice and articulation of an alternative vision of political economy, as well as a politically strong commitment to realizing it" (Fernando, 2003:6). 'Community based resource management', 'grass-roots community development' and 'sustainable community' are all buzzwords gaining traction as industrialized and urbanizing societies seek solutions to their deteriorating environmental status' and the increasingly evident disintegration of place-based communities in developed nations. In light of these circumstances,

place-based articulations of social critique are increasingly on the forefront of investigations into alternative modes of development and social arrangements.

Performance and Performativity in Place-Making

This particular form of place-based critique also involves creating alternative social organizations and spaces in which the practice of a 'lived alternative' can be both experienced and observed. The concept of a 'lived critique' is described by Susan L. Brown (2002) as a form of 'critiquing with ones feet' through which participants band together in pursuit of a new paradigm that they can 'embody'. This theme of 'living' the alternative is also essential to understanding the implications of intentional communities and directly illustrates what it means to 'perform' in the context of this project. For my purposes, there is great utility in the analysis of performance, as, "to see places as events or performances is to make available for investigation the human practices and processes involved in their construction, and to understand that places are never "finished" or complete but are always becoming" (Miller, 1996: 363). Thus, despite the theoretical tensions, I hold that the framework of performance presents important opportunities for analytical insights in the context of this project.

Overall, performativity and performance have not been used at great length to understand intentional communities. However, ignoring the glaring observation that these intentional communities are demonstrating lived, embodied, and performed forms of critique, increasingly seemed to be an analytical misstep. In fact, the intentional community critique appears inherently performative, as it is based on the ability to 'live' the alternative to those very social paradigms they critique. Thus, I offer a framework in which performance and performativity are intermingled to develop a geographical analysis of performance, which moves away from the traditionally myopic focus on performing bodies, and towards a more expansive engagement with the performative.

Today, readings of '*performativity*' are typically associated with Judith Butler's work on the formation of gendered subjects, while readings of '*performance*' with Erving Goffman's interpretation of performing bodies and their engagement of an audience. Gregson and Rose explain that, "behind Goffman's analyses of interaction lies an active, prior, conscious, and performing self" (Gregson and Rose, 2000: 433). As a result, Goffman conceptualizes performance as staged, and interprets performance as highly theatrical. In contrast, Butler's project was focused on problematizing notions of intention and agency in order to complicate the constitution of gendered subjects, while understanding performativity as discursive: "words, acts, gestures, and desires" (Butler, 1993: 185). Butler does not conceptualize performativity as a *choice* to 'perform' an identity, but rather as the way that signifiers come to be and are normalized through reiteration: "Performativity is thus not a singular "act" for it is always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (Butler, 1993:12). Butler refers to these discursive repetitions as 'citations' through which "discourse produces the effects that it names" (Butler, 1993: xii). Rather than attesting to a natural or inborn character of an individual, for Butler, identity comes into being through reiterative citations, and gender is essentially a performance (or a citation) of all previous performances of gender.

Similarly, Gregson and Rose explain how places come into being through comparable reiterative citations in a process by which, "performances do not take place in already existing locations: the City, the bank, the franchise restaurant, the street. These 'stages' do not preexist their performances, waiting in some sense to be mapped out by performances; rather, specific performances bring these spaces into being" (2000: 441). Performance, understood as such, also bears heavily upon the formation of identity within ICs, in the sense that "place is the raw material for the creative production of identity rather than a prior label of identity. Place provides the conditions of possibility for creative social practice" (Cresswell

2004:39).

Critics of Butler's *performativity* worry that by employing her interpretation of performance without complicating human agency is a mistake, and question whether her version of an abstracted subject leaves room for creativity and human intervention (Nelson, 1999; Rose, 1999). Nelson (1999), specifically, is expressive about the intellectual blunders made by many geographers who have uncritically employed Butler's 'performativity' in ways that evade its more problematic aspects, and inappropriately apply it to their own analysis by assigning it 'agency'. Nelson argues that by reading Butler's definition of performativity as one possessing intention completely misses the point that Butler *depends* on the unintentionality of a subject formed by discourse. For Nelson (1999), to engage the concept of performativity in a way that also engages intentionality and conscious subject formation is not inherently wrong (and perhaps might even be a good idea), but *is* unquestionably an 'incorrect' reading of Butler's theory. In this way, Butlerian performativity does not permit space for the complex ways in which speaking human subjects, located in time and space, do identity: "This point is crucial for geographers because spatially embedded, intentional human practice often lies at the center of our inquiries into identity and space" (Nelson, 1999: 332). In order to resolve this dilemma, scholars critical of the highly abstract nature of Butlerian and postmodernist conceptions of performativity typically propose a project of 'situating' which can bridge postmodern performative theory, Marxist ideas on materialism, as well as resistance and agency.

Fortunately for my project, performativity has been uniquely translated, and productively employed by many scholars before me for a variety of projects which help me to think through the social construction of other useful identity categories (Bell, 1999; Mahtani, 2002; Sundberg, 2004) and the construction of space, place, and geographies of resistance (Gregson and Rose, 2000; Rose, 2002; Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008). I have specifically turned to the traditions of feminist geography and methodologies

to help me make the connections between intentional communities and social critique, along with the performance this entails. Scholars of these traditions suggest a conceptual and interdisciplinary ‘translation’ of performativity which theorizes a more concrete, situated subject (Nelson, 1999; Houston and Pulido, 2002; Mahtani, 2002; Sundberg, 2004). Specifically, Houston and Pulido (2002), Gregson and Rose (2000), and Lise Nelson (1999) have all worked to ‘translate’ the concept of performativity into something functional for a geographer. I find these more geographically grounded deployments of ‘performativity’ – ones that are able to bridge lived daily experiences and agency with those strictly produced in the discursive realm – to be more helpful than the highly abstract readings of ‘performativity’ or the strictly agentic conceptions of a conscious performance.

Houston and Pulido (2002) also offer a translation which highlights the possibility of performativity as a conscious realm of action which can be undertaken at a *collective* scale, but does not limit it to this. The authors consider performance in the context of oppositional, critical, and collective forms of political and social action in order to make connections between “the material production of everyday life and imaginative work as a means of engaging in political action and resistance” (Houston and Pulido, 2002: 402). Further, they are critical of the postmodern lean, which they argue, avoids the everyday practices of ordinary people and leaves the processes of identity formation/resistance to the realms of discourse with “the effect of mystifying material relations and radically reducing the scale of resistance to the site of the individual body, thereby diminishing the power and viability of collective political and social action” (Houston and Pulido, 2002: 404). Here, the authors lay the groundwork to better understand the utility of performativity through a more ‘geographically appropriate’ framework which can be translated in ways that fruitfully investigate the workings of intentional communities as embodied articulations of social critique and collective action.

By insinuating the possibility of agency into performativity, I acknowledge that I deviate from

Butler's performativity. However, this intermingling of intentional performance with that of the citational conceptualization of performativity is not new. For Gregson and Rose the possibilities offered by intermingling performance and performativity theories are expansive. For them, *performance* is "what individual subjects do, say, 'act out' – and *performativity* – is the citational practices which reproduce and/or subvert discourse and which enable and discipline subjects and their performances", but they are not mutually exclusive (Gregson and Rose, 2000: 434). In line with these translations of performance and performativity, the framework utilized in this project involves both the socially critical results of discourse, citationality, and symbolic signifiers, as well as the deliberate conversations and intentional actions ICs undertake as performance. In the realm of discourse, the expressions of social critique emanating from intentional communities are, by way of being 'lived practices', often suggestive gestures. As explained previously, the phenomenon of the intentional community 'social critique' is a processual one, in which actors are not always conscious of the significance of their performances. Daily decision-making is not necessarily rooted in the conscious effort to critique society, and yet in an indirect way, it most often does this very thing. Additionally, in the realm of intentionality, one cannot deny the deliberate acts of social critique that align with Goffman's 'performance' theory. Thus, *performativity* in the context of this project will speak both to the 'implicit' realm of discursive signifiers and reiterative citations, as well as the 'explicit' or outright theatrical expressions of social critique involved in intentional community life. In this way, I re-frame performativity as to avoid foreclosing on the notion that conscious efforts to subvert or displace identity, culture, or society can be effective, while also taking into account the unique process of identity formation and the suggestive manner in which IC critiques seem to unfold.

Because the purpose of this project is also to understand the intentional community phenomenon as one that is inherently 'socially critical', employing this framework becomes particularly useful in deconstructing the variety of routes through which their critiques are expressed. The connections between

performance and social critique became increasingly evident in literature which complicated and/or grounded the theory of performativity. Specifically, Houston and Pulido explain that performativity is “a socially transformative, imaginative, and collective political engagement that works simultaneously as a space of social critique and as a space for creating social change” (2002: 403). Gregson and Rose (2000) also intrinsically connect performance and performativity in a way that suggests community must be thought of as ‘brought into being’ through performances and various performative articulations, but never through one or the other singularly. Ultimately, I suggest that the very idea of ‘intentional community as social critique’ is one hinging upon the capacity of a collective ‘place-making’ endeavor which capitalizes on a matrix of *performance and the performative*.

Place- Based Social Critique: Two Central Critiques

In order to focus the scale of this analysis, I have also identified two critiques that possess thematic dominance across a wide spectrum of literature on intentional communities: (1) a critique of environmental exploitation and (2) a critique of community disintegration and inequality. Together, they address a larger set of interconnected eco-social paradigms that, in the context of intentional communities, are sometimes difficult to differentiate from one another. In fact, it is this marriage of the environmental concerns with those of community building and equality-based collective initiatives which distinguishes the integrated approach of most intentional communities today (Kanter, 1972; Brown, 2002; Kirby, 2003; Lockyer, 2007). With these two themes in mind, one can more easily deconstruct the implications of their critique, the modes through which it is articulated, and the institutions through which it is operationalized.

Foundationally, it is also important to explicate my own understanding and employment of the term “social critique”. In terms of this project, a social critique does not necessitate ‘finding fault with’ (any particular aspect of society (although it may involve this), but rather indicates a form of ‘critical

commentary' - one that is just as likely to be constructive or supportive, as it is to be criticizing. A critique is a way to examine the assumptions within a field of knowledge or experience, to negotiate and re-negotiate with social and cultural norms, and to engage in an analysis that permits the imagination of 'something different'. As in the words of Foucault, "a critique does not consist of saying things aren't good the way they are. It consists of seeing what type of assumption, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based" (Foucault, 2000: 465). That said, the particular critiques I have chosen to analyze for this project both involve expressions of disapproval, as well as a living and performed constructive commentary.

I also suggest that we can better understand ICs if we account for their social critiques in the context of their elastic boundaries which are defined by the relationships of members of one community to members of another, as well as to their larger society. In this way, although they are 'place-based', intentional communities are not isolated entities, but rather overlapping and interacting with larger society, intersecting communities, the nation, and the economy. According to Tania Li Murray (2001), without this understanding, we are likely to create divisive and engineered notions of 'community' that do not take into account the porous interface between community and society operating in reciprocal and conversational ways. Therefore, each intentional community studied in this project will be considered within the wider context of the societies and places in which they function, as well as the ones with which they interact.

Firstly, the critique of environmental exploitation is central to the architecture of most intentional communities in which a 'sustainability' component directs both the physical development of the community, as well as social and consumer practices (Carr, 2004). As they work to live in closer concert with their natural environment and practice more environmentally friendly ways of living, intentional communities are recognized for their experiments with organic and sustainable agriculture as well as 'sustainable' resource use and development. 'Eco village' and 'Sustainable Community' are two of the most

common titles given to intentional communities with an environmental focus, but they are not confined to these labels (Kirby, 2003). In fact, according to Debie Kasper (2008), what sets ecovillages apart from other intentional communities, is simply their explicit emphasis on ecology; in all other ways, ecovillages mirror the framework for ‘what makes an intentional community’. According to Dawson, “The primary gift of ecovillages to the wider sustainability family [is] the impulse to move beyond protest and to create models of more sane, just and sustainable ways of living” (Dawson 2006:38). As a result, although many ecovillages *do* seek a high degree of energy and resource independence, they also do not aspire to become completely self-sufficient or isolated, for they acknowledge the importance of networks and the larger ‘system’. Research also suggest that the ecovillage model is primarily distinguishable from mainstream society by their expanded notion of community and ‘sustainability’ along with the ethics they instill (Van Schyndel Kasper, 2008). Specifically, Kasper (2008) explains that ecovillages are self-reflective and conscious of building their ideals and visions into the physical design of their community, as well as into the daily practices, in an effort towards ‘holistic sustainability’.

In an attempt to challenge competitive or avaricious consumerist practices, intentional communities may also create institutions of ‘collective or collaborative’ decision-making, ownership, and distribution as opposed to hierarchical or stratified power structures (Jason, 1997; Murray, 2002; Pretty, 2003). According to Brown, intentional communities’ emphasis on communal sharing testifies to their critique of capitalism and the inequalities that these individuals perceive as part and parcel to the capitalist economic system (Brown, 2002). Similarly, Sargisson argues that these communities represent the “starting place for a consideration of the roles of the public and the private, property, and relations of the self and other” (Sargisson, 1996: 1). Within this discourse, intentional communities speaks to some of the most challenging dilemmas of our time (Sargisson, 1996; Brown, 2002; Lockyer, 2007).

In any discussion of ‘sustainability’, it is also imperative to acknowledge the highly disputed and

vague nature of the term. Thus, for the context of this project, I will draw upon Fernando's conception of the word, in which he explains, "If one were to provide a generic definition, sustainable development can be said to be meeting the necessity of ensuring a better quality of life for all, now, and into the future, in a just and equitable manner, while living within the limits of supporting ecosystems" (Fernando, 2003: 7). Similarly, for Agyeman (2005), sustainability is a truly 'communitarian' discourse which upholds the prospect of inciting local action and community mobilization towards the ends of environmental 'sustainability'. Agyeman rails against the top-down institutional 'sustainability discourse' and argues that sustainability requires local communities. Fernando (2003) also suggests that, while the metanarrative of a sustainable political economy might be important, we must primarily focus on the 'islands of sustainability' where experiments with "counterhegemonic intellectual and material practices closer to the ideal goals of sustainable development' are taking place" (Fernando, 2003: 14). Carr even argues that interest-based communities such as 'internet communities' "would actually be preferred by the corporate sector since indifference to place exposes local resources to exploitation without resistance" (Carr, 2004: 27) Thus, the place-based critiques enacted by sustainability oriented intentional communities become increasingly interesting as scholars seek to better understand the role of place-based communities in embodying a counter-narrative.

Secondly, the social and political articulations of intentional communities frequently take shape as a struggle against community disintegration, inequality, alienation, and isolation by working to build intimate environments of mutual consideration and collaboration. Scholars suggest that, inherent to the course of modern 'development' is a set of socially segregating, hierarchical, and alienating paradigms. Even further, in capitalist societies, economic and social practices which privilege the 'individual' as well as the 'single-family unit' are said to degrade the important characteristics of community interdependence, cooperation, and mutuality by encouraging competition and exploitation instead (Kanter, 1972; Putnam, 2000; Brown,

2002; Bellah, 2008). To address this concern, intentional communities generally work to provide material and psychological safety, security, and institutionalized social equalizers in order to eliminate the need for competition or individually exclusive interests (Kanter, 1972; Brown, 2002). Kirby notes that in his own research, as well as in that of his predecessors, there exists a consistent theme in which members of intentional communities seek to evolve an ethic of commitment to one another and the natural environment in a manner that shifts the focus from their individualistic pursuits towards their connectedness to humanity and the earth (Kirby, 2003).

Utopias and the Utopian Imagination

Lastly, any analysis of the intentional community phenomenon cannot ignore the common, and often controversial, attribute ascribed to most intentional communities: a ‘utopian imagination’. Intentional communities in all their varieties typically uphold lofty or ‘utopian’ goals and visions that evolve in alignment with shifting concerns of the modern day. In this project, the endeavor is understood as an aspirational and deeply self-critical practice in which utopian ideals are experienced and rooted in the moral belief that one must ‘practice what they preach’. In fact, self reflective and critical engagements with utopian ideals are signature of communal endeavors and contemporary forms of intentional communities. Olsen et al. argue that the study of intentional communities represents a wealth of utopian information in regards to “how to best collaboratively work to build shared goals, mutual help orientations, positive communications, and thereby strengthen norms of diversity and universality.

In contrast to the admittedly ‘utopian’ precepts of many intentional communities, there are also a large number of intentional communities rejecting such labels, despite their similar aspirations; many narratives expressed by intentional communities that do not identify as ‘utopian’ continue to speak of utopian ideals such as universality, brotherhood, healing, consensus, and unity (Olsen et al., 2009). They

also often emphasize their imperfect reality in which conflict and intolerances exist all the time. Ultimately, it seems that the nuance is in ones translation of ‘utopianism’, and the perceived utility in upholding these idealizations, that often remain in the realm of aspiration.

There is also an undeniable set of negative connotations attached to the term ‘utopia’ that make it less attractive, due to its employment in a series of historically controversial attempts at changing culture and society. Russell Jacoby specifically explains the waning utopian imagination through three central historical events: the collapse of the communist states, the conflation of utopianism and totalitarianism, and the “incremental impoverishment of what might be called Western imagination” (Jacoby, 2005: 9). In response, many scholars suggest that we should work to better ‘define’ utopianism, and place borders around it which protect the term from its more violent detractors such as Nazism or Stalinism (Harvey, 2000; Jacoby, 2005; Olsen et al, 2009). Nonetheless, Jacoby concedes, “No one can jump over his or her historical shadow. Any study of the utopian spirit must engage its current status” (Jacoby, 2005: 9).

Scholars also attribute the general disregard for utopian idealism and its dwindling force in the modern imagination to the discourse of ‘practicality’ (Fernando, 2003). To this point, many argue that it is a large *misperception* of utopianism to assume that one must demonstrate the qualities of perfection, or even articulate the desire to achieve the ‘perfect’ society in order to be deemed utopian. In fact, the term ‘utopia’ was first coined by Sir Thomas More to reference his critique of theocratic domination in England, and is termed to describe the “desire for an ideal society, the *impossibility* of realizing it, and the tension thus generated” (Lockyer, 2007; More, 1997 (1516)). Thus, the term utopia is said to identify the basic tensions between reality and idealism, suggesting that one can at least *endeavor* to overcome this tension, while never denying its fundamental existence. In this way, utopianism is in fact a prospective and aspirational lens through which the discourse of human potential and alternative paradigms for development and sustainability may emerge. In the context of ICs, Scher argues that the point is not to look to ICs as models

for perfection, but rather, to look to them for what they offer as alternatives and radical juxtapositions to life in mainstream society. Scher explain that ICs are at once of, and not of, society and that it is this liminal space which allows for meaningful experimentation with utopian ideals that can both challenge and offer alternatives to society at large (Scher, 1997)

Fernando (2003) and Harvey (2000), argue that a utopian vision, in combination with practical community-based initiatives founded on eco and social justice centered paradigms, are also an essential preface to creating the necessary conditions for sustainable development. This requires the willingness to engage in a counterhegemonic utopian vision that is structured differently from the one that underpins capitalist accumulation, and which actively experiments with this vision in the context of community (Agyemen and Evans, 2002). In fact, Harvey (2000) argues that the free-market is itself a version of utopia; today a neoliberal utopian ideal. Harvey questions why it is that neoliberal and capitalist modes of development are treated today as a 'natural state' as opposed to a discourse riddled with utopian idealism of its own kind, i.e. infinite material abundance and freedom. In fact, Harvey argues that all ideals or aspirations look beyond reach - democracy, equality, and the proverb "freedom for all"— and are all in this sense utopian. Specifically, Harvey highlights the possibility of spatial and temporal utopias'; those produced in concrete space and those performed over time, as process and practice. Intentional communities in this sense, demonstrate both attributes of what Harvey considers 'utopian', and embody collective movements towards change which operate as 'spatiotemporal utopia's' (Harvey, 2000).

Harvey's emphasis on process and practice in the unfolding of a spatiotemporal utopia is a defining attribute of this framework, in which the end goal is less important than the process through which it is *aspired* to. In this sense, counter-utopia's (such as intentional communities) operate in ways that fundamentally disrupt the established order of things, and involve a set of beliefs and practices that are reactions to existing socio-cultural conditions which might eventually serve as inspiration for social

innovation or change (Fox, 1989). According to Susan Brown, intentional community members work to craft alternatives to their perceived problems in society because, “When the rules and understanding that once served them well no longer apply – they turn away from their existing communities and toward intentional community with an eye toward setting things right in a more intimate setting” (Brown, 2002: 6).

Just as ‘place-making’ is a process, so too is the notion of utopia. In a very similar manner to the processual expressions of the built environment, the entire project of intentional community can be considered as reiterative performances of idealistic striving; or as Aurovilians frequently expressed, ‘*aspiration*’. Similarly, Olsen et al. (2009) found in their psychological research of intentional communities, that participants frequently expressed utopian narratives of universality, brotherhood, and acceptance, while never meaning to imply an experience of ‘perfection’. In my own research, I have come to a very similar conclusion about the ideals of intentional community living, and the conflicting notions of ‘utopia as process’ versus the building of a ‘perfect society’. I argue that it is a large misperception of utopianism to assume that one must demonstrate the qualities of perfection, or even articulate the desire to achieve the ‘perfect’ society to be deemed utopian. I thus complicate the common reading of ‘utopia’ as a state of operational perfection, and instead consider the term descriptive of the daily processes through which the individuals and the collective strive towards manifesting a set of ideals that align with their inner aspirations and the collective goals of transformation.

The term ‘utopia’ also held different connotations on Kashi and Auroville. In Auroville, residents seemed accepting of the notion of utopia and the ways it applied to their mission, whereas in Kashi, the discourse of utopia was generally rejected. Aurovilians past and present acknowledge their journey as a ‘utopian’ one’ while grounded in the knowing that ‘perfection is forever in the future’. In contrast, members of Kashi typically regard the label as ‘inappropriate’ for their purposes. Interestingly, in one

interview, a Kashi member illustrated the precise discrepancies in interpretation of the term ‘utopia’:

“Utopian doesn’t work with Kashi because it distracts from Kashi’s direction. If Kashi was actually trying to reach what this utopian idea would be, it would lose sight of what its real goals are. I think Kashi is so amazing BECAUSE everyone is looking at themselves internally and trying to make themselves that kind of heightened person. And in reaction to that, as those changes happen inside of them they are better with each other and better with the interaction with visitors and being more open and giving and expressive. This is because they are so focused on the internal connection. So if you call it Utopian it’s almost like you are looking at this big picture of the whole community. Where as I think it is their focus on their inner journey that makes the community so great.”

Taking these sentiments into account, I suspect that if utopia is understood in the context of ‘process’, or as an ‘internal aspiration’, members of Kashi might reconsider the awkward label.

Although Kashi and Auroville regard the term ‘utopia’ very differently, it is evident that they each aspire to high ideals and attempt to create an alternative existence or a ‘better’ society within the bounds of their own communities. Despite the differences in vocabulary, the values of each community align and practice many of the same fundamental precepts geared towards creating a *more* ‘perfect’ micro-society. Further, members of both intentional communities made it clear that they feel that they are called to cultivating new visions and paradigms in their own lives and for future generations. I therefore recognize these intentional communities as utopian projects and understand the notion of ‘utopianism’ through the lens of practice, performance, and aspiration. Here, intentional communities are one form of embodied utopian aspiration and experimentation that can offer important insights into the theoretical compatibility of these visions with lived reality.

Conclusion

To date, most research on intentional community building has focused on utopian theory, charismatic leadership, communalism (resource sharing), historical analyses or contextualization, and religion. Few have observed the phenomena as a ‘place-based critique’, and none using the lens of critical geography. Through this lens, I work to ask fundamentally critical questions in order to translate their more

lofty and utopian precepts into legible indicators of change: what does it look like, sound like, and feel like to have aspirational and socially critical principles embedded into an organizational community? Typically, interdisciplinary scholars have concurred on the utopian objectives of intentional communities, yet in regards to their purposes for such an undertaking, their ability to articulate and operationalize their critiques, and the effects of such efforts, scholars come to vastly different conclusions. In light of this fissure, my research builds from these theorizations on the premise that intentional communities are of increasing relevance to contemporary social and environmental concerns, and offers a dynamic setting for diverse and critical research inquiries. Ultimately, this analysis works to empirically deconstruct both the explicit and implicit forms of critique expressed by this form of place-making, as well as understand the impacts this has on the individual lives of participants and the collective.

Chapter # 3

Site Descriptions

(1) Auroville

Auroville was founded in 1968 in Tamil Nadu, India and now has approximately 2,200 full time residents. Auroville's inception was encouraged by both the government of India and UNESCO as a social experiment in 'human unity', and has functioned as a research site into collectivism, environmentally conscious living and alternative economic, cultural, social, and spiritual paradigms ever since. As prelude to an analysis of contemporary Auroville, I retreat to the past to build a historical framework through which the reader can understand the conceptual underpinnings of their modern project. To do so, I first outline the beliefs of their founders and spiritual/philosophical guru's: Sri Aurobindo and The Mother (Mirra Alfassa). While Auroville was designed and officially founded by The Mother, it is modeled on the integrative philosophy and teachings on human evolution of the twentieth-century philosopher and mystic, Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo was born 'Aurobindo Ghose' in Calcutta on August 15th, 1872. Aurobindo was educated in England, and later attended Kings College, Cambridge. He did not return to India until 1893, at which point he took up a position as a professor at Baroda College (n.a. Sri Aurobindo, 1999). Aurobindo began exploring yogic practice in 1905, and soon after moved to Calcutta where he became a leader in the Indian Nationalist Movement (Jones, 2006). In 1910, he withdrew from his political life, and took up residence in Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, where he became the teacher and spiritual guru of many. Aurobindo remained in Pondicherry for the next forty years, where he evolved his own philosophy of yoga (Integral Yoga), founded the Sri Aurobindo Ashram (in collaboration with The Mother), and wrote many seminal yogic pieces including *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, and *Savitri*. He was joined by his spiritual collaborator, Mirra Alfassa or 'The Mother', in 1920, and later passed away on December 5th 1950 (n.a. Sri Aurobindo, 1999).

In light of the prolific nature and vastness of Aurobindo's writings, it is difficult to distill his philosophies within the scope of this project. However, as Shinn elucidated, Aurobindo's central contributions to Auroville specifically, can be summarized into four central insights:

"First, he concluded from his several visionary experiences that there exists at the core of physical and psychic reality a divine, feminine energy he simply calls Shakti or 'the Mother'; second, he asserted that all beings are evolving in a progressive way toward a transformed consciousness which will participate in and reflect the divine energy latent in all beings; third, Aurobindo's notion of the 'descent of the Supermind' proposed that the evolution of humankind requires transformation of matter such that both body and mind, physical world and consciousness are inextricably joined in the evolutionary process; and fourth, Aurobindo suggested that through spiritually alert working in the world (integral yoga), evolutionary progress may be hastened towards its inevitable end of human transformation" (Shinn, 1984: 240).

Most central to Aurobindo's philosophy was the concept of 'Divine Consciousness', often referred to in both his own writings, and those drawn out for the conceptual framework of Auroville itself. For Aurobindo, the Divine is directly linked to concept of 'Shakti', or 'feminine energy':

"Trust the Divine Power and she will free the godlike elements in you and shape all into an expression of Divine Nature. The supramental change is a thing decreed and inevitable in the evolution of earth-consciousness" (Sri Aurobindo, 1929: 61).

According to Aurobindo, Mira Alfassa embodied the principle of the 'Divine Mother' and was thus given her name 'The Mother'. The concept of Divine Consciousness is also at the base of Aurobindo's teachings on 'integral yoga' which largely inform the community of Auroville:

"This yoga accepts the value of cosmic existence and holds it to be a reality; its object is to enter into a higher Truth-Consciousness or Divine Supramental Consciousness in which action and creation are the expression not of ignorance and imperfection, but of the Truth, the Light, the Divine Ananda (Bliss). But for that, the surrender of the mortal mind, life and body to the Higher Consciousness is indispensable, since it is too difficult for the mortal human being to pass by its own effort beyond mind to a Supramental Consciousness in which the dynamism is no longer mental but of quite another power. Only those who can accept the call to such a change should enter into this yoga" (Aurobindo in Pandit, 1992).

Although Sri Aurobindo's 'integrative' philosophy inspires the Auroville's ethos, it was in fact his collaborator, The Mother, who is credited with the instigation of the Auroville project.

The Mother was born, Blanche Rachel Mirra Alfassa, in Paris, France 1878 (n.a. The Mother, 20014). As a child, The Mother reported having frequent and transformative spiritual experiences. She was also a very gifted artist, studied studio art, and later became a part of an exclusive Parisian art scene. She married

at age nineteen, and had one son a year later. The Mother later divorced her first husband in 1908, and began leading mystical thought groups, writing about her spiritual realizations, and teaching students and seekers. The Mother did not meet Sri Aurobindo until 1914, when her second husband, Paul Richard, brought her with him to Pondicherry. Reportedly, the Mother instantly recognized Sri Aurobindo as a mentor she had encountered in earlier visions, and eventually moved to Pondicherry to be with him in 1920. The Mother never left her residence in Pondicherry until her death in 1973 at age 95. It was also from this post that 'Mirra Alfassa' first came to be known as 'The Mother'. Here, she taught side-by-side Sri Aurobindo and organized their students into the official 'Sri Aurobindo Ashram' in 1926. Much later, in 1968, The Mother became the driving force behind the manifestation of Auroville. In fact, the idea for the creation of the township was birthed in a dream The Mother had in which she explained:

“There should be somewhere upon earth, a place no nation would claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of goodwill, sincere in their aspiration could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of supreme truth, a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his suffering and miseries... a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions” (A Dream: Envisioning and Ideal Society, n.d.).

Ultimately, Auroville is considered a collaboration between The Mother, Sri Aurobindo, and the 'Divine'. According to the Auroville website, “Under the shaping influence of the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's dual philosophies, Auroville emerges as a unique, multi-cultural confluence where matter and spirit, the individual and the collective meet in the search for a higher consciousness” (n.a. The Mother, 2014). Today, Auroville's charter and mission statement are as follows:

Auroville Charter¹:

- 1. Auroville belongs to nobody in particular. Auroville belongs to humanity as a whole. But to live in Auroville, one must be a willing servitor of the Divine Consciousness.*
- 2. Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages.*

¹ The Mother. 1985. Mother's Birth Centenary Library. Vol. XIII. All India Books. Pondicherry. pp. 199-200

3. *Auroville wants to be the bridge between the past and the future. Taking advantage of all discoveries from without and from within, Auroville will boldly spring towards future realizations.*
4. *Auroville will be a site of material and spiritual researches for a living embodiment of an actual Human Unity.*

Mission Statement²:

“Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realize human unity”.

Auroville was initially constructed on a 2-kilometer square patch of barren desert along the southeastern coastline along the Coromandel Coast of India about five miles north of Pondicherry. The location of Auroville also has a meaningful history. The story goes that The Mother placed her finger on a map of India and declared that there was a tree which would be the center of a new town called “Auroville”. Today, that very tree – a banyan tree – to which The Mother pointed decades ago from her room on the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, lay at the (near) center of Auroville (Sullivan, 1994).

There is another parallel legend among the local villagers, which recounts that centuries ago, there lived a powerful Yogi³ who put a curse on the local lands which caused them to dry up. Although he refused to remove the curse, he did promise that with time, people from distant lands would come one day and ‘reforest’ or ‘re-green’ the area (Sullivan, 1994). As predicted, today, the land that was once recognized for its hot, dry, cracked earth, is in fact now a high yielding, tropical, (somewhat) sustainable community. Thus, for both Aurovilians and some villagers, the story of Auroville is also one of destiny.

Tellingly, the early ‘settlers’ are most often referred to as pioneers; a term aptly evocative of the spirit and determination required of the early Aurovillian’s who were confronted with desert like conditions yet armed with utopian aspiration. Their relationships with the local Tamil villagers at this time was allegedly a

² N.A. Auroville, City of Dawn. Retrieved from: <http://www.auroville.org/>

³ A “yogi” is defined most basically as ‘a practitioner of yoga’, but may also imply an ascetic practice of renunciation, meditation, and yogic performance.

generally positive one, in which the villagers remained mostly in awe of the audacity of ‘strange’ westerners attempting such dramatic feats and subsisting in such harsh conditions. As the land became increasingly habitable through various projects including the replanting of tree’s, small damming projects, and water management systems, Auroville became better equipped to take on more creative and wide ranging projects. However, as many long time Aurovillian’s expressed, this has also come with a price which has taxed the sense of unity, collaboration, and trust among Aurovillian’s. One life-long Aurovillian explained:

“Well we don’t feel it like we used to feel it when we were only 500. In the past there were two filters that helped us maintain the sense that we were a “body” as a community. These were the natural environment and its hardships, as well as the fact that we were only around 500 individuals. Now the hardship factor doesn’t exist and we are large. So there are no filters and you feel like I’m not sure of what peoples Real motives are for being here? The trust is unclear. Are they hiding from the West? Are they here because it’s easy and you get three meals a day? Before you wouldn’t be here unless you were completely enthused by the Dream because it wasn’t comfortable! So even if you didn’t like someone you had respect for them because they were HERE.” - Aurovilian

During Auroville's formative years, from 1968 to 1973, The Mother also directly guided the project. Aurovilians typically described these years as a period in which The Mother redirected energies in a positive direction, maintaining a balance among Aurovilians. After her passing in 1973, residents described a long phase of feeling lost and mired in negativity. A primary source of these sentiments was the fact that soon after her passing in 1973, Auroville was launched into a decade of conflict with the Sri Aurobindo Society who claimed that they had the rights to control the project of Auroville. The Sri Aurobindo Society is the social and educational organization affiliated with the Sri Aurobindo ashram. While she was alive, The Mother had directed the society, and entrusted it with the legal elements of Auroville. With The Mother gone, the management, assets, policies, and development of Auroville were all claimed by the Sri Aurobindo Society. While this was not an inherently bad situation for Auroville, it was the fact that the residents of Auroville became increasingly suspicious of the societies management which caused the disruption. Residents believed that the society was severely mismanaging Auroville, as well as engaged in criminal activities. This ‘battle’ went on until 1980 when it was ‘technically resolved’ with a Supreme

Court ruling of the 'Auroville Emergency Provision Act'. This act was declared to manage the affairs and administration of Auroville under the auspices of the Supreme Court of India and to guarantee that Auroville and its assets "belonged to humanity". This act eventually led to the Auroville Foundation Act of 1988, through which Auroville was placed under the administrative control of the Ministry of Human Resource Development as an 'autonomous' body under the Government of India. The generation of this body allowed for Auroville to organize formal arrangements for the management and development of Auroville in alignment with its original charter. Their location under the wing of Human Resource Development also establishes them as a 'government administered educational institution' through which they may receive annual funds from the government and through which they are administered by a central financial body that gives grants to various units across Auroville (Sullivan, 1994). The Act also instituted three authorities to govern Auroville: (1) the Governing Board which oversees the general management of Auroville, (2) the International Advisory Council which is intended to advise the Governing Board from a position of international insight, and (3) the Residents Assembly, which is made up of all residents who are 18 years and older. The Central Government of India also appoints an individual from the Indian Administrative Service as the 'Secretary' to manage the day-to-day needs of the Foundation.

In the early stages of planning Auroville, The Mother had also selected a particular architect, Roger Anger, to design the material manifestation of the community. Anger's design for Auroville is called the Galaxy Model, "in which several 'arms' or Lines of Force seem to unwind from a central region" (N.A. The Galaxy concept of the City, 2014). However, as the project progressed and certain material limitations emerged, Anger's plan became highly disputed territory among Aurovilians. It was not until 1988, when the Auroville Foundation Act was passed, that Roger Anger returned to clarify that "he had never intended the original Galaxy model to be manifested in all its details; the details had only been included "to give a sense of completion". Suddenly there was a new spirit of flexibility and cooperation in the air" (*The Auroville*

Experience, 2006: 46). Today, the physical geography of Auroville very loosely resembles a spherical shape in which numerous housing projects and “zones” have been designated to cater to various aspects of Aurovilian life. Five central zones currently divide the community into residential, industrial, international, cultural, and green belt zones (the green belt zone itself has three main zones of use: agriculture, farming, and forest and land regeneration). Although the dignity of these zones or their boundary lines have not been completely upheld, they do offer some insight into developmental patterns of the community.

Economy on Auroville operates through their ‘Central Fund’ which is upheld by businesses on Auroville who contribute a 33% tax, private donors, individual tax of Rs. 1500/month from every resident, monthly contributions from guests and guest houses, and a portion of returns on the deposits managed by the Auroville Maintenance fund (Auroville, Internal Economy, 2014). The Central Fund in turn also supports many community services and activities such as: community kitchens, farms, health services, information centers, electricity, administration, dental care, roads and traffic management, education, and more. Commerce on Auroville is centrally made up of what they call ‘commercial units’ as well as the income generated through tourism. Income generating “trusts” which are a part of the Auroville Foundation are vested with the coordination and organization of the activities of commercial units in Auroville and group them on thematic lines. Commercial units are businesses involved in a range of activities including: arts and crafts, languages, food processing, restaurants, sustainable energy and research, architecture, electronics and computer systems, music, travel, and clothing boutiques. Personal economy also operates through Auroville’s central fund, and instead of tangible currency, residents use their account numbers to connect to their central account. Aurovilians are supported through what they call the maintenance system. Maintenance is a monthly stipend that all working Aurovilians should receive and provides just enough money for essentials, and is sourced from the ‘Central Fund’ of Auroville. Visitors also create an account with the Auroville bank and use a temporary card (Aurocard) to purchase items or

meals in the community (N.A. Internal Economy, 2014).

Auroville's promotional material also explains that they focus heavily on sustainable living and integrating environmental consciousness into its growth by using innovative environmental design, architecture, and technology. The tenets of Auroville are rooted in the concept that consciousness develops through unity of the mind, body, and nature. Thus, Auroville claims that social consciousness in the community is geared towards sustainable and green living. They are world renowned for their endeavors in innovative sustainable design and green technologies, as well as the ways in which they have integrated social life into their environmental design.

Cosmopolitanism is another signature quality of Aurovillian life, as it continues to be a mecca for westerners, diasporic South Asians, spiritual aspirants, students of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo, and artists and researchers from around the world. Auroville's membership is constituted by individuals from a multitude of social and religious backgrounds who have chosen to reside together, not in an effort to conform to a singular normalcy, but to embrace their differences in the way described by the adage, "unity in diversity". The governing structure of Auroville has also been designed to uphold the dignity of their aspiration for transparency, equality, and 'human unity', and is thus based on non-hierarchical structures: *"There is no fixed formal hierarchical structure in the internal organization of Auroville. At present, the day-to-day running of the township is in the hands of various working groups whose members are selected by the community through a recognized process. These groups, covering areas like community coordination, city planning, finance, education, green work, health, etc., operate with a considerable degree of autonomy. Major decisions are usually taken at meetings open to all residents or through the Residents Assembly decision making process"* (N.A., Decision Making by the Residents Assembly). Specifically, consensus is used in the Residents Assembly; an assembly that consists of all residents over age 18, and is vested with the powers to advise their governing board, make proposals, vote on community related issues, and grant or terminate

Aurovilian residencies, among other things.

There are also four different categories under which one might live on Auroville: 1) An Aurovilian, 2) A Newcomer, 3) Student, 4) Relative/Partner, 5) Friend of Auroville. In order to manage the entry process into Auroville, the Auroville Foundation Act also created a body called the Entry Service. This group registers and manages all applications and assists the Newcomers, any returning Aurovilians, and relatives and friends of Aurovilians with their entry process into Auroville. Becoming an Aurovilian takes place through a multi-stage process during which the applicant is expected to familiarize themselves with Aurovilian life, create relationships with other residents, experience life and work on Auroville in a year long 'experimental phase', and work through all of the necessary legal work it might take for the applicant to migrate to Auroville (particularly if they are an international migrant). According to the Auroville website, the Auroville Entry Service determines the ultimate admission status of the applicant but "will take decisions based on well-informed and reasoned feedback received from the residents" (Internal Organisation, n.d.), so that the admission of new members is streamlined by their central body, and yet mostly an open forum.

At first glance, the relationship between Aurovilians and the local Tamil villagers also reads like a storybook tale of neo-colonialism. However, nothing about this interaction is simple, and on the ground, the dangers of a single story become increasingly obvious. The shifting relationship between Auroville and the local Tamil culture over their forty-year history is a complex storyline that entails a variety of narratives including differences in deep seeded cultural values, political skirmishes, successful entrepreneurial partnerships, numerous and ongoing confrontations over land acquisition, cultural and religious assimilations, intellectual exchanges, and even joint memberships. This said, its complexity is beyond the scope of this analysis, as it would require the attention of its very own research project to do it any justice. What is important to highlight here however is the fundamental fact Auroville has not developed in isolation

from its larger community or its influences, and non-native Aurovilians and local Tamil's have undoubtedly shaped a burgeoning hybrid community that envelops both Auroville 'proper' and also the surrounding communities and the villages it engages with.

In its early days, Auroville was often referred to as the "City of Dawn", "City of Human Unity", "City of the Future", and other similar nicknames evoking a city expected to be a utopia of sorts. Although these projections were abundant in the early days, today they are rarely referred to in discussions on 'what is Auroville' as the phase of "enthusiastic future projections, utopian reveries, and unbounded expectations" has generally come to an end (Wickenden, 1980: 8). Instead, today, what one finds in Auroville is a dramatic diversity of material expectations and visions for the future, which perhaps only remain bounded by their most fundamental aspiration for 'human unity', a desire for self-transformation, and by the basic principles outlined by The Mother. Shinn (1984) explains that this is a natural evolution for a community rooted in The Mother's vision, which never detailed a plan for the city, but instead only provided general *process* guidelines. For him, "Just as the philosophy of Aurobindo detailed a progressive evolution of humankind through a 'spiritualization' of matter to full 'supermanhood', so too the Mother's vision of Auroville was process-oriented from the beginning" (Shinn, 1984: 243).

(2) Kashi

Kashi is an interfaith spiritual community founded in 1976, with approximately 150 full time residents. Kashi's charter explicitly commits itself to interfaith practice and dialogue, envisioning a world in which all are treated with kindness, dignity and respect. Kashi's founder and visionary was a woman called "Ma" who acted as the matriarch, leader, and spiritual guide of the community until her death in April, 2012. It was her vision of a spiritually interfaith, humanitarian driven, and inclusive community upon which Kashi and its mission were established. Similar to the realities of Auroville, in order to understand the conceptual

underpinnings of Kashi, one must also understand the background and beliefs of their founder and spiritual guide, Ma.

Ma was born 'Joyce Greene' in Brooklyn NY, 1940. She married at age 15, had three children, and resided in Brooklyn as a mother and house maker for the following fifteen years. It was not until Ma was in her early thirties that she experienced her 'spiritual awakening'. Subsequent to her realizations, Ma's journey moved rapidly. During the early phases of her 'awakening', she reported mystical experiences of many different teachers and spiritual lineages, leading her to embrace a tradition of interfaith. Eventually, her emphasis on the 'truths' that underlie all spiritual paths came to inform her vision for the community of Kashi. Prior to establishing Kashi, Ma continued to reside in New York, teach meditation and her spiritual discourse to a growing number of students, and travel around the United States offering spiritual retreats. In 1976, Ma moved to Sebastian, Florida with a number of her students and established 'Kashi' (which at the time was called "Kashi Ranch" and later became "Kashi Ashram"). From the grounds of Kashi, Ma developed her own yoga system (Kali Natha Yoga), became well known for her advocacy work related to HIV/AIDS, authored many books, opened a school (The River School), became a prolific artist whose paintings were exhibited in galleries around the world, and grew the community of Kashi into what is now an 80 acre intentional community. From the beginning of her public ministry, Ma also began officiating 'spiritual unions' between homosexual partners. This practice led Ma to envision Kashi as "a place of refuge for people that others shun, especially people with terminal disease such as AIDS or with non-heterosexual orientations" (N.A. Social Activist, 2012). Her message also inspired the sprouting of many other 'urban ashrams' around the United States in cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and more. According to the Kashi website, Ma essentially taught that "divinity is ultimately beyond words and without form, and yet manifests in countless ways to lead us to liberation. She embraced an interfaith approach, believing that all paths of love lead to the truth. She offered the example of a spiritual path alive with love, faith,

creativity, service, and the rituals of many traditions. Emphasizing individual spiritual growth, she taught seekers at all levels and did not ask her students to follow any particular set of doctrines or beliefs” (n.a. Who is Ma Jaya, 2012).

When Kashi was founded, there were just seven acres and two houses. Over the years the property grew to include 80 acres and 5 main houses in which residents live communally. For Kashi, establishing themselves in middle of Indian River County, Florida in the 1970's brought challenges to the community they would have not otherwise faced in many more liberal parts of the country. As one early Kashi member explained, *“When we came to Kashi in the late 1970's, it felt like the 50's! There was so much overt bigotry, the KKK was burning crosses on our lawn, etc.”* At the time, Indian River County, and particularly the town of Sebastian (in which Kashi is situated), was an unlikely location for the interfaith community, but it was also not an accident. Speaking to Kashi's incongruous location, one resident explained, *“Sure we could have gone to California because we would have had an easy life. There are a lot of communities like us out there, people would have understood etc. But how do you make an impact in that way? SO the reason we are here was to make an impact on this area.”*

Although an ‘impact’ was perhaps the ambition, insularity was also the initial response to the conditions of their larger community in the early years. It was not until the late 1980's the, when AIDS epidemic had peaked, homophobic sentiments were growing more violent, and the denial and negativity around these issues throughout the state of Florida enlivened the small community to a more ‘outwardly’ engaged and activist role in their larger community. It was during this time that the community began administering ceremonial ‘gay marriages’, opened a hospice for adult's with AIDS as well as an orphanage for children with the virus, welcomed children with AIDS into their on-site private school, and conducted local fundraisers, protests, and campaigns for AIDS awareness, the LGBTQ community, and human rights.

Entering into the later 1990's and early 2000's, Kashi began to reach a wider national and global audience with their participation in global interfaith networks, the parliament of the worlds religions, participation in AIDS related campaigns and projects, and other human rights issues. Where Kashi began to develop international allies and a reputable status among the LGBTQ, AIDS activist, and interfaith alliance communities, their immediate community continued to be a point of tension and controversy. Specifically, Kashi was facing an even more pronounced and ongoing allegation, one that most projects of this kind have at one time or another faced in the West: charges of 'cult' behavior and brain-washing. Today, Kashi also continues to suffer from a somewhat 'mysterious image' mired in controversy, rumor, and bad or uninformed press, and yet maintains a growing number of global and local allies at the same time:

"Now I also think the local community has lightened up and changed also. I think they are more accepting in general. There is still great intolerance too. But yet, paradoxically there is more acceptance...but that is the whole country right now. There is a polarity that is happening."

Overall, it appears that Kashi's relationships continue to be complex, but improving. Generally, members of Kashi seemed optimistic about their relationship to their immediate Floridian community, and either unconcerned or fairly certain of their good standing with the wider national and global communities.

Over the last 5 years Kashi has also been implementing a planned development for the entire 80-acre property. As part of the overall development plan, Kashi has allocated land for residential lots for sale to people interested in building their home in the Village of Kashi. Their 'development' plan attempted to take into account the entire ecosystem in which Kashi exists, and specifically designated 30 of Kashi's 80 acres as protected wetlands along with some additional uplands to protect sensitive habitats. In the design of their project, Kashi also tracked the progress of improvements or changes made to their land since the 1900's in a way that accounts for humanity in the definition of 'ecology'. The development plan was subsequently designed in light of these findings in order to enhance the natural landscape and leave the buildings as mere punctuations (where possible). In addition to the environmental aspects of sustainability,

Kashi examined their economic diversity (low income to upper income), racial and religious diversity, and the makeup of their larger social networks. According to Kashi's CEO, it was important to Kashi for them to understand their state of diversity, and to manufacture an environment that was truly integrated and 'welcoming to all'.

In 2012, younger members of Kashi began a sustainability project and organization called "Sustainable Kashi" with the goal of integrating their 80 acres into a productive and sustainable unit guided by the principles of permaculture. Sustainable Kashi also "seeks to provide an environment in which sustainable living can be experienced, fostered, and observed". To do so, they are establishing year-round producing gardens, a food forest, and exploring alternative energies. Parallel to the Sustainable Kashi project, another 'youth initiative' emerged in 2014 called 'The Eco Project'. Concretely, The Eco Project involves the rearing of goats for milk, chickens for eggs, and both for their natural contributions to their eco system around them. This project is also guided by certain principles of permaculture and is:

"Working towards a better understanding and appreciation of our (Kashi's) environment and the other living things that are sharing it with us. We provide the opportunity for people to learn about our ecosystem (animals being the main focus) first hand... By facilitating this deeper connection and understanding of other living things, we are planting the seed of care for all beings; this project's success is/will be very relevant to the spirit of Kashi" (Eco Project Newsletter, 2014).

Both Sustainable Kashi and The Eco Project provide the community of Kashi with 50% of what they either harvest or their animals produce: vegetable crops, fruit, herbs, eggs, milk, etc. The other half of their products are sold to local markets and wider community members for profit. Kashi as a community also practices vegetarianism, making the contributions of both of these projects comprehensive contributions to the Kashi diet.

At Kashi, the concept of *satsang*⁴ further informs their understanding of community to include the search for truth. They claim to foster an environment of acceptance, belonging, personal growth, healing, and self-discovery in order to combat the ‘longing for community’ they observe in their wider society as well as offer what they call “a vacation from hate”. In an effort to demonstrate their commitment to progress, Kashi emphasizes that with each new generation, their community continues to learn and evolve along with their search for ‘truth’.

Although Kashi was founded soon after Auroville, for this research project it will be considered and viewed as a budding community in comparison to the internationally established Auroville. Just as the physical size and scale of Kashi as a community is much smaller in contrast to Auroville, so too is the size of their material aspirations. Nonetheless, Kashi has been undergoing intensive changes following the passing of their founder, Ma. Debates on their ‘mission and vision’, their prospective goals, and their identity are pertinent to this transition. In some ways, Kashi has been looking towards a more ‘global’ vision for their community as they open their doors to more and more individuals and organizations, and consider how they might participate in more international conversations and activism relevant to their ideals and value systems. In other ways, they have embraced a more localized or ‘domestic’ approach to developing their community through the eco-oriented projects of Sustainable Kashi and The Eco Project. Overall, the only thing that is certain is that Kashi, since Ma’s passing, has been tossed into the hands of transformation, expansion, and reflection.

Conclusion

In both Kashi and Auroville, I observed a set of distinct, space transgressing impulses for IC living, which applied to everyone I interviewed in this project, as well as to those in secondary sourced research I

⁴ “Satsang” in Indian philosophy means (1) the company of the ‘highest truth’ (2) the company of a guru, or (3) company with an assembly of persons who listen to, talk about, and assimilate the truth.

reference throughout the course of this project (Lockyer, 2007; Forster and Wilhemus, 2005; Bohill 2004; Kanter, 1972). Although these four factors do not encompass the whole variety of motivations, they are the select four that were most consistent amongst the communities, and in alignment with most other intentional community findings. These decision-making factors involved one or more of the following, and not always (but often) in this order:

- 1) Commitment to and desire for self-transformation.
- 2) Commitment to the spiritual beliefs, values, and/or practices of the community; typically with some sort of allegiance to a specific spiritual leader, although not necessarily affiliated with any one religion.
- 3) The desire to be a member of an intimate community or network in which deep relationships are fostered and families can be created.
- 4) The desire to lead a more socially and environmentally conscious lifestyle not typically available in mainstream rural or urban environments.

As a result of these foundational impulses, both Kashi and Auroville stand as starkly conspicuous monuments of multi-cultural liberal thought and aspiration against their most immediate surroundings. Particularly during their early years of conception, the contrasts in ideology, practice, and vision between these two ICs and their surrounding communities were so stark that relationships were often strained, if not violent or controversial. In both locations, these dynamics have shifted over the years; in Kashi they have dramatically improved, whereas in Auroville one can only accurately argue that they have *changed*. Nevertheless, neither of these status' stand without myriad exceptions, contradictions, and complications. It remains difficult to deny the very visible challenges both Kashi and Auroville continue to face in the context of their larger communities as well as the multiplicity of sentiments local residents harbor towards these two ICs. For this project, what is significant is that this interaction is taking place at all, and the fact

that over time, both Kashi and Auroville have evolved growing relationships with their wider communities in which both parties have been mutually influential on one another.

Chapter #4

Methodology

This project consists of qualitative research in two intentional communities: Kashi in Florida, USA and Auroville in Tamil Nadu, India. The first portion of the research took place on Kashi and spanned the period of early June to late August, 2013. The second portion of the research took place in Auroville during the months of September and October, 2013. I spent approximately two months in each community, performing one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and participating in myriad community activities for the sake of participant observation. By investigating these spatially bounded areas of idealistic practices, this project will contribute to our understanding of the interplay between place, community, and social critiques in society.

Primarily, the body of my research has come from field research and primary sources. A ‘purposeful sampling’ design strategy has been employed in which communities were selected for being information rich and illuminative, of international origins, maintaining parallel missions and ideals, and offering contemporary manifestations of the phenomena of interest. This particular set of qualitative methods - one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and participant observation - have been selected for their ability to unpack the ideological motivations of intentional community members and to best understand the complexities of ‘place-making’. These qualitative methods also help to me to identify important intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, gender roles, ethnicity, and religion that would be more difficult to understand through the use of strictly quantitative methods.

More specifically, each of these distinct qualitative methods offer different insights: (1) participant observation has been useful in collecting data on the naturally occurring behaviors of intentional community members in their usual contexts, (2) in-depth interviews have been optimal for collecting data on individuals’ personal histories, perspectives, and experiences, particularly when sensitive topics are being

explored, (3) lastly, focus groups assist in eliciting data on the cultural and social norms of the intentional communities and in generating broad overviews of issues of concern. These qualitative methods also offer a degree of flexibility that has been essential to my strategy of interpretation, and have allowed greater spontaneity and adaptation during the interactions between researcher and study participants. Interview questions were “open-ended”, so that participants were free to respond in their own words with as much complexity as they saw fit. Participants also had the opportunity to respond more elaborately and in greater detail than is typically the case with quantitative methods. In turn, I had the opportunity to respond immediately to what participants were saying by tailoring subsequent questions to information the participant provided.

Secondary sources also substantiate my first hand findings, situate my research in a wider context, and equip me theoretically with interdisciplinary perspectives on intentional communities. Secondary sources consist of key documents, mandates and charters from each community, as well as academic books and journal articles on intentional communities, social theory, utopianism, communitarianism, space and place, performance and performativity, and various community related theories. In order to best describe the discursive unfolding of intentional community living and practice, I also sustain the conceptual framework that focuses on ‘process, prospect, and practice’ as opposed to an account of success versus failure. For the purposes of this specific project, to recede into polarizing superlatives is to deny the complexities of living a life that is arranged around fundamentally challenging society in order to discover the ‘self’ through a collective body, to transform one’s own social arrangements to reflect their innermost values, and to critically engage with the society at large by embodying and experimenting with alternatives. Even more importantly, it is through the lens of ‘process, prospect, and practice’ that both members of Kashi and Auroville tend to examine their own lives and projects:

“Over the years, there has been progress on Auroville, but to put good/bad evaluations on it isn’t quite accurate. It’s just changing. It’s just different.” - Aurovilian

I have also identified four specific empirical challenges I face as a researcher in the context of this project. First, by nature of participant observation - participation in community activities and living with community members – my ability to maintain a ‘researcher’s objectivity’ has been on trial. As personal relationships were forged with community members, maintaining a researcher’s perspective was naturally more difficult. Secondly, and similarly, participant observation required a degree of subtle observation that demanded a strong set of methodological ethics, as to avoid intrusion, meddling, or inappropriate associations. Thirdly, the inherent difficulties of a trans-national, cross-cultural comparative analysis present themselves. With one community in India, and the other in the United States, cultural, social, economic, and political factors must all be taken into account in order to contextualize the analysis. In order to ease this difficulty, I have selected two communities with very similar ideological foundations. Lastly, this research will account for the fact that this form of social commentary is not available to everyone; the implications of which are also significant to this study. Although each of these challenges has been or will be addressed by way of strategic adjustments, positionality disclosure, methodological tuning, or a heightened attentiveness, they nonetheless have provided trials in the course of this project.

Site-Specific Methods: Kashi

During my tenure at Kashi, I resided outside of the community but commuted to spend my days on the grounds, talking with residents, and partaking in activities. At Kashi, I undertook 4 focus groups and 13 one-on-one interviews. Two of these interviews were performed in two portion segments, as the interviewee’s were critical subjects to this research. Kashi’s CEO was the first to be interviewed in a two-part segment, and a history professor and intentional community specialist with a personal history at Kashi, was the second to be interviewed in a two-part segment. I also interviewed the provost of a local

community college who has experienced Kashi from the perspective of their larger county. The other 10 interviews were with resident members of Kashi. Lastly, the three focus groups were categorized as follows: 1) Kashi WOOFER's, 2) Residents Group, 3) Publishing Committee, and 4) The Sustainable Kashi Group.

A youth retreat also took place in my first month at Kashi, in which 30 members of Kashi's youth organization called "KNGN" (Kashi Next Generation Network) gathered for three days of meetings and activities. Although the group is labeled as 'youth', none of the members are below the age of 18, the youngest member being 19 years old. During the retreat, I participated in activities as well as documented and observed the meetings and activities. In order to obtain my observational data outside of this retreat, I ate my meals in the communal halls, and attended community gatherings, events, and celebrations.

Site Specific Methods: Auroville

During my stay in Auroville, I lived in a house with other residents of the community for approximately two months. In Auroville, there is a horizontal power-structure and no leader. Thus, all participants fell under the category of either an "Aurovilian" in the "residents assembly" or a "newcomer" in the midst of a vetting process to become a part of the resident's assembly. Although in India, language was not a barrier, as almost all communication in the community is in English.

I also participated in a volunteer position for an organization within the community called Savi. Savi is an educational organization dedicated to enhancing the academic, experimental, and research based culture on Auroville by way of accommodating volunteer's, interns, and researchers from around the world to experience and learn on Auroville. Savi agreed to provide me with the necessary amenities, contacts, and accommodations in order to cater to my academic needs. I also took on a research project for Savi to help them in their endeavor to transform Auroville into a cohesive 'city campus' and 'innovative learning

center'. My duties to Savi involved a field work project in which I: gathered documents, info, and data about educational units operating on Auroville, examined their curricula and syllabi, met their coordinators, completed missing information in Savi's database, and transcribed data collected through my interviews. During my interviews with community leaders I asked them about their own projects, the educational opportunities they offer, and their visions for Auroville. This collaboration helped to foster my integration within the community and formalize my relationship with Auroville as a researcher. This position also complemented my research by providing me the portal to connect to community members and leaders in a way that was unobtrusive and organic so that I was openly received by my research participants. In order to obtain observational data, I also ate my meals in the communal halls, and attended community gatherings, events, and celebrations.

Positionality and Situated Knowledge

"Feminism as a mode of analysis leads us to respect experience and differences, to respect people enough to believe that they are in the best possible position to make their own revolution" (Hartstock, 1981: 40).

In an effort to complicate my analysis and to interrogate my own politics and subjectivities, I engage one feminist approach to knowledge production- feminist standpoint theory. Feminist standpoint theory deals with my concerns on undue claims to 'the truth', approaches to critique that permit irresponsible and unaccountable criticizing, and with my implicated position as a researcher. For my own purposes, I find feminist standpoint theory to offer me an accountable and honest way to engage with my research sites, without asking me to deny my inevitable partialities or to abdicate the fact of my embeddedness in exchange for some elusive idea of 'objectivity' (Heckmen, 1997). I would extend this to say that even if my work itself is not centered on a 'feminist question', the very use of a 'counter-methodology' in itself challenges certain traditionally 'top down' or myopic ways of seeing and producing knowledge in important ways for the content of this project. Thus, although it is perhaps incomplete, it is my belief that standpoint theory

represents a strong body of developing theory, which offers a paradigm shift in the concept of knowledge production, and is transforming - not just feminist theory - but traditional epistemology itself.

There are also two central understandings that have developed throughout standpoint theories' evolution which I readily and fully embrace in my own research: (1) knowledge is situated, perspectival and incomplete and (2) there are multiple standpoints from which knowledge can be produced and understood. There are also two central questions explored in feminist standpoint theory which come to bear heavily on my own analysis: (1) how can knowledge be situated yet also 'true'? and (2) how can we acknowledge difference without abdicating the duty of critique, and thus, a viable feminist politics? (Heckman, 1997).

Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the attributes of standpoint theory, and its demand of 'positionality disclosure', deals with certain complexities of my particular analysis, in which I am personally embedded in in one of my primary research sites. In fact, with the use of standpoint methodologies, my claim to a sound methodology (despite my embeddedness) are no longer egregious, but in fact, well supported. This is also contingent upon the fact that I do the work to provide my readers with an honest insight into my political and personal baggage which inevitably informs my analytical lens, as well as the information I was able to obtain and the themes I was able to glean from my respective research sites.

In the following two sections I will use the footing I have laid to depart into a more personal exercise to situate myself within the context of each of my respective research sites and disclose my own set of subjectivities that apply to my project. As a prelude, I acknowledge that although I am unable to abandon the baggage that comes with a 'lived life', I will work here to expose my own positionality to equip the reader with the tools necessary for a critical, discerning, and insightful reading of this work. Even more, I abandon the position of 'objective researcher' (or even the existence of such an entity in the first place), although I do commit myself to seeking the most honest story I can access within the limitations of my own

story. I turn the lens of situated knowledge upon myself in hopes that this exercise will help both myself and the reader to mine out the implications of my subjectivities on my findings and interpretations.

Situated in Kashi

Kashi is the community I grew up in. Although my biological family no longer resides there, there is no question that Kashi embodies 'home' for me. There is also no denying that the particular closeness of relations I sustain with Kashi and its members are significant to this project. Certainly, my history is personally implicated in both the types of responses I received from participants in this community, as well as my interpretation of them. Further, the fact that 'I am embedded' has implications on my ability to access certain 'insider' stories, as well as miss other stories that are clouded by my assumptions. For example, the ease with which interviews were arranged was a natural side-effect of the trust inherent to our shared history, and the obvious assumption that "she is on our side". However, where the arrangement of interviews was easy, the interviews themselves did not proceed with such effortlessness. Instead, I was consistently surprised by two things (among others); (1) the many emotions I had wrapped up in the answers 'I wanted to hear', and (2) how little I actually knew about the very people I have 'known' since childhood. With this, I quickly recognized that even my 'insiders' perspective had not won me all of the inherent insights I had thought it might; I had and have a great deal to learn.

In an effort to maintain a respectable intellectual relationship with the community during the time of my investigation, I used myriad methodological tools to maintain 'professionalism'. Nonetheless, I continue to uphold a certain set of fundamental beliefs about the community and its members which inevitably inform my analytical lens. Accordingly, in an effort to tease out my own positionality in regards to Kashi, I have identified three fundamental and unchanging beliefs I hold about Kashi and its residents: (1) Kashi's existence is important and should continue for the benefit of its residents as well as their community

at large, (2) the values and mission of Kashi are ethical, principled, and progressive (3) the residents of Kashi are undoubtedly diverse, yet fundamentally, they are all ‘good’ (perhaps this third belief could, and should, be extended to all of humanity, but this is philosophical terrain I will not traverse at this time).

Fundamentally, my interest in the social critiques articulated through intentional community building is one stemming from my belief that this effort at critique is a potentially viable one, possessing the prospect for positive social transformation. That said, I acknowledge my motivations for exploring this topic, which stems from my own political, social, and ethical beliefs in the capacity of intentional community building. I also realize that in admitting these beliefs, any claims to ‘objectivity’ or ‘impartiality’ have been relinquished. However, this is also not to say that I plan to present a romanticized version of my observations in order to contrive a manipulatively praiseful or optimistic project. Instead, I argue that it has positioned me to derive a more deeply insightful and accountable analysis in which I am better equipped to build nuanced and constructive criticisms, which are simultaneously critical and compassionate.

Situated in Auroville

My research and myself are situated very differently in regards to Auroville. Prior to my arrival for this research, I had never set foot on the premises of Auroville, nor did I know anyone living in the community. This permitted a more ‘standard’ association between Auroville as a community and me as a researcher. In fact, Auroville has institutionalized a portal, or ‘host organization’, through which researchers can arrange their projects and their needs within the community in a standardized manner. Further, the culture on Auroville overall is one based on the premise that they are a ‘living experiment’ or ‘social laboratory’. This culture invites the practices of ‘research’ in ways that make arranging interviews fairly easy, ones needs a researcher understood or ‘implied’, and ones reasons for undertaking research in

the context of their community seemingly 'obvious'. This environment also generates a sense that everyone in the community is collaborating as a researcher in the 'process of discovery'. Thus, as 'a collaborator' I found myself quickly absorbed by the community with a natural ease. This ease was also supported by the fact that I engaged in an internship with an organization working on 'life-long' educational programs in Auroville. This internship solidified my relationship with Auroville as one of an 'exchange'. Thus, I was not merely observing, but was instead actively engaged in daily 'making' of Auroville in a way that generated trust among certain residents who I believe would have otherwise been more cautious.

As with Kashi, my belief in the potential of intentional communities to influence progressive social transformation still stands, and imprints itself upon my reading of Auroville and its residents. Certainly, my preceding biases prior to living in Auroville have impacted my analysis. However, the fact that I was living, working, eating, sleeping, and socializing on Auroville for over two months provided me with spontaneous insights into the areas of life in which I might not have consciously ventured. In retrospect, I find I was provided with a challenging, strangely balanced, often contradictory, sometimes disturbing, and often elating insight into this community.

Finally, I am left to grapple with how being differentially situated in each community might affect this analysis. The merits of this diversity have been well explained by Barry Shenker in his own research of intentional communities where he argues that, opposed to privileging either the 'insider' or the 'outsider' perspective as more accurate, one should value both perspectives for their unique abilities to understand different aspects of communal living. This dual perspective, Shenker argues, actually provides dynamism and a multiplicity of perspectives that generates a '*more objective*' account than were the researcher to only occupy either the 'inside' or the 'outside'. Hartstock also supports this thesis and argues that one can produce more accurate knowledge if they are in a position to 'see' society from more than one perspective; that of insider and outsider, thereby providing a more comprehensive account (Hartstock, 1983). Upon

reflection, I also recognize that the diversity of my 'positions' has supported my research with both wider and deeper insights. Additionally, I believe that my level of comprehension in regards to the dynamics and complexities of Kashi hold a level of depth that I have not acquired in regards to Auroville. To deny my position as an insider in Kashi, or my developing relationship with Auroville, would be turn a blind eye towards one of the most interesting and honest aspects of this research project, which permits my own unique contribution to the developing body of research on intentional communities. Ultimately, the glaring difference remains history, the personal relationships this breeds, and my own attachments to the destiny of the community.

Chapter #5

Place-Making: Bounding Space and Performing Place

In this chapter, I deconstruct the very foundations of building and sustaining intentional community. As preface to a more in depth analysis of the ways in which ICs embody and deploy social critique, I here endeavor to develop a foundational understanding of their two-pronged approach through a unique lens informed by geography and feminist epistemologies. Drawing on theories of place, space, place-making, performance and performativity, I analyze the multi-layered ways in which Kashi and Auroville generate place through this physical bounding of space, material and ideological manifestation of place, and the daily making and re-making involved in performing place. Together, these integrated stages are considered an act of ‘place-making’; a geographical framework I will employ to better understand the ongoing iterations of intentional community production and ‘performance’. Preceding my site-specific investigation of these processes at work in Auroville and Kashi, I will first substantiate the theoretical frameworks I use to understand these methods of bounding, performing, and making place. Following the positioning of my framework, I will then explore the ways in which Kashi and Auroville demonstrate these precise processes and practices, as well as their consequences.

Bounding Space and Defining Place

The task of ‘place-making’ is one that is interrogated by geographers with an interest in the scope, scale, and role of place, as well as the varying ways it is created and mediated. According to Pierce et al. (2010) place-making is the process by which people iteratively create and recreate the social, political, and physical experiences of a particular geography in which they live. For these authors, “Place-making is an inherently networked process, constituted by the socio-spatial relationships that link individuals together through a common place-frame.” (Pierce et al., 2010: 1). For intentional communities, the task of making

place and 'linking individuals' begins first with *bounding space*.

The ability to bound space is fundamental to establishing the grounds upon which later stages of the intentional community critique can unfold. In the context of this research project, 'bounding space' simply refers to the process by which an intentional community is established in its physical form through determining a boundary and placing limits around a particular allotment of land. A distinct attribute of the intentional community design is that participants are able to live and practice together in a cohesive space. Unlike other value based communities such as cyber communities or churches, ICs depend upon the attributes of a shared space which permits the manipulation of both the physical landscape as well as the lifestyles and practices that take place within this setting. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter explained, "Members of utopia's are highly conscious of themselves as a community and of their role in history. They have a clear sense of their own boundaries – how far their land extends, who belongs and who does not. There may even be a map and a list of members. Whereas people on the outside are often vaguely aware of their membership in social communities, people who live in a utopian community explicitly know that they do belong, what the community stands for, how it is distinguished from the outside, and who else belongs" (Kanter, 1972: 52).

This framework also hinges on the premise that intentional communities seek to create their own distinct form of place in order to mediate personal, social, and ecological transformation. Without the ability to create a distinct place, intentional communities might not be capable of embodying their conceived 'alternative' in a way that can be experienced or observed. The very nature of this bounding is a tremendous display of trust in the power of 'place'. The more disparate or distanced by space, the more 'intervening places' there are; and the more intervening places, the more factors there are to mediate. Without the creation of a bounded place, intentional communities do not have the power to facilitate the many modes through which life is negotiated, and thus, place may be made for them. For some scholars,

this is considered a pursuit of freedom, independence, and refusal, while depending upon deeply communal and cooperative precepts (Kanter, 1972; Brown, 2002). In a similar vein, this research is interested in the extent to which these localized groups are able to deflect a passive reception of globalization, and instead engage their own agency by actively shaping the specificities of identity, social relations, economy, creativity, ecology, and spirituality through the body of community.

In the context of IC, reiterative practices and processes also constitute place through the daily making and re-making of place (Massey, 1994; Cresswell, 2004; Pierce, et al, 2010). Miller's findings in one intentional community explain that, "collaboratively produced and continually reproduced forms of expression and communication generate a sense of place" (Miller, 1996: 361). This articulation of ICs as 'practice', 'process', and 'expression' suggest that place is not made at one moment in time, but is in fact an ongoing exercise operating in a matrix of diverse actors, power-relations, scales, and intervening influences. Implicit in this place-making framework is the notion that place is *performed*, and that the physically bounded space in which it is performed acts as a figurative stage. In some ways, one might suggest that intentional communities are exemplar sites of a tremendously theatrical or visible form of 'basing oneself in place'. In accordance with these observations, I now move to deconstruct the role of performance in the making and ongoing iterations of intentional community, and call upon theories of 'performativity' while grounding them in a geographically relevant analytical framework⁵.

Performing Place

With my framework of performance and performativity previously developed in Chapter #3, I now move to translate these theories into something more useful in the task of understanding the empirical and material implications of these spatially bounding, performative, and place-making community projects.

⁵ Refer to Chapter #2 (Literature Review) for in depth explication of performance and performativity theory, and how it fits into this particular analysis.

Essentially, I suggest that the very idea of ‘intentional community as social critique’ is one hinging upon the capacity of a collective ‘place-making’ endeavor which capitalizes on the merits of *performance*. In this way, explicit performances and suggestive gestures of performativity interact in ways that manufacture a *lived* and embodied form of critical commentary on the practices and structural arrangements of larger society.

Members of both Kashi and Auroville are cognizant of the special circumstances in which they practice their daily lives and the distinct contexts within which they unfold. The very fact that their lives are unfolding in the context of a ‘place *and* interest based community’ generates a metaphoric stage upon which members can live out their aspirations and investigate their ideals in both experiential and observable ways. Living the critique also offers unique possibilities for consonance between ones ideals, physical environment, and daily routines. In one Aurovilian’s explanation of why he chose to live in community, he highlighted the attractiveness of a ‘lived critique’ and how living in intentional community permits this:

*“It was like, what can I do as an individual? And as an individual what I can do is I can **live** those things. I can have my compost toilet, and have my bicycle, and I can ride around Auroville, and I can do my zero waste. (On Auroville) I can do all these things that I want to **live**, but if I’m in California I cant do it. Compost toilets were illegal in California! And you can build here and be creative... I am building a new home called the “Trash Mahal”, made out of trash material.”*

With this in mind, I journey to the soils of Kashi and Auroville to explore the theme of ‘place-making’ in action in each of their respective contexts. I do so through gleaning thematic patterns operating as a result of place-making practices and developing a theoretically contextualized narrative of the intentional community critique. As is to be expected in any attempt to understand lived lives through the lens of theory, I also grapple with *both* the confluences and contradictions between the theme of ‘place-making’ and that of daily life on Kashi and Auroville. The remainder of this chapter will deal with these themes, the living production of Kashi and Auroville, and the narratives shared by my participants.

‘Place-Making’ in Kashi and Auroville

It may take centuries to shift the culture of a nation or society. So what is it about intentional community (IC) that has been so attractive to certain cultural pioneers of every century in written history (Brown, 2002)? In this chapter, I suggest that the possibilities presented when a group of people incubate another paradigm through interconnected physical space and metaphysical value systems involves unusual opportunities for living and practicing holistic change. I will later extend this analysis to account for the ways in which this translates into social critique and is deployed to a larger local and global audience in Chapter 6.

In both Kashi and Auroville, my findings demonstrate that their practices of place-making result in the production of four particularly apparent qualities which facilitate the daily making and re-making of place and community. I propose that, eventually, each of the following consequences of place-making (*bounding and performing*) are also essential to the articulation of the IC social critique: (1) a *consolidated* life in which lifestyles and values can be nurtured and developed through the incubation of people and paradigms, (2) the generation of a *collective* body, (3) an ability to imbue the built environment and physical landscape with meaning and value inscriptions, (4) a sense of individual instrumentality. Although each of these characteristics can be witnessed in operation in both communities, the ways and degrees in which they exist vary. Therefore, in the following sections, I will discuss each of these four characteristics, their degrees and varieties on both Kashi and Auroville, and the ways in which they are part and parcel to the place-making effort.

(1) Consolidating life

The very definition of ‘consolidated’ speaks volumes about the manufacturing of intentional community life: “to combine a number of things into a single more effective or coherent whole” (New

Oxford American Dictionary, 2010). As a direct result of the physical bounding of space, there are of course the physical results of ‘consolidation’ in the context of intentional community: resource sharing, communal housing, an identifiable membership (and non-membership), consolidated work and recreation, etc. The details of this ‘consolidation’ differ between these two communities. For example, on Kashi there is one bill which pays for rent, food, yoga classes, home maintenance, basic supplies, community events, and other various activities. Even more now, with Sustainable Kashi and The Eco Project’s presence in the community, Kashi is able to provide food for its members directly from their own land. In Auroville, life is even more ‘consolidated’ in the sense that, for the most part, one does not need to leave the community for anything. In many ways, Auroville might be more aptly referred to as a small city. There is health care, food and supply stores, café’s, restaurants, living facilities, guest houses, recreation areas, a movie theater, meeting halls and offices, classes and workshops, schools, a post office, and much more. Additionally, every resident of Auroville both lives and works on Auroville. While some hold remote, contract, or seasonal jobs elsewhere, for the most part, all of life is centered around the operations, growth, and betterment of Auroville.

Beyond these basic physical manifestations of a consolidated place, there are also a set of distinctly qualitative lifestyle consequences in operation. These qualitative attributes are more difficult to define, but were most often referenced as experiences of either “space” (in its creative and temporal forms) or “closeness” (in physical proximity and human interaction). For most, spaciousness was described as enhancing ones sense of freedom, while the closeness was attributed with offering a unique life of intimacy. For members of Kashi and Auroville, the unique coupling of intimacy with freedom breeds a nurturing environment, and although the expression of these qualities differed in vocabulary choices, the themes were nearly ubiquitous among participants on both communities.

Aurovilian participants also explained how living in a place in which all of their needs are taken care

of permits their whole lives to become deeply connected in this *one* place. Equally, residents of Kashi repeatedly informed me that they feel deeply invested in their ‘place’ and all that this encompasses. In this way, they described life as feeling dynamically entwined, sometimes blurring together the lines of work, recreation, family, friends, play, duty, passion, and creative expression. For most my participants, this consolidation provides tremendous and important gains in both *time and quality*. Significantly, many participants referred to this gain as a supportive mechanism for self-growth, as opposed to for convenience. Their gains in time and quality were quoted as sanctioning ‘self-reflection, meditation, physical exercise, leisure, time with community and family, artistic expression, exploration, and innovation’. One member of Auroville also expounded on this idea and explained that:

“What you have is that the mother (Mira Alfassa) has put a number of things at the base: everyone works, no difference in income (whether you are man or women), we have a six hours working day, the strong emphasis on education throughout your life, huge emphasis on sports, the connection with nature, and collective food and eating. You look at the Western world with an eight-hour or more working day, and you see that children fall through, old people fall through, families fall through, it doesn’t work. With the six-hour working day (on Auroville) you have six hours for your work or your interests, and then you have your relaxation, your health, and your sleep. Some people work much more than six hours, but the opportunity is there.”

Similarly, one young resident of Kashi explained how and why the relationship with ones every day activities is altered, and why time and quality of life are given great importance when living on Kashi:

“I think that we are all on a similar path. And that path is to live consciously. And I think that once you start to think about living consciously, things like working a 60-hour week is suddenly not living consciously. It’s about relationships and putting yourself out there and moving consciously, getting quiet, etc. You are also forced to consider other people”.

Also ubiquitous in both communities, is the notion that there is a certain ‘potency to place’ (to *their* place specifically) contributing to the nurturing environment. Culturally, there is a shared understanding that their investments made in one concentrated space have had consequences over time, in which ones experience of life is affected by something operating at a metaphysical or atmospheric level. For one Aurovilian, sentiments of empowerment or freedom were not only inspired by the ‘spaciousness’ or the gains in time, but also by the very ‘atmosphere’ of Auroville. For her, the atmosphere is directly related to

the daily performances of residents and their work:

“In Auroville it’s the atmosphere...and Auroville builds people. And then people express that, and that expression is called work. So if I am built by or inspired by Auroville then my actions will be inspired by that too. But the input is a surrounding atmosphere, vision, processes, and community life. Most of us are doing incredible work. So it’s not that all the geniuses have decided to come to Auroville. All of the normal people came to Auroville and became geniuses.”

This reference to ‘the atmosphere’ was not an unusual one on either Auroville or Kashi. Significantly, many participants attributed their personal development in part to this ‘potency’ and the ‘environment’. As explained to me by one long-term member of Kashi, it was in part Kashi’s ‘catalytic environment’ which supported his own transformation:

“I was someone who always felt a lot of unworthiness, in many ways. So working in the world was the same, I always felt on the outside. On Kashi, I gained confidence in my ‘essential self’; my own wisdom was found. And there was a similar thing happening to everyone here. Living in this community has been a nurturing and catalytic environment.”

Similar to this illustration of a nurturing environment and its role in self-development, many participants described their communities in the image of ‘incubation’ through which one’s life is mediated by very different environmental factors than those operating in their larger societies. Their verbal illustrations depicted places that both literally and figuratively ‘hold’ its members together in ways that both inspire them to, and force them to, ‘rub against one another’. As one member of Kashi put it, this ‘rubbing’ causes a dynamic in which:

*“We (members of Kashi) smooth out the rough edges of one another by living with people that we might not **choose** to live with”*

In the same conversation, another member of Kashi explained a commonly employed metaphor that indicates the ‘churning, scrubbing, and smoothing’ experienced in this consolidated space on Kashi by comparing the community to a “rock tumbler”⁶. Similarly, one Aurovilian, called on the metaphor of a washer machine to illustrate the same sentiments:

⁶ A rock tumbler is a device used to smooth the edges of rocks by rotating them in a barrel so that they slide against one another. The churning and sliding slowly polishes and shines the stones.

*“Living on Auroville is like stepping into a washer machine. It is like Auroville (as a collective body) is some kind of mirror. Its not something that people do **to you**, it’s just like the first purification, which happens by rubbing up against others.”*

From these words, one can glean the more personal seeking that is operating underneath a sometimes seemingly outward expression of place-making. Although I more fully deal with the role of the ‘self’ and ‘transformation’ in the seventh chapter, for now I want to highlight the importance of a shared and consolidated space in which a collective body can grow, and through which members can use this collective for their more individual objectives.

(2) The Collective

“It’s a bit boring to be by yourself after living in community. There is richness, and sweetness in multiplicity. It’s a richer creature, whatever is evolving. Its much more vast! This creates a consequence in your own self-development”

First and foremost, bounding space and creating place in the context of ICs is fundamentally oriented towards facilitating the creation of a ‘collective body’. In my interviews, I often suggested to my participants that they could perhaps embrace the same set of ideals in another environment. I questioned why is it important that they embody their ideals through a collective, and more importantly, why *this* collective? To this, I received a wide variety of responses, ranging from slightly troubled attempts at articulating something that had not been fully resolved, to the succinctly clear and articulate expressions of purpose and rationale. This paradox was, for me, an interesting aspect of my research findings, and will be dealt with in later chapters of this project. For now, I focus on the importance of a communal endeavor and why *most* residents of Kashi and Auroville continue to believe in the collective aspect of their enterprise.

Just like any living situation, the collective aspect of living in intentional community undoubtedly entails its unique set of advantages and difficulties. What *is* unique about the sentiments of Kashi and Auroville residents however, is the ubiquitous appreciation for both ends of the experience, in which value

is placed on all forms of interaction; enlightening, challenging, or otherwise. Overall, what was significant to them, was the fact that all experiences of life on the IC were unfolding in the context of a collective enterprise where individuals feel accountable to one another. One Aurovilian teacher was particularly expressive of why it was important that her ‘journey’ unfolds within the context of a collective, and why this was different from a life lived ‘outside’:

“The difference between this journey here, and any other journey I could do somewhere else, is that any idea or experience that I may touch in my individual capacity, is then immediately diffused into the collectivity. It’s not only for personal benefit. The aim is to create a critical mass, a collective oneness that can hold it in the earth atmosphere. The reason why Auroville is interesting as a pursuit is because it is a fraternity of collaboration. It is very important that Auroville is built on Life rather than Ideas.”

The fraternity experience of a collective project also comes with a set of unique social factors that can be ‘agitating’ to an individual’s character, habits, and preferences. While there were a few participants that expressed this agitation as a negative feature, most participants were adamant to express the consequence of such challenges for both their own growth, as well as the development of a healthy community. One elder member of Kashi explained this as a form of built in responsibility through which:

“We are accountable to one another. I have had people say to me that “I want to know if I am doing something really wrong, you have permission to say this to me as my friend”. So we have agreements with people, but I don’t have them with everyone. Because it’s very intimate and raw. Because you have to remember that whenever you are speaking to someone you are speaking to their heart and so you have to be very conscious.”

Similarly, one Aurovilian spoke about the importance of ‘Sangha’ in supporting each individual in their own journey. The terms ‘Satsang’⁷ and ‘Sangha’⁸ were frequently used on both communities in reference to their ‘collective’ nature. The meaning of the two terms are nearly identical; ‘satsang’ emanating from the Hindu tradition, and ‘Sangha’ from the Buddhist. Used in this informal way, the terms refer to the

⁷ ⁷“Satsang” in Indian philosophy means (1) the company of the ‘highest truth’ (2) the company of a guru, or (3) company with an assembly of persons who listen to, talk about, and assimilate the truth.

⁸ “Sangha. Community. This word has two levels of meaning: (1) on the ideal (arya) level, it denotes all of the Buddha’s followers, lay or ordained; (2) on the conventional (samvtri) level, it denotes the orders of the Bhiksus and Bhiksunis” (Robinson et al. 2005: 327)

‘community’ but connote a deeper sense of connection and accountability between members than is typical in any incidental community:

*“There is a concept that is very strongly supported in Buddhism called the **Sangha**, which is the community. And the idea is that the community supports the individual, because the individual starts to stray, and the community calls them back. Like a peer review! So your peer group has to be the group that maintains the integrity of the community. It can’t be the police or any outside force, so it has to be self regulating. In Auroville people are not shy about telling another Aurovilian, “Hey you shouldn’t be doing that”, etc. In fact maybe they do it too much, and they are very critical!”*

One member of Kashi also spoke about her experience of community living and the role of ‘Satsang’ in keeping her accountable to other Kashi residents:

*“I have lived in the “proper” household; I had a home and did the whole suburban housewife thing. But there is a sense of not being satisfied and aloneness in that set up. Living in a community with **Satsang** where you have the same agreements, and principles, is invaluable. Its fulfilling because you are working towards being open, and providing a place for other people also.”*

Her expression of a paradigm shifting view on the role of community and the differences between her communal living situation and that of her prior life, are thematic demonstrations of sentiments among members of Kashi and Auroville. Members of both communities were expressive about how differently they view the role of community, and the ways in which a life outside of this context now seems unattractive. These same sentiments were even evident in non-resident members of Kashi. Specifically, a married couple who has been WOOFING⁹ on Kashi arrived at the community with the intention of staying one day. A year later, they find themselves still at Kashi and with a new set of expectations from life:

“I think that the best thing that I learned is that this place exists. Learning that this place exists has changed my entire life. Knowing that this exists has changed my expectations of what I want my world to look like.”

Following this expression, her partner followed with a statement of agreement:

“I’m getting so used to it now (living in community) that it is hard to imagine it the other way. The other way seems isolating”

⁹ WOOFING = World Organization of Organic Farming. Participants in this program generally exchange their labor on the farm for room and board.

Ultimately, these projects of place-making generate a collectivity and entail consequences that extend beyond the individual participants and their personal lives. Returning to the idea of social critique, these projects represent counter-narratives to a developing world in which the Western model of individualism, market based value systems, and nuclear family units reign (Putnam, 2000). Although not all members of either Kashi or Auroville are concerned with the outward expressions of their project, for others, the prospective implications of their project on humanity, society, and culture, are important. As one Aurovilian concluded, collective projects such as Auroville are fundamentally interesting and important in respect to the evolution of society as we know it:

“The necessity of trying collective experiments which seek unity, oneness, and non-exclusivity, becomes logical, scientifically justifiable, socially and psychologically a necessity, and spiritually obvious. So on each plane of thought, you can see why Auroville becomes interesting. On one level it’s impossible, and on another level, it’s inevitable... if humanity is to survive. We have to create collective oneness. All intentional communities are interesting because they are an attempt to create larger conglomerates.”

(3) Imbuing the built environment and physical landscape with meaning

In their research on the ‘interpretive potential of utopian settlements’, archaeologists Thad Bueren and Sarah Tarlow found that the architecture of each intentional community they researched was highly expressive of the community’s values. They explained that community architects were particularly cognizant of imbuing the aesthetic of their communal structures and landscape with a deeper meaning - one representative of their belief system (Bueren, T., and Tarlow, S., 2006). In my own research, I observe numerous parallels to their findings, and have found that the architecture and physical landscapes of both Kashi and Auroville are highly symbolic of their values. Saturating their built environment with meaning is also essential to making-place in a way that is meaningfully distinguishable from their respective larger societies, and consolidating a shared identity among residents. In Auroville, this project of ‘imbuing’ was often referenced as ‘willing the divine into the manifest’. Miller (1996) refers to this as this as a project of

‘reanimating the bond between the environment and the social’. I understand this to be another manifestation of their search for consonance between ‘meaning and materiality’ and ‘manifesting place’.

The intentions behind the various stylistic developments surely vary between the two communities, between architects, between residents, etc. Nonetheless, both communities are structurally, visually, and symbolically distinctive from their surrounding communities in ways that speak to their values, ideals, and overall purpose. In Auroville, the most striking example of this is the glaring absence of temples, deities, or displays of *religious* faith. In contrast to the rest of India, in which diverse religious paraphernalia embellishes nearly everything, this is a striking feature that offers testament to their belief in a spirituality that supersedes all religion. On Kashi, it is perhaps the fact that there *are* deities dotting the grounds, numerous temples to the world's religions, spiritual art work and an open celebration of *all* religious faiths that distinguish Kashi from its visually secular encircling community (beyond the visual aspect this is not a secular social environment, but a heavily Christian one).

In particular, the central body of water (a pond) on Kashi is a metaphorically telling one. The pond is surrounded by a series of temples and religious monuments to a wide variety of religious traditions including Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and Sikhism. Not only does the variety of temples speak a message, but the circular manner in which they have been built speaks to Kashi's values of unity and equality. Auroville also has a symbolically embellished community center. Perhaps the physical attribute they are best known for around the world is their ‘Matrimandir’; a tremendous geodesic dome structure covered in golden discs at the figurative (not literal) center of Auroville. The Matrimandir (Sanskrit for ‘temple of the mother’) is a structure inscribed with spiritual significance for practitioners of Integral Yoga (Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of yogic practice) and is considered the ‘soul of the city’. The structure took 37 years to complete and is the site of Auroville's most important annual celebrations. The monument is also a striking homage to an Aurovilian culture of manifesting place:

“I very strongly believe in manifesting places. I think it makes a huge difference. The first thing I saw about Auroville was the Matrimandir. So for me this is very important. This drew me. We have actually manifested our dreams physically. There is tremendous difference in our activities now that we have these physical structures. The activities are streaming in. They are developing themselves because the space is there to hold them.”

Although Auroville’s built environment is not outwardly associated with any one religious tradition, it does often express certain value commitments stemming from the writings and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Particularly, the tenets of ‘unity in diversity’ are expressed in the aesthetic and processes through which Auroville develops. As with most aspects of place-making and daily life on Auroville, architecture and the built environment are considered domains of ‘research’. The freedom I spoke to earlier in this chapter has been essential to inspiring their range of innovative designs and creative architectural expressions. With this, the lineage of research projects also trace the evolution of thought, social and environmental concerns, and creative interests of Aurovilians through time. One Aurovilian architect explained:

“This is a main charter that the mother talked about: the unity in diversity, which you will see in the built environment here. Lets take a housing project for example. You would see most of the housing projects are different from each other. You would see that if you look at Prathna and Samasti, they are similar, yet different from each other. But you can see that it’s from the same decade. Now if you see the new project, Luminosity or Arti, you would see that they are different from each other but there is something that says “it is from this decade”.

In contrast to Kashi, there is a significantly more pronounced emphasis on the built environment, the manifest, and development in Auroville. There are numerous reasons for this, but centrally and foremost, this is because Auroville is a much larger project with the goals of growing into a flourishing city with the capacity to hold 50,000 residents. The labor, planning, and materials that go into such a project make it clear why there is this emphasis. Auroville’s special attention to the built environment is also significant because it speaks to their tactics of performance and an articulated social critique. Their expressiveness through the built environment is a performative gesture in itself, and should be considered as significant as the daily routines or operations that the built environment facilitates. For some, in Auroville,

the focus on the manifest is also part and parcel to the inner journey and is an essential component of ‘living’ the critique:

“How to bring our ideals down into matter is the real trick. So first of all, it’s the recognition that the bringing it into matter is not any less important than thinking about it or writing about it or talking about it”.

Both communities also articulate their relationships with the natural environment in visible and tangible ways. Whether through locally sourced building materials, the use of solar or renewable energy sources, or permaculture and organic gardening projects, the ways in which they regard the natural environment are *observable*. On Kashi, their sustainability organization has a mission statement that explains: “Sustainable Kashi seeks to foster an environment in which sustainable living can be experienced, fostered, and observed” (Sustainable Kashi, 2014). Implicit in this integrated approach to environmental consciousness is also a set of embedded values which inspire the general ‘ecofriendly ethos’ at work in both ICs. According to the founder of ‘Solitude Farm’ on Auroville, the values of his work and those of Auroville run parallel:

“In my lessons I teach about how there is the life of the soil and how that is the first dimension. Then I go into the intercropping and the health of the plants and how that goes into the food we eat and then into us, and that’s our wellbeing in society. And we have a healthy society because we know where our food comes from, and it comes from this soil that has been very nurtured. So the technical things and the philosophical things they have come together now.”

Beyond the manufacture of observable models that articulate their fundamental values, other aspirations are also expressed in the *process* of creation, as opposed to in the creation itself. Specifically, it is clear that the dynamic relationship between individual values, cultural ethos, and the act of ‘creation’ are a significant meditation in Aurovilian society. For one architect and resident, the teachings of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo are not necessarily articulated *in* her creation, but through the process in which the creation comes into being:

“I’m not at that stage where I refer, for each and every step back to The Mother and Sri Aurobindo’s ideals. You could see that in your process, but not in your creation. Basically it’s a process, which, at the end, creates something. So yes, in process, one does experience this. But it’s all internal. If you do it beautifully, then the divine is there. So I don’t think you need to display that. And I hope we don’t do that.”

The significance of the ‘process’ to which the architect refers extends itself into the post-construction era as well. Just as the ideals are expressed in the *process* of constructing the creation, and not necessarily in the creation itself, the creation is then continually expressive of these ideals through the ongoing practices that the creation hosts. Although it was not articulated outright in my interviews, I deduce that this progressive expression is in reference to the architecture and construction of buildings which are meant to host daily activities, as opposed to the construction of a piece of art work or creative edifice that is purposefully and explicitly designed to convey a message, in and of itself. That said, the expression of ideals becomes an iterative daily practice in which value laden performances bring the creation into being. The same architect provided a clear example of how these two performances (the before and after) may run in tandem to manufacture a space of meaning:

“If you take other projects like Savitri Bhavan, you can see that the built environment in Savitri Bhavan is very calming, the moment you walk in. I don’t know how much extra effort they must have put in there, to bring that kind of environment. But its not just the architects role, its the activity that its ran along...these things actually go in harmony. The activity which is being held, the project holder, and the architect who is respecting those activities and designing accordingly. All of these things, if you do it in a harmonious way, which most of the architects in Auroville do. Of course there ARE disasters, but that is human nature”.

(4) Instrumentality of the Individual

Perhaps more than any other quality, residents of Kashi and Auroville mentioned the attribute of ‘freedom’. Often, it was used in reference to the safe space created by consolidating the community around inclusive, ‘all-accepting’, and ‘non-judgmental’ precepts. Members often expressed feeling that one could be whoever they are - no matter color, creed, gender, sexual preference, etc. – and that they would be met as ‘another human being’. As one Aurovilian explained to me, on a very fundamental level:

*“Auroville is based on freedom; the freedom that excludes nothing. That’s also why Auroville is in India. Because **highest** Indian thought is non-exclusive.”*

Where this foundational freedom speaks volumes about the unique paradigms being incubated in these two ICs, the notion of ‘freedom’ was also not limited to this. On one afternoon in Auroville, I sat with the manager of a clothing design studio in Auroville and we discussed her own experiences with the creative freedom she enjoyed, and the ways this had been fostered on Auroville. By the nature of her answers, and the readiness with which she responded, it was clear that the ‘daily making’ of Auroville was also a daily meditation. In comparing her life on Auroville to that of the ‘outside’, she explained that:

“I am not so concerned with what we have achieved and what good and bad we have done. But I give a lot of importance to the fact that all this has happened because we are living in a community and in an atmosphere that allows us to think with a certain freedom, which no city can provide. I would be more concerned with what I would be paid to do for that or this design project, and my rent, and networking, and what will happen to my career and my car etc. Out there, your life is governed by these inferior thoughts and I am so grateful my life has been freed of that.”

From her words, one can observe the interplay of ‘freedom’ with the atmosphere of ‘innovation’ and ‘creation’ that is cultivated. As expressed by numerous interviewee’s, it’s a feeling of being ‘allowed to be instrumental.’ Similarly, another long term Aurovilian described ‘freedom’ on Auroville as:

“There is a constant feeling of ‘how far can I go?’ I still am mesmerized by the fact that I don’t even have to ask permission from anybody! And I wonder, how far can we go as co-creators? There is this sense that this is an unfolding universe that we are living in, and we are participating in its enfoldment, and that awareness is so alive with me here. I can go out of Auroville for a week and start to feel that slipping away. I think in Auroville that is really one of the most profound opportunities. The conditions here were created from the very beginning to allow for that kind of freedom for the soul to find its way. So although I wouldn’t go so far as to say it’s a “completely free” place, relatively I have never felt so much of that possibility as I do here.”

Here, one can glean the effects of a ‘place-making’ endeavor in which those involved are actually aware that they are making-place, and experience this attribute as a liberating one. The make-up of individuals comprising my participant group in Auroville is also noteworthy, as they are primarily members who have taken the initiative to develop their own visions as leaders of organizations or community projects; most of which are particularly successful. With this observation, I take heed of the possibility that these ‘empowered’ sentiments are not the most representative sentiments of Aurovilians. What I can say however, is that these sentiments were ubiquitous among the participants of this particular research project:

“I left Auroville for a while, and then after working some jobs here and there I realized that anything I wanted to do was all HERE in Auroville. Anything I possibly dream of doing was here. All I needed was the maturity to do it. I also had to learn how to wake up and have the energy to manifest something on your own. Not because someone is telling you what to do. It’s you waking up and saying okay “How am I going to manifest this?” And I think a lot of people suffer with this. I see it a lot with my volunteer’s now. We are used to being told what to do.”

This sentiment of instrumentality was significantly more prevalent among members in Auroville than in Kashi. It is clear that the evolution Kashi is currently engulfed in, involves exploring ways in which members might come to feel more instrumental, empowered, and collaborative. However, this transition only sprung from the wake of losing their founder in 2012. The recentness of this loss has not permitted the time it will take for the community to negotiate these new terms, and they remain slightly locked in old patterns of leadership and a power vacuum that has yet to be resolved. Further, there is no denying that the historic power dynamics involved in managing life on Kashi was heavily dependent upon the dictates of their founder. This dynamic, although willingly sanctioned by most members of Kashi, also produced a structural dependency upon the leadership of their founder, and did not stretch members of the community to explore more collaborative and self-empowering means for maintaining and growing their community.

That said, as Kashi develops, leaders and members alike are amidst important dialogues geared towards assuaging sentiments of ineffectiveness, disempowerment, and lack of transparency expressed by certain members of Kashi. Simultaneously, there are also members who have taken the opportunity inherent to times of change and upheaval, to become ‘instrumental’ by developing their own visions, creations, and innovations on the grounds of Kashi. These particular members were uniquely expressive about their sentiments of freedom and the unique conditions of living on this intentional community. Speaking to the distinctive circumstances existing on Kashi, the founder of Sustainable Kashi explained:

“We have an abundance of land, we have almost 80 acres and its protected. We have a good source of water: wells, and water that flows through the property. We have the support of the community. We are a church foundation so we get away with a bit. The codes are different. As far as the animals go – chickens and goats – you can do that in a normal residential area. You have to be zoned for agriculture. So we are in a gray are as a church foundation.”

Physically, the land was often described as a canvas on which members were prepared to figuratively ‘paint’. There was an implied notion of creative freedom, and the *space* in which to express that. They also often referenced the unique confluence of human and land resources which were operating under a different set of rules than in their larger societies. Legally, for example, Kashi enjoys the relaxed restrictions on development and zoning that come with being designated a church foundation, as well as their jurisdiction under the county as opposed to the ‘City of Sebastian’. In Auroville, they have been operating under the Auroville Foundation Act since 1988, which safeguards the development of the ‘International Township of Auroville’ according to its charter. The various units working on research, education, service, or commercial enterprise in Auroville have all been assigned to different trusts under the act, in which they garner the designation of ‘non-governmental organization’. The Foundation has also provided Auroville with a clear and uniform legal status. This involves a unique income tax exempt status, special visa policies for members, and unique developmental ‘freedoms’ (N.A., Auroville In Brief, 2014). The results of these unusual legal circumstances, the literal and figurative space offered for imaginative expression and innovation, alongside community support, encouragement, and resources were regarded as remarkable creative opportunities by many members of Kashi and Auroville:

“In Auroville you have a lot of perimeters working in your favor. You have a lot of collective support and interest. Auroville is really a canvas ready to be painted on if you have the capacity and vision and maturity to paint it. You are free to manifest what you want to manifest. Auroville is a remarkable space in which this kind of experimentation is permitted.”

Even with such freedoms in place, the inherent challenges of undertaking a project in the context of a collective, the myriad ‘politics’ this entails, and the number of lives the ‘designer’ is held accountable to, does not make this ‘freedom’ an easily deployable tool. In fact, none of the four above-mentioned aspects of place-making are particularly ‘easy’, simplistic, or even fully attainable. In truth, they often remain somewhere in between the realms of reality and experimentation, occupying a somewhat murky matrix of idealistic aspirations and basic needs. Nonetheless, it is this same set of qualities that articulate a clear

project of place-making dependent upon the observable and palpable qualities of performance to shape their articulations of social critique.

Accordingly, I now move to extend this analysis to account for the ways in which this translates into social critique and is deployed to a larger local and global audience. By generating a collective and consolidated space imbued with value-laden representations and an atmosphere enabling individual instrumentality, an essential preface to the more theatrical expressions of place is developed. This stage, along with the atmosphere it incubates, is then deployed through a rich matrix of expressions and performances which are both responsive to their larger society, as well as to the internal needs of the community and its members. In this way, critical deployments are both personified and operationalized in inward and outward looking ways, generating an environment at once self-analytical and socially critical. The performative nature of this iterative and dynamic form of critique involves actors that are not always conscious of the significance of their performances, performances that are contradicted by other performances, and incomplete ideals that often remain as aspirations. In essence, each of these qualities collaborate to set the stage for subsequent expressions of social critique and prove to be essential aspects of a place-making project primed for subsequent embodiments and deployments of critique.

Chapter #6

Deploying Place-Based Social Critiques

The purpose of this project is to understand the processes through which intentional communities embody and articulate critiques of society at large. In the former chapter (chapter 5), I discussed the making of intentional community through a place-based analysis of the daily production and performances of place, as well as the impacts these phenomenon's have on individual lives and the collective. In contrast to chapter five, in which ICs were considered in isolation, this chapter will consider the interface between these communities and their larger societies. In essence, I will move forward to account for the reactions of these bounded communities to the local and global particularities that have informed their place-making agendas and projects of social critique. As Pierce argues: "The politics of place-making are key to understanding how communities conceptualize and then motivate their reactions to (among other things) the socio-spatial re-ordering of the urban environment. Scholars focusing on the place-making processes of politics tend to highlight the local particularities of place that inform or motivate activism" (Pierce et al., 2010: 55). In this chapter, I also develop my analysis to account for the specific processes and 'bodies' through which Kashi and Auroville operationalize and deploy these critiques to larger audiences. Lastly, I expand the theme of 'consonance' between 'meaning and materiality', to the realms of practice and projects, and observe the ways in which a search for consonance plays a central role in their daily productions of place and selections of socially critical programs.

According to Kanter (1972), there are three identifiable critiques of society that have historically provided the initial impulse for the utopian endeavor: religious, politico-economic, and psychosocial. According to Bueren and Tarlow (2006), utopian communities are often difficult to classify, as they each take a different view on which problems and root causes are of importance and value to them. Ultimately, they conclude, there exists little uniformity in their visions. In the cases of Kashi and Auroville, both

communities share similar ideological roots in inclusive belief systems on human unity, equality, peace, acceptance, service, and environmentally conscious practices. Further, they articulate two specific critiques that have thematic dominance in a wide spectrum of literature on intentional communities in general, which speak to issues of community disintegration, social inequalities, and myriad concerns involving environmental exploitation. Thus, the two central critiques under analysis have been categorized as (1) a critique of environmental exploitation/degradation and, (2) a critique of community disintegration and inequality. Together, these critiques address a larger set of interconnected eco-social paradigms that, in the context of intentional communities, are sometimes difficult to differentiate from one another. It is this marriage of the environmental concerns with those of community building and equality-based collective initiatives which distinguishes the integrated approach of many intentional communities today (Brown, 2002; Kirby, 2003; Lockyer, 2007). With these two themes in mind, I am able to more easily deconstruct the implications of an intentional community form of critique, the modes through which it is articulated, and the institutions through which it is operationalized. Although there are numerous other critiques that can be extrapolated from the bodies of these two communities, for the purposes of this project, I will focus on their expression of these two central and critical conversations.

To accomplish the above-mentioned, I first examine the responsive and conversational aspects of their critiques, while analyzing the porous interface between community and society. Second, I examine their embodiments of these critiques (place-based facilitations of ecological and social transformation) as a form of consonance between ideals and practice. Lastly, I observe their deployments of 'place' as a site of education, life-long learning, and activism. 'Place-making' also situates the unique confluence of rejecting societal status quos, making place, deploying social critique, and the subsequent eco-social transformations these two intentional communities aspire to.

The Community / Society Interface: *Responsive Critiques and Conversations*

I suggest that it is the porous quality of the boundary over which the IC and their larger society interface in ongoing and conversational ways, that is the most significant indicator of the critical projects each respective intentional community embodies and deploys. Part and parcel to analyzing this interface is the understanding that intentional communities are certainly embedded in their larger society, and today more than ever, the global community. Here, intentional communities can be understood as a form of social critique that highlights the ways in which a community functions within complex societies. ICs are intrinsically embedded in larger social and political-economic contexts, and can help us understand the mechanisms through which communities and large state societies interact. Kanter demonstrates that the politico-economic response enacted by utopian intentional communities began to emerge “with the increasing mechanization, overcrowding, and poverty that developed in the wake of the Industrial Revolution” (Kanter, 1972: 5), and thus, was not a prevalent theme in communes prior to this period. Today, their contemporary and explicit responses to changes shaped by industrial, capitalist, and neoliberal political economies can also help to inform us of the socio-cultural dissatisfactions with such developmental processes. If we recall the definition of intentional community as ‘communities founded upon two fundamental precepts: dissatisfaction with mainstream society, and the idealist belief that there is an alternative life possible’, then it becomes clear that the approach is the same, involving first, rejection, and second, a lived form of constructive criticism.

Over the course of their decades long histories, both Kashi and Auroville have developed and evolved a series of shifting and responsive social critiques dealing with a variety of issues regarding inequality, community, and environmental degradation¹⁰. Further, in the context of ICs, any project or

¹⁰ For a more in depth contextualization of both Kashi and Auroville against their immediate surroundings, as well their respective nations, please refer to the ‘Site Descriptions’ section of this document where these histories are summarized

embodiment of social critique can be generally traced to a parallel and observable phenomenon in their larger or global society. For example, Kashi's engagement with the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980's and 90's spawned in a time that one longtime resident of Kashi explained as such:

“There was such extreme marginalization at that time (of AIDS patients). The illness itself was harsh, the fact that it affected predominantly young people, and then the whole gay association... it was sort of like the perfect storm. All of the taboos were there.”

As reflected in this quote, and in the previous chapter, there was a period in which Kashi was actively responsive to the AIDS crisis in the United States. It was during this time that they opened a hospice for adult's with AIDS, an orphanage for children with the virus, welcomed children with the virus into their on-site school, and welcomed members of the LGBTQT community to their community for a respite from the discrimination and the AIDS related stigma's that had been attached to their sexuality.

Similarly, I hypothesize that although there are of course the site specific and individual specific factors in determining the contemporary developments taking place of Kashi, never before in history has a generation in the United States (or perhaps in the world) been so acutely aware of the dire environmental circumstances of our time (McCright and Dunlap, 2011; Giddens, 2009). In this way, Kashi has only recently truly begun to engage with the critical discourse of 'environmental sustainability' when younger members developed an organization called 'Sustainable Kashi'. The timing of this 'environmentally sustainable' endeavor at Kashi is an opportune one, in which the conditions of their larger society are attuned to the need for such a project. . In fact, at a larger scale, one can observe the overall trend in 'revitalization movements' by observing the dramatic increase in 'eco villages' that are sprouting up around the world (Dawson, 2006). This phenomenon is considered an acute response to the global problems of climate change and environmental degradation. The designer and president of Sustainable Kashi also made this connection when he explained that:

“We are starting by making this community more sustainable, but eventually once we get it rolling we want it to go around the world and to the community around us. This is relevant to other communities and to the family across the

street on a regular suburban lot. You know being able to start growing your own food or reducing your foot print on the earth and living more efficiently within your means. We are at a global point where now if we don't start doing this we are at a tipping where the earth cannot continue at this growth rate, population boom, and consumerism. So it's about beginning this movement one individual at a time."

Critical responses such as these are typically contextualized and specific to Kashi and Auroville's local and national conditions, but often also address larger global crises, particularly in the realms of inequality and ecological degradation. In this way, Kashi and Auroville are able to articulate a global vision of solidarity, responsibility, and environmental consciousness, while continuing to practice locally appropriate and emancipatory realities for themselves. Insightfully, in his investigation of 'place-based' strategies of social critique, Escobar asks, "Is it possible to find in place-based practices a critique of power and hegemony without overlooking their embeddedness in circuits of patriarchy, capital, and modernity?" (Escobar, 2001: 142). The implications of acknowledging such embeddedness are numerous and bring to light an array of contradictions and impossibilities, all the while permitting the possibility of an encompassing analysis unhindered by an illusion of separateness. Accordingly, I embrace a theoretical approach in which place (and in this case intentional community) is situated as both constitutive of and constituted by the 'local' and the 'global'; possessing neither complete agency nor complete innocence; a state of being both within and without; the creators and the created.

Within each community, critique is expressed in different ways and through a variety of modalities. A very significant factor in this distinction is related to the very fundamental discrepancies in size; regarding both land and individuals. Auroville's expansiveness permits a much wider variety of projects to manifest in contrast to the small size of Kashi. As a result, Kashi's capacity to be the host of myriad social and ecological experiments is diminutive in contrast to Auroville's. Nonetheless, Kashi demonstrates the same core themes as Auroville, permitting me to extract the most fundamental phenomena discernable in the production of these two ICs, and perhaps ICs in general.

Also in the case of both Auroville and Kashi, I must further complicate the idea that the goal of critique *alone* provides the impulse for IC living and creation. Instead, in the case of Kashi, members usually explained a desire to either (1) live with the founder and spiritual teacher of Kashi, ‘Ma’, and/or (2) to live in a way that permitted their spiritual or inward-seeking quest, as the preliminary reasons for which they chose to reside on Kashi. In the case of Auroville, it was generally cited as the fulfillment of ‘The Mother’s Dream’¹¹ and the goal of self-growth, which provided the initial impulse. Even more importantly, each member I interviewed defined the vision, meaning, and purpose of both Kashi and Auroville differently. As one resident of Auroville put it:

“It’s really hard living in a Utopian ideal, because you are never there! So that is a constant frustration for everyone. It’s never what it’s supposed to be. And on top of that, Utopia is very personal and very powerful for each person because it’s a dream that sits on the bottom of each person’s heart. So each person has a particular emphasis based on their experience or aspiration, so that is so powerful and particular, and then you try to put all of those together!”

In fact, it seems that the only thing each member of both Kashi and Auroville might agree on, is that they are there for individual growth. This relationship between individual self-transformation and the making of intentional community will be more fully addressed in the following chapter. For now however, I maintain that it is accurate to assign intentional communities with the objective of ‘social critique’, but it is also important to recognize the diversity of impulses from which these projects spring. Lastly, there are two primary modes through which these critiques are articulated and deployed over the porous interface between community and society that I have just described: (1) embodying or ‘living the critique’ through performance and the subsequent generation of consonance between ideals and actions (2) deployment of place as a site of education, life-long learning, and activism. It is these two modes of developing and deploying their critical conversations with society that I seek to understand in the remainder of this chapter.

¹¹ The Dream is a text written by the founder of Auroville, “The Mother”, in which she details the vision of Auroville, the ideals to which the township aspires, and the state of an ideal society that she believed should one day be realized. The text can be found here: <http://www.auroville.org/contents/197>

(1) Seeking Consonance: *‘Living the Critique’*

“Most of the core ‘themes or ideals’ run through our lives. Whether it’s in a conscious or deliberate way or if it’s just built into the way we live” – Kashi resident

In this section, I extend the theme of ‘consonance’ to the realms of practice and projects, and observe the ways in which a search for consonance plays a central role in their daily productions of place and selections of socially critical programs. In chapter five I introduced the notion of a ‘lived critique’ and what Brown (2002) deems ‘critiquing with ones feet’. I also articulated the ways in which the intentional community critique is inherently performative, as it is based on the ability to ‘live and practice’ the alternative to those very social paradigms they critique. In this chapter, I elaborate on this idea of ‘living the critique’ by unraveling the role of evolving consonance between ideals and practice in the manufacture of an alive critical commentary. As explained by Kanter, “Meaning is obtained in the utopian community from the knowledge that all events within the community have a purpose in terms of the beliefs and values of the group. For the Shakers, for example, this integration of values and everyday events meant that even getting out of bed was an act infused with meaning by community dictates” (Kanter, 1972: 39). Here, the IC endeavor is understood as an ongoing and deeply self-aware practice in which aspirational ideals are rooted in the moral belief that one must ‘practice what they preach’:

“Your life and your ideals become seamless. It doesn’t matter what the situation is, or your locality or who are with or what you are doing... your behavior and way of interacting must be the same, in a way. You don’t necessarily differentiate between going to the office, to the grocery store, or doing the laundry, the question is where and how are you putting your practice into effect. Its really about how you live your life in any given moment and in any given circumstance”. – Kashi Resident

Thus, this section will address the ways in which community members capitalize on their ability to manifest consonance in their lives as a form of a 'living critique' and the practices and programs which facilitate this experience. As the purpose of this chapter is also to understand the means through which Kashi and Auroville deploy critiques of environmental exploitation and community disintegration and inequality, I consider their development of consonance between ideals and practice through the mediums of

these two specific critiques.

Critiquing Community Disintegration and Inequalities

“For those who are satisfied with the world, a project like this has very little meaning” – Aurovilian

According to Mohanty, in all industrializing and urbanizing nations, traditional forms of community coherence are further subject to fragmentation and degeneration (Mohanty, 2003). As a result, scholars are suggesting that many people around the world are seeking ‘community’ and alternative modes of ‘living together’ that foster greater interdependence and human intimacy. As the scholar Geoph Kozeny has explained, many people are seeking ways to make community a central component in their lives: “Today a lot of people are saying “I want more of a sense of community in my life”- and this craving is evident in all walks of life. I hear it from the middle class, from working class folks, upwardly mobile young professionals, singles, couples, with or without children, students about to graduate, and senior citizens” (Kozeny, 2009: 1). Thus, any critique of community disintegration is most fundamentally made possible through the basic reality that ICs are place-based communal projects of interdependence. By nature of their being, Kashi and Auroville embody critical representations of interconnectivity and coherence - despite the sometimes more volatile and confrontational interactions that may take place as a result of their persistent humanity and the challenges that come with ‘living together’. Revealingly, one new resident of Kashi explained why she had chosen to move to Kashi from her former urban residence:

“I have always felt that people in general feel very alone. I think that the lifestyle we live (on Kashi) offers support in a way that the world would benefit from. Somewhere along the way we have all separated in a way that is not natural for human beings. I mean people live in these houses, they have grass lawns and they have to go the grocery store to get food. It doesn’t make any sense! It also puts so much pressure on your love relationship. We (at Kashi) live in a lifestyle in which your love relationship is not your sole relationship. It holds a lot importance in your life but it doesn’t hold more importance than the community. I feel like I am a part of something bigger than my own goals and my own love life.”

Critiquing community disintegration also involves much more than simply ‘living together’.

Integral to this critique are a series of critical commentaries on individualism, the social isolation this breeds, the nuclear family paradigm, inefficient systems of health and mental care, support for elderly and children, wasteful patterns of production and consumption, and the resultant disparities that may spring from such developments in contemporary capitalist state societies. Thus, critiques of community fragmentation and inequality typically involve endeavors of communalism, shared housing, collective projects based on collaboration, striving for infrastructural equality and deep democracy, varieties of socialist systems, community resource sharing, giving circles, participatory decision-making, equal compensation, and an emphasis on community celebrations, events, and meal sharing, etc. (Jason, 1997; Murray, 2002; Pretty, 2003).

At Kashi, their critiques of community disintegration take shape in the most fundamental forms, i.e. communal housing, the sharing of certain resources, frequent community meetings, celebrations, meals, and events. The more involved experiments in consensus decision making, collaborative models, socialist programs, etc. have not blossomed in this small community as they have in Auroville. However, also due to their small size and long shared histories, there are more frequent community wide gatherings, discussions, and celebrations, which foster a strong sense of community coherence. This permits a distinct degree of intimacy among residents at Kashi that I did not witness in an encompassing way in Auroville.

Instead, Auroville has divided into many smaller settlements within the larger body of Auroville. As I was informed, most of these settlements have a distinct theme; some focused on ecological sustainability, another on music and the arts, another on architecture and design, and so on. In some ways, this fragmentation resembles that of the western world and contradicts the purpose of critiquing community disintegration and inequality. However, with their founders “Dream” framing every individual Aurovilian’s endeavor, most Aurovilians expressed a sense of camaraderie that was resilient, and evidenced by the sheer phenomenon that this place continues to operate and grow. Even within each distinct settlement, one can

witness a variety of approaches to living these ideals. Even more, some Aurovilians believe that each settlement serves an integral part of the whole, and are not at odds, but in concert with one another. This dynamic was described by one Aurovillian who has a distinct interest in ecology:

“So on Auroville you have over 70 different settlements, everybody doing it a little differently. And so how are these various groups connected? I would say this process is based on what I would call a “permaculture philosophy”. Because Mollison says, ‘everything is site specific’. So in Auroville, everything has its own conditions, and you have to deal with the conditions that are HERE. So we have illiterate villagers, and you have people with their PhD’s. So some might see these parameters as obstacles. But like Mollison would say, whatever you have, you turn it into a resource. So the fact that we are here, and all the things we have here are assets.”

Overall, Auroville’s critique of community disintegration manifests in countless ways, but is most essentially expressed through a shared set of aspirations that are necessarily cohesive in order to develop lives that are in concert with ‘The Dream’. Auroville has also developed a series of evolving projects and infrastructure that grapple with various manifestations of inequality and fragmentation in their larger society. Their more distinct critical commentaries involve projects of consensus decision making, horizontal leadership models, wage equality, socialist programs such as ‘universal health care’, the refusal to align with any particular religion or political creed, etc. Specifically, Auroville’s aspiration to be a consensus-based community generates some of the most observable illustrations of how these ideals are experimented with in real and human ways that invariably produce a cohesive yet paradoxically volatile community feel.

Although consensus decision-making is the preferred mode of decision making in Auroville, it is not always plausible, or desirable. Major decisions in Auroville are usually debated in open meetings through what they call their ‘Residents Assembly’¹² in which the goal is to come to a form of consensus around the questions at hand and through a process they deem “divine anarchy”. Although the details of the governing arrangements of Auroville will not be detailed here, what *is* important is the fact that Auroville recognizes the ‘Residents Assembly’ as the most essential body for decision making, and that they make the *effort* to

¹² For details on the governing structure of Auroville, the Residents Assembly, and consensus strategies, see the ‘Site Descriptions’ section of this document.

come to some form of consensus when possible. When consensus proves impossible, a voting process opens in which they practice universal suffrage: each Aurovilian has the right to participate in the decision-making, but there is no compulsion to exercise this right. It is also essential to recognize that Aurovilians address most aspects of their society as ‘experimental’ and are embedded in an ongoing process of reworking, reconsidering, retrying, and reformulating. Many Aurovilians are very critical of their current status of governance, leadership and decision-making, and frequently cite frustration over the pace at which decisions are made and the general state of lethargy they experience in the development of the township. Some residents are even concerned that they delude themselves by manipulating names or titles of projects and institutions in order to ‘fit their ideal’, as opposed to manipulating the project itself to embody the ideal. As one lifelong Aurovilian observed:

“There are too many things that have gone unsaid and too much lack of sincerity. If you give a more palatable name to everything so that it’s more acceptable to your ideology or theory, then it doesn’t help you; it’s sort of an alcoholism of denial. We say, “Oh we don’t give salaries, we give maintenance. This is your contribution.” But it’s not a contribution it’s a tax, it’s a forced thing! A contribution is a voluntary thing. So we have given a different name to everything to make it fit to our ideal. But that is a big problem, and I think we have to be more honest”

There have been many stages in which Aurovilians have experimented with diverse forms of governance and decision-making, always seeking to better align their lifestyles with that of their ideals and ‘The Dream’. Even today, there is a large group of Aurovilians who suggest the need for an ‘overview body’ or ‘town council’ which would be vested with the powers of ensuring that the various activities of Auroville are moving in the direction of their larger ideals in a coordinated and cogent manner.

Essential to this form of decision-making is also the fact that Auroville’s governing arrangement is based on non-hierarchical structures. There is no single “leader” of Auroville, and no official ‘CEO’s, ‘executives’, ‘presidents’, or ‘bosses’. Even within the individual ‘units’ and organizations that make up Auroville, there are no official ‘executives’; although there are certain individuals whose responsibilities and roles within the respective organizations closely resemble that of an executive position. At present, a large

number of “working groups” manage the day-to-day administration of the community. These groups are chosen based on particular community members ‘expertise’ through a vetted process, and address issues related to community coordination, city planning, economy and finance, education, ecology and green work, health, etc. They also operate with a great deal of autonomy, while the largest community wide decisions remain in the hands of the Residents Assembly. Overall, I was informed that it is their ideal of ‘human unity’ that guides each of these projects towards a practice of deep equality, and inspires their critical experimentations with alternative modes of decision making and ‘living’ in general.

The ideal of basic human unity and equality has also inspired many different models based on combatting unjust disparity in Kashi’s larger community. Although Kashi has certainly engaged in more ‘outward’ oriented activism to impact these challenges, they have also typically engaged with these inequities *within* the context of Kashi itself, by embodying a model that works to redress the respective disparity. Specifically, in his explanation of why he took the lead in developing a community home for low-income elderly folks on Kashi (called By the River), Kashi’s CEO explained:

“I hope that By The River can be a model for other communities. In the US there is a major population challenge with aging. When we created By The River, we did a needs assessment. We used to focus on the AIDS issue, but with shifting needs, we shifted our response”

In contrast to characteristic models of activism, Kashi as a community is both currently and historically interested in manifesting ‘place’ in a way that challenges social inequities by creating their own paradigm which articulates a critique of these inequities by nature of its mission and practices. This approach to challenging social inequalities is not singular to ICs, but is indeed an unusual and thematic attribute. Another long-term member of Kashi spoke to this theme when she explained:

“I think it’s important for people to be able to come to a certain place and know that ‘this is the place’. Especially during the AIDS epidemic, it was important to have a place that people can come and know that they are safe.”

Any critique of community disintegration or social inequality in contemporary capitalist state societies also involves an inherent and sometimes explicit critique of capitalism. According to Brown, intentional

communities' emphasis on communal sharing testifies to their critique of capitalism and the inequalities that these individuals perceive as part and parcel to the capitalist economic system (Brown, 2002). Similarly, Sargisson argues that these communities represent the "starting place for a consideration of the roles of the public and the private, property, and relations of the self and other" (Sargisson, 1996: 1). Even further, in capitalist societies, economic and social practices which privilege the 'individual' as well as the 'single-family unit' are said to degrade the important characteristics of community interdependence, cooperation, and mutuality by encouraging competition and exploitation instead (Kanter, 1972; Putnam, 2000; Brown, 2002; Bellah, 2008). To address this concern, intentional communities generally work to provide material and psychological safety, security, and institutionalized social equalizers in order to eliminate the need for competition, social hierarchies, and divisive power inequalities (Kanter, 1972; Brown, 2002). Kirby notes that in his own research, as well as in that of his predecessors, there exists an apparent theme in which members of intentional communities seek to evolve an ethic of commitment to one another and the natural environment in a manner that shifts the focus from their individualistic pursuits towards their connectedness to humanity and the earth (Kirby, 2003).

In Auroville, their development of what they call the 'maintenance system' is one strategy they have designed to counter capitalistic value systems. Ideally, this system is intended to create economic equality, simplicity, and a sense of 'motivation' among *all* residents to engage with work they are passionate about as opposed to pursuing financial gain. Put simply, the maintenance system is a monthly stipend that all working Aurovilians should receive and provides just enough money for essentials (see Site Descriptions: Auroville, for detailed information). Although the maintenance system *does* provide members with equal pay, currently not all members are receiving maintenance, and the ideal of 'economic equality' is far from reality; many Aurovilians are independently wealthy or sound, many have found additional 'contractor' jobs outside of Auroville, and some are living without even the basic maintenance pay. Despite the apparent

contradiction, one Aurovilian spoke to the motivating implications behind their ‘money-less economy’ and the maintenance system, and explained the benefits and the hardships of such an aspiration:

“No possession of wealth or money. The most scary phenomenon has brought a huge amount of freedom to the individual. So if there is the kind of talk about growing and expanding, this can only happen when our personal sense of clinging is dropped. The imposition of this ideal that there is “no personal possession of any kind” is an incredible background to live in. Simplifying the lifestyle adds quality, space and time to ourselves, and it’s a phenomenal system change. Second thing is that Auroville says it wants to create a society in which there is no circulation of money. It’s BLOODY HARD. It may never be achieved, but the very fact that we dare to contemplate what it would be like is important.”

Relatedly, neither Kashi nor Auroville has ever been known for being particularly ‘financially prosperous’. Certainly they have managed to survive, if not thrive - despite it, but not because of it. In the context of both communities, this reality perhaps speaks volumes about their values, and the projects of abundance that they privilege over financial wealth. Responding to the issue of monetary ‘lack’, one Aurovilian explained that there is an opportunity for deeper contentment and happiness embedded in a life unconcerned with financial wealth. Despite the aspiration to live these ideals, today, members of both communities expressed interest in, if not desperation for, a ‘more sound’ financial condition:

“We are still here after all of these years, with very intangible assets, and certainly not financial ones. It’s a beautiful contradiction. Now we have to see if we can be smart enough to use those intangible assets to become financially sound as well - and also to touch the world.”

Ultimately, the journey seems to be one of integrality, synchronicity, and ideally, consonance. Whether between the individual and community, the community and society, the human and natural environments, business and family, spirituality and materiality, one culture to another, ones inner and outer aspirations, business and family, or generation to generation; Kashi and Auroville express an aspiration, not only for self-growth, but for this growth to take place in the context of integral and systemic changes to their immediate, and eventually, extended environments:

“In principle and practice the individual and the collectivity are equally as strong. Communism - you have the community or group strong. Capitalism - you have the individual strong. But in Auroville, you have both of these things; both have to be as strong and clear as one another. This is a real challenge: how are you fully an individual, and at the same time how can you be fully part of the collective? You have time to develop yourself, and there is time that HAS to be given to the collective. There is an interaction there. This I like very much”.

Critiquing Environmental Degradation and Exploitation

The critique of environmental exploitation is also central to the architecture of most intentional communities in which a ‘sustainability’ component directs both the physical development of the community, as well as social, organizational, and consumer practices (Carr, 2004). As they work to live in closer concert with their natural environment, many intentional communities are recognized for their experiments with organic and sustainable agriculture as well as ‘sustainable’ resource use, building materials, and development techniques. ‘Eco Village’ and ‘Sustainable Community’ are two of the most common titles given to intentional communities with an environmental focus, but they are not confined to these labels (Kirby, 2003). Today, as environmental degradation and the sustainability discussion reign even among popular discourse, the prevalence of environmentally minded design in intentional communities around the world has dramatically increased (Dawson, 2006). One intentional community in Scotland explains that: “the ecovillage model is a conscious response to the extremely complex problem of how to transform our human settlements, whether they be villages, towns or cities, into full-featured sustainable communities, harmlessly integrated into the natural environment” (Findhorn Ecovillage, 2011).

In both Auroville and Kashi, the movement towards a more sustainable ecology is now a fundamental component to the makeup of their communities, and elements of scalable models for other communities are evident. Significantly, these ecologically minded projects are much less foundational tenets than they are a consequence of their foundational value systems. In order to understand the relationship between ICs and their natural environment, one must first understand the value system driving these projects, why their desire for consonance between their values and actions inspire environmental consciousness, and how and where these projects situate into the larger conversations these communities

are having with society at large. As one Kashi resident illuminated, the evolution of their interaction with their natural environment was an obvious *consequence* of their ideals:

“I think compassion for mother earth is a key thing. Kashi has always been beautifully taken care of in honor of the earth mother. You cannot get great joy out of taking care of your grounds unless you understand that this is a divine thing that you are doing. So Sustainable Kashi today is now another way of enhancing the land, and being able to provide a forum for other people to do the same thing”

In Auroville, a deep running consciousness of their natural environment, and their role in facilitating this environment is also a consequence of their ideals. Many Aurovilians I spoke to draw deep connections between this ecological facilitation, their self-transformation, and the values of the community as a project. Additionally, nearly every built structure on Auroville can be observed for its environmentally conscious characteristics. Considering the degree of environmentally conscious infrastructure, one might assume that there are a set of development regulations in place that guide the architects in their choice of materials and design. I personally was surprised to find that this is not the case. In fact, there are only two guiding principles formally in place for architects: 1) they may not use asbestos, and 2) they must work to integrate water catchment systems into the infrastructure of every building (the latter being more of a guideline than a direct rule). So what is it then that guides these architects, diverse and numerous as they are, towards environmentally friendly and creative styles of design? This is what one interviewee described to me as the “Auroville ethos”:

“The only standards we have are: we don’t use asbestos, and you TRY to use rainwater harvesting from your roof - but that is a Tamil Nadu rule! These are the two standards. The good thing is that it is kind of the Auroville ethos (environmental concern). So even if there aren’t rules per say, it does factor in as a research question and on a subconscious level ...on all levels.”

The fact that it is ethos which holds together the symmetry of environmentally conscious projects on Auroville, highlights the other aspects of the physical landscape and built environment which are being guided by such implicit principles. For members of Kashi and Auroville, development and daily life are contemplated in holistic and integrated ways, whether through formal systems of thought such as

permaculture and integral education, or in more idealistic terms of universal human unity, equality, and interconnectedness. In this way, it is also difficult to separate the critique of environmental exploitation from that of community disintegration and inequality; the values driving both sets of critique are the same. Specifically, just as both communities have taken up ‘permaculture’ guided principles to shape their agricultural projects, a permaculture approach also guides the development of these communities on a social and organizational level. Speaking to how their ideals of ecological harmony align with their social lives, and the fundamental values of Kashi itself, the founder of Sustainable Kashi explained:

“They run parallel. Kashi has always spoken of teaching awareness, kindness, and giving back. There is nothing more aware than being completely aware of your land and natural environment and learning from it and treating it with respect and not poisoning it. Being aware of all of these choices you make on a daily basis can affect your land and make it more healthy and thriving for the future. Permaculture is a design science on how you place everything in your life. Whether it’s the placement of a fruit tree or the placement of your house, or the placement of yourself within a community and the relationships with the people you place around you. So permaculture looks to include every aspect of your life to be designed to be the most efficient and beneficial”

In a time when the world is experiencing the ramifications of a long history embedded in the perspective of ‘separation’ - in which the human world is separated from the natural world - the integral strategies of these two intentional communities represent pertinent critical commentaries on the ways in which humanity, our built environments, our value systems, and the natural environment interact. In this way, they do battle with the conservationist discourse that has historically dominated the western world approach to ‘managing nature’, and has depended on our ability to exclude human beings from particular spaces in order to preserve nature, while dominating and domesticating all other spaces of ‘nature’ (Gregory, 2001). As Fairhead and Leach explained, the ideal of ‘the natural’ has “been central to conservation policies which have commonly deemed the exclusion of people as necessary for the preservation, or reestablishment, of nature” (Fairhead and Leach, 1997: 6).

According to Cronin and Forsyth (1996; 2008), the historical desire to ‘protect nature’ from human destruction has served as a form of discursive distraction – an evasion of systemic problems in the

ways we arrange our societies and the capitalist systems that develop them. They argue that there has been a fundamental conflict between ecology and human culture, and academics, philosophers, and scientists have been at odds over which aspect of life should be privileged for centuries. For Dubos (1980), ecology becomes a more complex but far more interesting science when human aspirations are regarded as an integral part of the landscape. He believes that in fact, the interplay between humankind and the natural environment has most often created some of the more creative ecosystems and that “the word “environment” does not convey the quality of the relationships that humankind can ideally establish with the Earth” (Dubos, 1980: 5). For Cronin (1996) changing the ways we conceptualize nature is a cultural and social critique in itself. Ultimately, each of these scholars conclude that what is needed is a form of critical self-consciousness – never imagining that we are able to ‘escape’ into the wilderness as to evade responsibility and history – and most of all to practice remembrance and experiment with new ways of being in order to make ‘nature’ or ‘wilderness’ as humane as it is natural.

In light of this theoretical discourse, the lived and practical ways of ‘interacting’ with nature practiced by Kashi and Auroville become much more interesting and meaningful projects of constructive resistance. Their experiments with organized systems of interconnection, interdependence, and stewardship, while aspiring to higher ideals of harmony, balance and unity, manufactures unique paradigms that are inherently critical of the conservationist, nature as mechanism, and ‘separation’ discourses. By exploring the ‘human to nature’ relationship members of both Kashi and Auroville are not only better able to live their ideals, but they are also remarkably expressive of vital and performative social critiques.

Consonance, interconnection, and seamlessness also inform Kashi and Auroville’s tactics in facilitating their respective ecosystems. According to Kasper (2008), the thematics of seamlessness and interconnectivity are actually typical of most contemporary ICs, and although many ICs seek a high degree of energy and resource independence and sustainability, they also do not aspire to become completely self-

sufficient or isolated. Instead, they typically acknowledge the importance of networks and large ‘systems’: “the ideal ecovillage does not exist. It is a work in process — a fundamental component of the new paradigm, where much is yet to be learned” (Van Schyndel Kasper, 2008; 13). Similarly, as many residents of both Auroville and Kashi confessed, their purpose is not to serve as a complete and replicable prototype upon which society at large can model itself. Rather, despite their efforts, members of both Kashi and Auroville also expressed dissatisfaction with their own ‘sustainability’ statuses:

“I would say that Auroville is progressing but not doing enough. I would point to one statistic regarding the garbage model: Auroville is recycling 65-70% of its waste. So the other 30-35% is going into landfill. Given the ideals of the place, its not enough. Auroville is growing 15% of its food needs. It should be growing at least 60% of that. But because in India we have access to cheap food, and you cant grow food for the price you can buy it, it’s a tough sell”.

Although none of these projects or organizational attributes are above criticism, contradiction, or critical analysis, what is significant here, is that they operate in ongoing and aspirational contexts, which in their very expressions and performances articulate critiques of their larger societies. Regardless of how you qualify these projects in terms of ‘success vs. failure’, their experimentations with modes of social organization and practice, of living with their natural environment, and of personal development within the framework of an active fellowship, *certainly* offer various ‘aspects’ of an alternative paradigm from which individuals and society can derive inspiration and new ways ‘of being’.

(2) Deploying the Critique: Education, Life-Long Learning, and Activism

Geographers in general recognize the importance of place in social organization and interaction. However, our theoretical acumen for understanding where and how place is *deployed* still needs much development. According to Martin, to do so, we can examine real tangible places that can “be a basis for identity-based activism, in which groups of people draw upon distinct political and economic frameworks that shape identity, their shared ideals about residential places, and specific sites of resistance and domination” (Martin, 2003: 733). In this section, I argue that intentional communities are exemplar sites

for an analysis in which place is *deployed* as a ‘real and tangible’ group of individuals with a shared political, economic, and value-based identity. In the cases of Kashi and Auroville specifically, these deployments are taking place as diverse forms of education, outreach, and activism.

Deploying social critique, in the context of Kashi and Auroville, depends on the reality that making-place extends beyond the bounded space these communities occupy. In fact, this ‘place-making’ endeavor travels into a much less much physically restricted realm when one takes into account their emphasis on education, outreach, and activism. Even more, both Kashi and Auroville have ‘satellite communities’ in which solidarity with their values is expressed:

“It’s important that we have also expanded ourselves. We have people that don’t live on the property that consider themselves full members of Kashi.”

This reality complicates the limited notion of a restricted or physically bounded place, and calls forward a more expanded investigation into the semipermeable borders of these place-based communities.

Further, if we accept that individuals ‘outside’ of these communities might be interested in deriving new ‘ways of being’, and that intentional communities *can* deploy their ‘living critique’, it is also understood that this form of critical commentary requires a stage on which it can be seen, heard, experienced, and contemplated (Marcus and Fischer, 1999). Thus, place-making is an essential preface to creating a *stage* from which the critique can be performed and deployed, and is intrinsically connected to any IC-based form of activism or education. As the founder of Sustainable Kashi explained, there are great benefits to having a stage from which they can deploy their critique:

“Its great to educate and have the canvas and the systems in place so that people can see it being practiced and not just hear about it and learn about it, but actually see it working.”

In the following section, I focus on their more articulately ‘outward looking’ deployments through which Kashi and Auroville typically share their ideals, lifestyles, and learning’s with their wider local and global communities. To do so, I examine how Kashi and Auroville’s place-based facilitation of ecological

and social transformation has permitted them to deploy place as a site of ongoing critique through the bodies of research, education, outreach, and activism.

Education and Life-Long Learning Environments:

Typically, when one conjures the image of an intentional community, it does not usually involve reflections of intellectualism, education, or research. Instead, I have found that the term ‘intentional community’ typically evokes imaginings of ‘hippy communes’, agriculturalists, religious radicals, or groups of individuals who have sought to escape society. According to Kanter, it may be true that “scientific and intellectual analysis have often had *little* place in utopian communities, and the body and soul have often been developed to the exclusion of the mind” (Kanter, 1972: 224). However, Kanter also recognizes that there are exceptions to this generalization and that some communities have historically “stressed education and intellectual life and send many of its children to universities. The life of the mind need not be incompatible with communal existence if it is well integrated into the fabric of the community” (Kanter, 1972: 224). Kashi and Auroville are two notable illustrations of this exception. Both communities historically and presently stress the importance of education, send their youth to universities, built their own schools, encourage a life-long learning environment, and engage their larger communities on the grounds of education and various styles of ‘learning’. Their projects are also typically tangential or complementary to the more formal venues of education and ‘the academy’, but not usually founded in it. In her essay on the cultural critiques of intentional communities, Susan Love Brown (2002) considers these types of communities as ‘revitalization movements’ and explains that they “constitute indigenous forms of cultural critique in state societies, often separate from the critiques of scholars and public intellectuals but not unrelated or unnoticed by them. Thus, revitalization constitutes a non-elitist form of critique available to the privileged and unprivileged alike” (Brown, 2002: 158). In the context of Kashi and Auroville, this

confluence of education and social critique typically takes shape through models which are broadly drawn to explore a style of education that believes social change begins with each individual, and encourages experiential education within a community environment. This entails the manufacture of campuses and pedagogies better equipped to educate for *collective* change, and as Kanter stated, models that are well integrated into the fabric of the community.

In Auroville, these attributes are considerably more abundant than in Kashi. In fact, they are so heavily emphasized, one might suggest that there is nothing ‘more’ obvious about Auroville than its interest in research, education, and life-long learning. The ideals of education and progress are at the very center of their society and stated in their charter: “Auroville will be the place of an unending education, of constant progress, and a youth that never ages” (The Auroville Charter, 2014). Tellingly, the community is also referred to as a ‘human laboratory’; a term that aptly evokes the sense of experimentation and ongoing learning that is taking place in all spheres of life on this community. In order to facilitate such an environment, Auroville has actually established parameters to keep organizations or ‘units’ from needing to walk through red tape or a cumbersome number of bureaucratic channels in order to execute their missions. Although the degree to which this is successful is debatable, some Aurovilians feel that it can also make it very difficult to organize the ongoing educational activities on Auroville in any comprehensible or ‘systematized’ way. As one Aurovilian explained to me, sometimes, seminars or classes taking place on Auroville do not align with the purpose and message of Auroville, and this can cause great discord among members.

Auroville’s emphasis on using the manifest and material worlds for their scientific, philosophical, and spiritual inquiries also directs most daily activities on the community. In this way, it becomes clear that ICs which organize themselves around the principles of education and on-going learning depend upon their capacities to embody their critiques, so that they can later deploy them by way of observation, teaching,

sharing, and even replication. As expressed by the education wing in Auroville, they hope to: “Provide a platform for researchers to further deepen their work, exchange with others within Auroville, India and abroad, and ultimately be a catalyst for Auroville to deliberately orient itself around the theme of a learning society – a society in which everyone is a teacher as well as a student and where the main economy will be that of an exchange of knowledge rather than the unsustainable practices of a society oriented around consumption of goods” (Auroville, n.d.).

As a phenomenon in general, many intentional communities are also attempting to serve as ‘campuses’ for residents and students to explore possible and transformative futures. For instance, an organization within Auroville called SAVI is considered the gateway into the community for any student, volunteer, researcher, intern, or interested mind. During my own stay in Auroville, the organization was invested in organizing a more cohesive ‘campus’, through which all operating organizations and units around Auroville would be synchronized into a dynamic learning community. This entails a move from conventional academia towards creating campuses and pedagogies ideally able to educate for collective and holistic change.

Similarly, on Kashi, their sustainability movement has undertaken a comprehensive project in which they are integrating the entire community into a cohesive permaculture campus upon which they can both embody and deploy their critique through a model of experiential learning. As one member explained:

“I think it’s wonderful that it’s something healthy for the earth, and it’s awesome that we are all going to be able to eat better, etc. But I think the REAL purpose of it is “to be a place where people come to get educated”. Its part of their (Sustainable Kashi’s) mission statement. We are not necessarily trying to make a lot of money out at farmers markets. We more want to educate people, and in that way we want to be the hub that people can come to learn.

For both communities, the medium of education has possibly served as the most constructive discourse through which they interact with their larger societies. For Kashi, their school for children from pre-school

to the 12th grade, The River School¹³, offered transformative opportunities for educating children, and also for educating the larger community about Kashi itself. According to one Kashi educator, the change in the ways that Kashi's larger community regarded them was a direct result of the school:

"I don't know what necessarily happened around us. But I do know for SURE that the River School affected and influenced not only the kids but also their families. And that is hundreds of people right there. I think the River School was really a huge influence in "letting it be okay for people to be different".

Today, the River School is no longer in operation, and yet the sentiments remain. As the former principal of the River School and resident of Kashi informed me:

"The goal is to have a school again. We had the River school for many years. The education piece in Kashi also involves the workshops we do. Its not just formal academic education, but there are many forms. If we don't have educational opportunities, then how do people grow?"

In Auroville, there is also a steady stream of volunteer's, students, interns, researchers, and guests throughout the year. The interaction between Auroville and their guests of all forms is one rooted in the ideals of 'learning' and 'integral'¹⁴ education. Auroville also has schools of their own to educate Aurovilian and local children in a fashion that is not available to them in their local school systems. Although these ideals are a strong driving force in Aurovilian society, their lived reality is not as straightforward. In fact, today, Auroville faces a significant obstacle to their development as a 'learning community': a deficit of interested youth. According to some of my participants, there is a possessive grip on the 'old master plan' and 'what Mother said' among older Aurovilians in a way that suffocates the learning environment

As one Aurovilian informed me, she felt that the issue was two pronged, (1) 'older Aurovilians' are very rigid in their imagination about Auroville and cling to their 'positions', while (2) the younger members are not interested in getting involved in politics because they feel that it is 'already decided' and based on old 'favors' that being given based on old personal connections. Another very critical Aurovilian

¹³ The River School is no longer in operation but served a long and successful tenure from 1979 - 2005

¹⁴ Integral education is the philosophy and practice of education for the whole being: body, emotions, mind, soul, and spirit. It derives from the teachings on education of Sri Aurobindo and especially those of his collaborator The Mother (<http://www.edu.aurovilleportal.org/integral-education>)

went as far to argue that ‘Auroville is destined for failure’ due to the new direction younger Aurovilians and ‘newcomers’ are taking the community.

Despite these discrepancies in outlook, Auroville in general continues to explore ways in which they may deploy this work to wider audiences, and is regularly hosting conferences, festivals, and retreats aimed to engage their society on these terms. In fact, they are currently planning a conference in their neighboring city of Chennai, in which they will “project Auroville as a place of research and experimentation, a multicultural center which is constantly evolving and a place of never-ending education. The strides made in areas such as renewable energy, education, healthcare and waste management in Auroville are no mean achievements. We receive people from different countries who seek the expertise of Aurovilians in these areas. The festival will allow people to interact with Aurovilians on how these can be replicated in other parts of India” (Philip, M.D.V. 2014. *The Modern Utopia that is Auroville*. Quoting P.R. Srinivasamurthy). Altogether, it is clear that the aspirations of ‘integral learning’ are operating on all levels within Auroville and inspire the majority of their interactions with their larger society, whether ‘good or bad’, ‘successful or unsuccessful’.

Another significant consequence of embodying their ideals and sharing their discoveries through open discourse, distribution, and education, is the phenomenon of ‘replication’. In fact, Aurovilians often cited instances in which they witnessed their lifestyles, philosophies, methods, materials, and projects being replicated in other parts of India and the world. One resident explained that he has seen Aurovilian practices seeping into their larger community of India:

“Well, as one example, we were up in Rajasthan and saw these houses made of ferro cement. We went and found the guy who had built them and he was like, “yeah I was down in this community in southern India (Auroville) where they were using this, and I jotted down notes!” Also, locally, every mason can make a ferro cement house now in the surrounding villages. They are also using our earth blocks, etc.”

Comparably, residents of Kashi feel that there are aspects of their community that are meant for scalable replication, and might serve as models for society at large. Kashi’s CEO was particularly articulate

about Kashi's desire to expand the reach of these deployments and to engage in a more global discourse of change:

“Replication is appropriate with certain aspects of Kashi. But Kashi as a whole cannot be duplicated. By the River (community for low income elderly) for instance could be used as a scalable model. Sustainable Kashi also. However, when you talk about “What is Kashi?”... We need a better acumen as to understand why people even care about this. We are still just in the local paper. Its local and its important but its such a limited slice of the more global and international discussion we are trying to have.”

Overall, both Kashi and Auroville continue to express interest in further developing their own capacities to educate, host research and exploratory projects, and deploy their embodied critiques through the mediums of education and experiential learning.

Activism and Outreach

As much as a learning environment serves these communities in their endeavor to share their critical projects, both communities also believe it imperative that they involve themselves in more outright and assertive ways in their larger society through a diverse array of ‘outreach’ or ‘activism’. This is not surprising in light of the fact that both communities heavily emphasize the ideal of ‘service’ towards the larger goal of social change, and also towards their own individual self-development. Most often, these projects are reflections of a parallel and embodied critique to which the community itself aspires. Other times, they are responses to a ‘need’ they perceive in their larger society. Again, as the stream of foundational ideals run steady in all aspects of intentional community, even their need-based responses are imbued with the aspirations that serve at the community’s foundations. As expressed by one member of Kashi:

“We are trying to be who we are, and represent the tenets of our spirituality: kindness and compassion. Our approach has been responding to needs. Paying attention, seeing what projects are being worked on, and trying to plug in and help. Now with Sustainable Kashi, we have the chance to serve as a model, and that is a whole other way of helping”.

Here it is clear that, beyond making-place for others, these critical projects also aid the communities themselves to integrate their ideals into the make-up of their own lives in important and transformative ways, while simultaneously engaging them in socially relevant and outward reaching ventures.

Historically, Kashi has responded with activism and outreach to social issues involving diverse forms of marginalization and discrimination. Beyond the work they were involved with in the 1990's, regarding the HIV/AIDS epidemic, Kashi also developed an organization called the River Fund dedicated to providing support to people living with AIDS and other life threatening illnesses, marched in protests around the nation, supported a home for AIDS orphans in India, and were active in the NAMES Project¹⁵ and AIDS Memorial Quilt, among much more. Simultaneously, they became increasingly involved in movements advocating for the LGBTQT community, participated actively in the Parliament of the World's Religions to support interreligious peace, developed a program to provide food to locally disadvantaged families called 'Feed Everyone', and sponsored and developed educational programs for rural women in parts of Uganda and India.

Auroville's approach has historically resembled that of Kashi's on many fronts. What *is* unique to Auroville however, is that many social outreach programs on Auroville are also inclined towards a more holistic approach in which various social strata are dealt with in integrated ways as opposed to in silos. One such organization, Auroville Village Action Group (AVAG), is an exemplar of these ideals: "Since its inception, AVAG has developed into a solid and reputable organization for positive social change that fosters the integral development of civil society, democracy building and social advocacy, including gender equity and caste equality— the foundation stones for building a sustainable and healthy co-operative Indian society." (Welcome to Auroville Village Action Group, n.d.). In one conversation with the current

¹⁵ Established in 1987, The Names Project Foundation is an organization that developed the AIDS Quilt: "The mission of The NAMES Project Foundation is to preserve, care for and use The AIDS Memorial Quilt to foster healing, heighten awareness, and inspire action in the age of AIDS" (<http://www.aidsquilt.org/about>).

administrator of AVAG, it was explained to me that this was not always the case, and that the transition to a more integrated approach was a result of failed isolated projects:

“When we transitioned the organization, we made a commitment to deal with gender equality and caste equality. We also determined to work with all sections of the society because in Tamil Nadu there are organizations that work exclusively with women...or with Dalit’s. We determined that an isolated approach will not work, and integration is needed. So gradually we have framed our value system, we framed our way of approaching the people, and expanded in terms of number of villages.”

Again, the foundational ideals undergirding Auroville are observably evident in their tactics of outreach and activism, in which inclusion and equity are dealt with through an integrated approach to deploying social critique. Similarly, the administrator of AVAG also noted that the ideals of Auroville align with AVAG in ways that mutually impact the organization, Auroville as a community, the surrounding villages they work with, and the international community:

“Whenever there are land issues, or workers issues, they approach AVAG. And also these days there are groups of international students who come to be addressed by AVAG. We are also implementing SEDAB, which is a livelihood program, and for which we need to relate to many Auroville units (organizations). This will allow us to take Auroville’s technology into the villages. Building technologies, earthen bricks, spirulina, feminine hygiene products, solar energy, organic farming, and all environmental initiatives, etc.”

Overall, as much as intentional communities in all their varieties have actively developed critiques of their respective societies throughout the centuries, there is also the glaring impression that they have contributed little to politics or to vast social change. This is also the case with the communities of Auroville and Kashi, and over the course of this research project I have witnessed their own consciousness of this reality. Thus, although I cannot comment on these projects in the terms ‘effective or ineffective’, ‘failed or successful’; I *can* elucidate this form of social critique in which critique is embedded in place-making, embodied in practice, and deployed through education, activism, and outreach. In essence, one can only conclude that, certainly Kashi and Auroville do challenge their societies in socially and environmentally important ways, while the effects of such challenges must remain in the realm of speculation.

Chapter #7

The Role of ‘Self’ in Intentional Community

“The only way to know Auroville is to look into yourself. Auroville is, on a collective level, as rich in aspects, directions, dimensions and barriers as you yourself are on an individual level. One can know about Auroville just as much as one is able to discover in ones own depths.” (Sullivan, 1994: 19)

The mission of this thesis is to understand if, how, and why intentional communities embody and deploy critiques of their larger societies. The previous two chapters have dealt with the manifest ways in which Kashi and Auroville make place to dynamically address perceived social ills through iterative, performed, and embodied illustrations of an alternative paradigm. Thus, this chapter deviates from these more outward oriented illustrations and seeks to address the bedrock for their communal impulses: seeking ‘self’. According to Bohill, intentional communities in general serve as models that have been established for “setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for the decipherment of the self by oneself, and for the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as the object” (Bohill, 2010: 102). Although a discussion of ‘self seeking’ in the context of ICs is typically associated with the spiritual foundations of the community, this section will not address the specific spiritual belief systems of each respective community, or the diversity of individual beliefs that exist within them. Instead, I will discuss more thematic illustrations of their commitments to ‘self seeking’ in light of their unique communal environments in which members are invested in their *own* growth, and yet cherish infinitely diverse versions of this aspiration.

Firstly, members regularly emphasized the need to consider the ‘self’ from a holistic perspective, in terms of all its parts: *mind, body, spirit*. Secondly, and in a similar and ‘holistic’ manner, it is also a fundamental function of IC building that neither the ‘self’ nor the manifest are transformed in isolated silos. Rather, members of intentional communities typically engage in examining their own actions, their motivations, and their decisions in reflexive ways that inevitably also determine their communal projects

and expressions of social critique. Thirdly, for members of both Kashi and Auroville, the choice to reside in IC was consistently articulated as a decision more deeply rooted in their personal search for transformation or ‘realization’ than it was in affecting vast structural or social transformation in the dominant culture. Members, in general, are of the mind that in order to fully participate in solving societies challenges, one must first turn inward to tap their interior resources in order to act most effectively. Thus, community becomes the catalyst for personal transformation in the most deeply individualized sense, while simultaneously guided by a larger set of social aspirations and values:

“I think to want to live in a community like this, a person has to be in touch with their own yearning. They have to see that something is missing and they must be seeking. It’s a question of people wanting to find who they are and just be themselves. Coming to community doesn’t mean you have to conform to some personality shift. It just means that you have to really reach in and dig deep...while being committed to your own growth. I don’t think there are any other prerequisites. Its just all about wanting the shift within” – Kashi Member

Accordingly, this chapter deals with the role of ‘self’ at all levels of intentional community building, performing, deploying, and transforming in these two sites. I analyze the ways in which my participants are developing a relationship with ‘self’ through holistic systems, ethical contemplations, and individual negotiations taken up in the context of a collective. I examine the roles of place-making and community in supporting the development of both personal and social transformation, and account for the underlying utopian aspirations for harmony, synthesis, and integrality. I also consider the fact that the very foundations of intentional community building are settled in the belief that one must discover peace within before manifesting peace without, and work to unravel the implications of such a strategy on social critique.

The Individual ‘Self’ within the Collective

“Wherever there is a concentration of ‘aspirants’ – people who focus on this inner aspect – there will be a community which will be a collective representation of this thing. The first thing is to find the inner truth that exists in us all.”

Typically, IC adherents believe that it is through the transformation of the individual human being that the individual can then transform society, and even further, that this endeavor is best undertaken within

a group environment. This search for ‘self’ within and through the body of a collective makes the IC endeavor a unique and multidimensional one. Although any member of society is capable of performing the various ‘activities’ undertaken in intentional community, it is the concentrated form of these same practices which are performed for *both* individual and communal purposes, that make ICs different. Particularly with the socially and environmentally conscious precepts undergirding the make-up and activities of these two communities, this particular setting for ‘self-seeking’ inevitably inspires inner transformation with an eye towards their social and ecological consequences:

“The inner emphasis cannot be reduced because that is really what gives you the right relations with individuals, yourself, and the world. Outwardly, it (Auroville) is this widely accepting organization that tries to understand individual needs, allows the individual to expose their needs and their ways or approaches. Then coming together to decide things inside the system so it helps the individuals and then in turn the collective.”

Similarly, Bohill (2010) considers the meaning of intentional communities in terms of the Foucaultian understanding of ethics and dubs intentional community living as “ethics in praxis”. For Foucault, ethics concern the ways that we construct our ‘self’ and our lived ‘lives’, as well as the many fronts on which these two constructions meet. In parallel to the IC enterprise, Bohill explains, “Foucault’s ethics entertain similar notions around resistance and conscious cultural critique; contestations around representations of the self and values; and the performance of practices that may affect self-transformation” (Bohill, 2010: 91). Through intentional community living, participants find that they may construct notions of ‘self’ by aligning with their ethics in ways that are more challenging to accomplish outside of IC:

*“At Kashi, you get to focus on “your path”. Everyone here is pretty committed to wanting to grow. And we have become like brothers and sisters even though the majority of the people I live with, I would have never **chosen** to live with.”*

Although inner aspiration is operating at the center of each individual life, as well at the core of their communal enterprise, the role of ‘discovering self’ is not only sought for the purpose of inner transformation, but also for the external transformations that ensue as a result. For one Kashi member, the

daily interplay of individual ‘self seeking’ and a communal life designed around this ‘search’ is actually more important than the principles or activities playing out on the community:

*“Typically intentional communities are formed because of some set of principles or some body of thought, which like-minded people will choose to come together around. It might be religious, or sociological, or environmental etc. But Kashi is not **just** that. So if we were approached about advice for how to create a sustainable community, I would tell them that the difference is about putting consciousness first. So do not throw away the principles, but the sustainability is more about the heart and soul. It’s more about building a deep conscious awareness.”*

In both communities, it was exactly *this* elemental consciousness that has provided the glue for their communal projects through the range of trials, tribulations, and transformations that they have faced over their long histories. In fact, members explained that not only does the initial communal impulse begin with the aspiration for self-transformation, but it also develops into the foundational adhesive that holds their communities together - even through times of seeming impossibility:

“I have been here (in Auroville) almost 40 years and I can say that I feel as committed and as passionately involved as I was to start with, and I feel very close to many people. We may not agree on any instrumental plane, mind life body, but there is an agreement on a very deep inner plane; and that is unity- but unity WITHIN. So as long as that is there, it keeps you together, and that is why I think Auroville is a miracle.” - Aurovilian

Members of Kashi and Auroville also explained that without the collective environment, and the ‘container’ provided by the community, their innermost or individualistic aspirations did not feel so possible. For many, the aspect of community living actually emboldened their search for self-transformation by way of both (1) the constructive support system on offer, and (2) the agitations provided by a complex group of individuals living in close quarters. According to one Aurovilian, the collectivity has provided her with the necessary ‘fuel’ for transformation:

“Auroville forces you to engage on many levels, you always have to be involved in the collectivity, and you are constantly interacting with different groups functioning on different planes of being. Then on top of that you are trying to perfect your body also...you do not neglect this instrument. So 24/7 you are busy with your own development, but you are busy in a collective environment so there is this richness, fluidity, and fullness. You are never empty!”

As members continuously negotiate their terms with the ‘self’ and one another, their consistent investments into the development of themselves, other community members, and the community as an

entity also develops strong sentiments of personal consequence. Even with the sometimes painful manifestations of such responsibility, accountability was consistently attributed with encouraging the inner transformations participants are seeking in important and rewarding ways. For many of my interviewees, it was the confluence of ‘accountability, involvement, and responsibility’, that was an essential factor in their decision to ‘seek self’ within the context of IC. Although these sentiments were prevalent on both communities, the consciousness of the communal aspect and the attributes of such as lifestyle were more acute on Auroville than on Kashi. According to one Kashi member, their growing appreciation for the role of community, its membership, and the significance of their unique relationships are related to the recent loss of their founder and spiritual teacher, Ma:

“If you are going to step out of the social norm, you have to have a purpose. If you don’t have a reason that is similar to the other peoples, then it wont work. For a lot of people here, I think they thought their reason was “Ma”, and I think that is why a lot of people lived here was to be close to Ma. But now that Ma has passed away, you realize that it’s not something outside of yourself. It’s something very much inside of yourself that is fed by the lifestyle that we live. So as people see that, they almost value it more. That is why when Ma passed away, I would have thought a bunch of people would have left! – No one left! Not one single person”. – Kashi Resident

As the search for ‘self’ is implicated in all levels of community building and performing, a set of complementary tensions between the ‘individual and the collective’, their ‘inner and outer work’, and ‘the aspiration and the reality’ are also operating. Mediating these tensions is a distinctive task for members of ICs and creates a set of structural and everyday negotiations one does not necessarily face in society at large. Again, the search for consonance extends itself into most realms of life on these intentional communities, and aims to bridge ‘the individual and the collective’ in ways that permit the individual to learn more about themselves through the reflection of the community, and vice versa. As one member of Kashi expressed, the lessons in integration and the bridging of the community and the individual are a daily negotiation:

“When you live without this sense of community you are more selfish. You are more about what you are doing in your day. Everyday here is the opposite of that. Here, it’s always encompassing a variety of different people and how we are integrating with them on a daily basis.”

Similarly, one architect and resident of Auroville described her own experience with working to bridge the

individual and the collective through her profession:

“Because being a part of community you DO get much more involved than you would outside. Again because its such a small population, that you know inside and out about every project. It’s not just executing and manifesting YOUR concept, but to finalize this project in which so many people are involved. This is different from outside projects.”

Like the tensions between ‘self’ and community, the tension between ‘inner’ versus ‘outer’ work is also one that both communities grapple with on a daily basis. As these are experiments in which collective groups are seeking transformative realities – both personally and socially - the endeavor to balance the outer expression of this transformation with the need to inwardly nurture this change is a pressing contemplation. On both communities one will find members who are suspicious of emphasizing the outer work or outer expressions of the community, while there are others who believe that it is only through this explicit effort that one can progress inwardly. The question of how to negotiate the reality of ‘living in the world’ with their more esoteric questions about life, led many participants to explain their daily activities, communal projects, and the interactive components of their daily lives as ‘vessels’ through which the inner world is sought, explored, and mediated. In Auroville, the ‘work’ involved in developing or improving the community is generally considered just one mechanism towards accessing the ‘Divine’ and is an ideology that most centrally derives from Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy of Yoga, in which ones ‘work’ is their yoga. One farmer in particular explained to me his decision to choose a life in closer concert with the land, and why he saw Auroville as the best place for this lifestyle:

“After trying to do typical schooling, I started doing music and theater and gardening. And then I realized that if you wanted to have a life that is dedicated to an inner inquiry - which seems to be the only valuable thing to do in this short existence - then living in nature and working with the land would be a really intelligent way to cultivate the sensitivity needed for that inquiry. So that is why I chose to start farming on Auroville.”

Here, the manifest aspects of ‘work’ represent palpable ‘vessels’ through which residents of Kashi and Auroville reconcile the tension between their ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ efforts. As one Aurovilian explained, the question of balancing ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ discovery are central topics of interest for her and the community at large:

“You are tricked into signing up somehow. Because people come here because they are wanting to be part of a sustainable society, an ecological experiment, a community that is in the cutting edge in alternative technologies and doing research in architecture and in medicine and holistic living. All of these are very attractive new age ideas, which are inhabiting the earth consciousness at the limit of human thought. But then once you are here you discover that it is none of those things OR it is all of those things. But those are merely means. They are methodologies. They create the content of the journey that you need to make and the journey is only one: Self Evolution. So the “Field of Work” for everyone is his or her own evolution.”

From a slightly different perspective, some members of Auroville actually argued that the focus on the manifest can have consequences that detract from the ‘true’ purpose for which they are there (their inner work). According to these members, certain residents have forgotten about the emphasis on personal growth and change, and are too consumed with the politics, design, and labor involved in developing their community. Somehow, slowly, these ‘inward’ precepts have dissipated and the cultural emphasis in Auroville is now on ‘what you do’, your work, or what you manifest. A few participants actually attributed this cultural shift to another time in Auroville in which the emphasis lay ‘too heavily’ in the camp of inner work. According to them, it was common for members to use their inner work in order to evade the more grounded, physical, or ‘practical’ work on the community:

“People hid behind the “inner work”. You know... “I need to meditate all day today”. But we need all hands on deck, and so this also doesn’t work.” - Aurovilian

At Kashi, concerns around balancing the ‘inner and outer’ aspects of growth was less articulate and pronounced. Although the discrepancies and varieties of ‘inner and outer emphases’ does cause a degree of discord between certain members of Kashi, overall, the community as a whole has not developed the culture of dialogue prevalent in Auroville to bring the issues into a more public discourse. Nonetheless, Kashi maintains a strong emphasis on service work, social work, and work in general. As one Kashi member reminisced, Ma (their founder and teacher) was often quoted saying that ones inner aspirations are best sought through service and work, if the intention behind the work is conscious and kind. My observations also demonstrate that Kashi values the attributes of quietude, solitude, and contemplation, and are careful to make a conscious space for those interested in pursuing these methods. Ultimately, the size and

infrastructural aspirations of Kashi are small in comparison to Auroville and do not instigate the urgency 'to manifest' that one experiences in Auroville; making the topic less concerning to Kashi residents.

Members of Auroville and Kashi also drew out highly idealistic narratives of their community and their individual purposes in life, while remaining profoundly conscious of their flaws and the intrinsic humanity of their projects. In Auroville in particular, participants were acutely aware that their idealistic narrative is rife with contradictions, complications, and dissonance between idealism and realism:

“One of the first things that Mother says about Auroville is “Its life itself growing and perfecting itself, each one in his own way, above all not the same way”. Its clear that no one else can decide what someone else can do or be or think. So Auroville has always been highly opinionated, volatile, and explosive. But if there is something that unites it is not formulated, it is very inward”. - Aurovilian

The Mother herself was often quoted as stating: *“Auroville will contain all of the problems of the world”*. Upon reflection, it seems that The Mother was prescient. Today, Auroville continues to strive towards their foundational ideal of 'human unity', and yet subsist in the context of extreme socio-economic inequality; making Auroville a microcosm of humanity at large. For some, the subtle nuances in the meaning of 'human unity' complicate this ideal to the point of unrecognizability. For most of my participants however, this ideal truly speaks to their endeavor in transforming consciousness on a fundamental level; not simply everyone 'getting along'. In reference to the struggles of living up to the ideal of human unity, one long time Aurovilian explained:

“It seems the more we grow the more we experience how difficult it is. When I came, I thought it's very easy. We have all these cultures and all these nice people. But then I realized that I AM SWEDISH, and I am on one end of things. On the cultural level you start to realize it's not easy. But when we step into another level of consciousness, I don't think it will be this kind of challenge. But we are not living on that level now.”

Aurovilians also frequently and candidly suggested that Auroville's ideal of operating as a 'consensus society' has never been truly attainable. Particularly in contemporary Auroville, community members seem overall politically apathetic and have perhaps lost faith in their political process. On the other hand, proponents of consensus strategies argued that the important gains of this practice bear their fruit during the

process in which members learn about themselves, how work together, to communicate, to compromise, and to collaborate. One Aurovilian shared her own contemplations of this contradiction:

“Can we evolve consciously into another being...that is as different to a human (a mental being) as an ape. It’s impossible. And Auroville STARTS with that impossibility. But that’s kind of like the aim of Auroville. So we already have an aim that is impossible to conceive of mentally. So that is what holds us together if you can make sense of that contradiction. So because your aim is something that is impossible to realize in a lifetime, you are shifted away from the immediate demands, needs, wishes, and ambitions that kind of make a mess of human life. Because what destroys the earth is our immediate ambitions. I’m not saying Aurovilians DO THIS, but if they are signed up for this experiment...”

Aspirational Utopia’s of Harmony

“Harmony as a utopian value has another meaning: the merging of values, ideas, and spiritual matters with physical events, the union of mind and body, spirit and flesh.” (Kanter, 1972: 49).

Overall, most members of both Kashi and Auroville expressed an inclination to seek harmony among each of these tensions - ‘inner and outer’, ‘the individual and the collective’, ‘aspiration and lived reality’ - in dynamic and integrated ways. As a result, members of Kashi and Auroville can be observed negotiating these paradoxical dynamics by aspiring to utopias of harmony and experimenting with methods based on integrality and synthesis. Although these utopias often remain in the realm of aspiration, for a collective group of self-seekers, the import is placed on the *process* through which one learns about mind, body, and spirit. In this way, harmony, balance, synchronicity, and integrality operate as the guiding principles in ICs where the responsibility of ‘utopia’ is placed on the individual, and espoused through the diverse vessels of a collective.

Similarly, Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s research on intentional communities demonstrated that:

“The ideas informing the communal life-style – perfectibility, order, brotherhood, merging of mind and body, experimentation, and the community’s uniqueness – all represent its intentional quality, with harmony as their principal theme: harmony with nature, harmony among people, and harmony between the spirit and the flesh. Yet these notions must be recognized as idealizations, not truths. They describe the ways in which members of communes wish to conceive of communal life, rather than the realities of building a group” (Kanter, 1972: 54).

Kanter’s description of this tension between ‘the aspiration’ and ‘the reality’ highlight the ways in which

these IC projects represent idealism confronted with reality, and the fact that they seek harmony as the mediating element for their paradoxical conditions. It is clear that many of Kashi and Auroville's highest ideals, and in particular that of 'self realization', are lofty or 'utopian' in nature. In fact, many of my participants regard some their most idealistic endeavors as impossibilities. This element again returns us to their inward looking emphasis in which self-growth is sought through the vessel of every enterprise, whether deemed 'possible' or 'impossible'. The survival of their ideals and communal projects also speaks to their emphasis on the *process* through which one strives towards an ideal, as opposed to the importance of the actual end-goal. Or as one Aurovilian explained, the very project of Auroville is an 'impossibility':

"Auroville has never stopped being impossible. The impossibilities have just mutated. Now the impossibilities are of another kind than when they were more physical and material. Then they were based on the live spirit – we just couldn't get along with one another! Now they are on the mind plane."

Many members also suggested that it is the striving, and not the attainment, that sustains places like Auroville and Kashi, and where they achieve their inner most goals. Even the ideal of 'sustainability' was interpreted as an aspiration only attainable through *self-discovery* and learning how to become 'the type of people that can exist sustainably in harmony and interdependence'. When utopia is understood in this way, inner development is recognized as the foundational aspiration, and the consequences of 'self work' unfolding in and on the outer environment are considered vital. Rather than foreclosing on the notion that an individual can impact the world around them, these ICs try to make space for the reverberations of individual inner transformation to be expressed in the community and ultimately, their societies at large. They also leave the heights and lengths to which this expression might reach, as unknown and uncapped, while liberally tethering the individual and the collective project to the 'process' through which they express themselves and their aspirations:

"I like that Auroville is not an –ism". It is a total adventure the whole way. None of us know the goals. They are so far that actually we can't even see them. And this I love. I love that the whole life is like that. The way you have the freedom to, in a collectivity, express YOURSELF"

With the vital framework for these communities founded in the search for ‘self’ by and through systems seeking harmony, ‘whole systems’ thinking has become a natural emphasis. Just as elaborated in Chapter 6, education is an esteemed value in both communities and has also been influenced by their holistic ethos (‘education’ in this sense is being used liberally to reference any structured attempt or vehicle that is used for learning). As they evolve, both Kashi and Auroville are working to develop and refine social and environmental tools for education based on principles of holistic and sustainable change for the ‘whole being’. Auroville and Kashi’s diversity of ongoing learning opportunities, seminars, and workshops also contribute to an environment in which they seek to address the needs of the ‘whole being’ at any age. Specifically, in Auroville, it is imperative to make a distinction between ‘education’ as it is commonly interpreted, and holistic or ‘integral education’ as articulated by The Mother and practiced in Auroville. According to The Mother: “Education to be complete must have five principal aspects corresponding to the five principal activities of the human being; the physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic and the spiritual” (Education, Words of Wisdom, 2014). Today, the community envisions a dynamic campus with the capacity to incubate the body, mind, and spirit: creative, intellectual, social, and spiritual development for the ‘whole being’:

“We have created an atmosphere in which the many elements of the person can be taken care of: the mental, the physical, the emotional and the spiritual. So, these tangibles create something profoundly intangible in the society”. – Aurovilian

In fact, all aspects of Aurovilian aspirations are guided by the principles of ‘Integral Yoga’; a system of yogic philosophy dictated by their philosophic guru, Sri Aurobindo, and which is designed around the principles of harmony and integration. According to the Auroville website, the central purpose of Integral Yoga is the “Transformation of our superficial, narrow and fragmentary human way of thinking, seeing, feeling and being into a deep and wide spiritual consciousness and an integrated inner and outer existence and of our ordinary human living into the divine way of life” (N.A. Integral Yoga, 2014). Although the attainment of such an ideal is mostly only an aspiration in Auroville today, it is true that they are consciously

working towards the standard of integrality, and experimenting with ways to experience such synthesis in their own lives and in their society. Many of the Aurovilians I consulted believed that the ‘integral’ aspect of their lifestyle is important for their own development, and also for society at large. In particular, one Aurovilian explained why the work Auroville is doing with dialogue, peace talks, and reconciliation, is important to her:

“We want to be a motive for ‘peace work’ because we work with the whole being. So when we work with the peace work, it’s not about working with the mind or conflict only, its about working with the whole body, its about communicating differently, its about moving from the heart and not the mind. This place (Auroville) can be a real catalyst for these things”

Ultimately, members of Auroville and Kashi elucidated a collective enterprise based on the search for ‘self’ in and through the body of their community; communities which emphasize self expression and diversity while offering educational and work opportunities to address the ‘whole’ being through systems of harmony and integrality. Furthermore, their aspiration for harmony works in tandem with their emphasis on consonance to generate lives that reflect their values and innermost goals: *“In general, it is important for utopians to believe that life is an expression of their ideas, that there is no separation between their values and their way of life”* (Kanter, 1972: 54). For most of my participants, everyday life when building IC, manufactures a distinctive experience of collective aspiration and inspires the inner development that they seek:

“I think I have received possibilities in my life that I would never had received anywhere else. And I think that those possibilities have given me opportunities for growth in a way I could have never expected with my personality and disposition. To be part of creating something like this, where on earth could I experience this?”

In summation, and in reflection of the insights elucidated in this chapter, it is clear that the social critiques expressed by intentional communities are not always undertaken as conscious articulations of a particular ‘critique’. Rather, in Kashi and Auroville, there were three distinct modes through which social critiques evidently manifest: (1) as a tangential result of self reflective practices encouraged by conscious community living, 2) as a catalyst or vessel through which the individuals involved seek a more inward focused evolution; in this way the social critique is seen as a tool or a mechanism through which one can

‘develop’, or 3) the social critique is a very conscious manifestation of an attempt to address perceived inadequacies or challenges in the larger social and physical environment. Each of these three pathways were addressed throughout the course of this thesis, although not explicitly. Each conduit of social critique is essential in understanding the complex matrix of exchanges that occur between the individual, the community, and society at large. Most simply, I conclude that living on Kashi or Auroville is first and foremost an ethical agreement between the individuals and ‘themselves’, in which inner transformation takes priority, and social critique develops as consequence.

Chapter #8

Conclusion

“I feel that we need to re-create the building blocks of society because when you re-use the old ones, you may change a few things, but ultimately you just recreate the past.” - Aurovilian

Summary of Findings

In this thesis I have proposed that the communities of Kashi and Auroville (and perhaps most intentional communities) can be understood through a matrix of four place-based arrangements in which the human to ‘self’, the human to human, and the human to environment relationships are all negotiated: (1) ‘bounding space’ in order to create place and mediate rationales; (2) ‘performing place’ to further develop community identity, community cohesion, consonance, and transformation; (3) ‘deploying place’ to convey a living critique, breed an environment of learning and experimentation, and potentially inform individual and social transformation, and lastly (4) a search for ‘self’ in and through the body of a collective, which begins with inner inquiry and consequently develops into social critique. Each of these characteristics can also be understood as unique expressions of ‘place-making’; a geographical framework I employed to better understand the ongoing iterations of intentional community production and ‘performing’.

I also illustrated how aspirational utopias of self-realization and harmony serve as the foundational inspirations of social critique in these two ICs. In the cases of Kashi and Auroville, their critiques now most poignantly speak to issues of social alienation and isolation, community disintegration, and environmental exploitation. Although their *deployments* of these critiques demonstrate their responsive nature and ability to shift in concert with the vagaries of social changes and needs, there is also an apparent and consistent bedrock of critiques that function at the base of most intentional communities across time and space: the privileging of a collective, rejection of a set of social norms, the manufacture of an alternative, and a search for consonance between ones idealistic and lived worlds.

I maintain that the unique power of place-making enacted by intentional communities lays in their ability to articulate a global vision of solidarity, responsibility, and sustainability while continuing to practice locally appropriate and emancipatory realities. Specifically, Kashi and Auroville are not insular in their search for transformation; their missions of course speak inwards, but also upwards and outwards, towards answering inner inquiries and towards social and environmental transformation. Most uniquely, they continue to entrust this deeply personal and transformative endeavor to the will of a collective body, or as Kirby so aptly articulates, in intentional community “*The interplay of personal and ideological factors emerges, revealing an implicit and explicit critique of the existing social mode, as residents seek reconnection with each other and with the natural environment*” (Kirby, 2003: 323).

In summation, this research has come to understand Kashi and Auroville as potent spaces of exploration through which one can both explore the ‘self’ as well as ways of performing this discovery through the material manifestation and making of ‘place’. I have elucidated collective enterprises based on the search for ‘self’ in and through the body of community; communities which emphasize self expression and diversity while offering educational and work opportunities to address the ‘whole’ being through systems of harmony and integrality. Overall, I conclude that Kashi and Auroville are places where human agents can collectively seek to address various shortcomings of society at large through a form of *social critique* that begins with individual negotiations with the ‘self’ and consequently develops into expressive place-making projects of critique.

Implications and Suggestions for Further Research:

Translating text-based theories into practice, and insinuating their meaning into the lives of those living on Kashi and Auroville has been both intellectually challenging and sometimes personally troubling. Maintaining the individuality of each participant and the varied nature of their experiences has been the

victim of neglect due to the phenomenological scale at which I have been working to understand intentional community. In my pursuit of this lens, there is also an obvious and glaring dearth of detail in regards to history, politics, personalities, evolving generations, particular relationships, and perhaps most importantly, the lives of their founders and spiritual guides. By nature of being spatially bounded sites of idealistic practices, self-reflection, and social critique, these two ICs tacitly invite critical analysis, while demanding sensitive discernment in the face of their complex and deeply intimate endeavors. Nonetheless, it is my hope that the integrity of their uniqueness and humanity has been respected through my engagement of situated knowledge, a set of cogent objectives, and itemized limitations that will (hopefully) not be read as unjust omissions, but as strategic margins shaping my particular lens, scale, and objective.

Despite these concerns, I also believe that it has been helpful to consider the linkages between the lived worlds of intentional communities and the developments in theory; between Kashi and Auroville; and between the communities and society at large. My most idealistic self hopes that exploring these links has successfully provided an analysis that begins to bridge the gap between theory and praxis, text and world, “the comfort of the abstract and the relevance of the empirical, or the seduction of the ivory tower and the romance of the street” (Keith, 1991:182, in Mahtani, 2002: 426). By observing two intentional communities with stated ambitions to integrate social equality with sustainable design and experimentation, this research also contributes to the growing body of literature exploring alternative avenues to development and human and environmental welfare. This work also aspires to live up to the complex role of being both idealistic and academic, and to contribute to a body of research on intentional communities that seeks to “humanize their struggles, reveal what has been learned about social possibilities and the potential for fundamental change, and consider how their inherently provocative visions may serve as inspiration for current social change” (Bueren and Tarlow, 2006: 5). Ultimately, this project contributes to our understanding of the interplay between place, community, and social critiques in society.

For communalists themselves, my research is particularly relevant; intellectual analysis can complement their lived efforts in order to better understand the significance of their projects, to provide new ideas, offer harbingers of change and opportunity, and to contribute another and unique voice to their efforts at self reflection (Kanter, 1972). Additionally, the intellectual opportunity inherent to this framework has involved an important project of *illumination* through which the significance of daily practices and everyday realities in IC living (that might otherwise register as meaningless) are rendered symbolic or even critical. Although Auroville has had myriad research projects performed by both internal and external individuals, the number of research projects on the community of Kashi can be counted on one hand. In this way, the community of Kashi is not accustomed to this form of intellectual analysis of their ‘project’, or being considered within the larger context of global intentional communities. Perhaps the implications of such a study during this particular occasion of change might provide a timely contribution to their own growth, transformation, and self-reflective analysis.

Auroville is also not typically analyzed in parallel with another intentional community, as Auroville in itself provides a cumbersome number of features, individuals, and histories to investigate. In fact, due to the sheer size, longevity, and variety of the Aurovilian project, there are a vast number of contradictions, racial and economic discrepancies, historical stories and contexts, as well as ‘failures’ and ‘achievements’ that are left out of this analysis. Specifically, some of the more outwardly concerning aspects involving the ‘neo-colonial’ attributes of a significantly ‘Western’ community in the midst of Tamil villages, have been mostly excluded from this analysis in light of the numerous studies that have already been executed in reference to this topic¹⁶. The details of their many experiments in economy (the gift economy and maintenance system), social organization, environment, culture, communication, and much more have been left aside. Although those who have come before me have dealt with many of these ‘missing’ properties, it is my suspicion that

¹⁶ For one example, see: Namakkal, J. 2012. European Dreams, Tamil Land: Auroville and the Paradox of a Postcolonial Utopia. *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 6(1): 59-88.

due to the rapidly changing environment on Auroville, future investigations might (and should) also fruitfully investigate Auroville with a more ‘project specific’, individualized, or historical lens.

In light of contemporary transnational forms of connectedness, the decentering flows of global capital and people, ICs and their projects of place and people making, and their inherent embeddedness in the global system, I would also suggest further research into the ways in which these communities are entrenched in a global system, and how their actions both challenge this system but also thrive off of it. Escobar argues that today, the focus should be on “the relation between identity, place and power — between place making and people making” (Escobar, 2001; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). I agree with this sentiment and believe that further examinations of the inherent contradictions as well as latent opportunities present in a community trying to challenge capitalistic value systems, while being couched in the body of a capitalist society, would be a worthwhile contribution to understanding the role of their social critiques.

Although Kashi and Auroville have actively embodied critiques of their respective societies throughout the decades, there is also the glaring impression that they, and all other ICs, have contributed little to politics or to vast social change. In 1972, Rosebeth Moss Kanter wrote that, “it is still true that up to the present, American communes have not done much to change the society at large” (Kanter, 1972: 225). Perhaps she would uphold this argument today, in light of the fact that many of those communities no longer even exist. Truly, it is difficult to measure the impacts of these critical projects, particularly in light of the small number of investigations into the impacts of intentional communities on social change, culture, or politics:

“For their members they may provide an intensely participatory group in which power is equitably shared, but they do not affect the power structure of the surrounding society. Internally they may become totally cooperative or socialist, affecting a truly equitable distribution of goods, but still do nothing to change the inequitable resource allocation and income distribution in American society. They may offer intensely loving relationships within a small group, but they do not erase the hatred, violence, and conflict between peoples that exist outside their boundaries. They have contributed to culture, but not to politics.” (Kanter, 1972: 226).

In this regard, I can only argue that it is accurate that they make the *efforts* to create, live, practice, and deploy a set of alternative paradigms to those on offer in their larger societies, and ultimately, as large as their aspirations may be, they are primarily rooted in deeply personal and inward seeking journeys facilitated in the context of collectivism and human interconnectedness. Despite the absence of evidential concrete change exacted by the deployments of intentional community critiques, Bueren and Tarlow suggest that in fact, “Now, more than ever, the utopian imagination has a role to play in building different futures than those based on war, terror, conflict, and inequality.” For me, the questions remain; what is that role? Is there a place for embodying the utopian imagination through community? Is it rooted in building new individuals through the body of a collective? What is the significance of networking or spatially transgressing movements of localized resistance? Are intentional communities viable contributors to this project? And at last, if ‘models’ are unreliable, and ICs are embodied forms of critique, where and what is the space for intentional communities to contribute to a critical discourse on vast social, political, and environmental change?

In light of my own findings, as well as the many fissures, I suggest that future quests to understand the implications of intentional communities - on both their own participants and society at large - might consider (1) research that refuses to pursue archetypal models of ‘perfection’, despite the utopian aspirations of these projects; (2) research that instead wields a shrewd sword to cut through the illusive possibility that ICs could exist without copious contradiction, the imperfections of humanity, or be separated from the larger system; (3) research that forgoes the temptation to seek concrete ‘places of purity’ or ‘model societies’, and instead focuses on the value inherent to the gradations of ‘process’ and ‘striving’; and at last (4) research that has the intellectual fortitude to perceive strength and possibility in the midst of contradiction, ‘failure’, and chaos.

Although I cannot conclude with any quantitative evaluations on the ‘success’ of ICs, Kashi, or Auroville in breeding social change, I *do* argue that these particular ICs offer important insights into a set of socially critical strategies that are based on non-violent, self-critical, and responsible forms of critique. As we continue to witness the amounting limitations of individualistic dissent, political reform, and revolutions in creating deep-seeded change, these place-based and collective projects become increasingly interesting (Kirby, 2003). For the time being, I believe that this work contributes *one* valuable narrative to the mosaic of stories and inquiries involving social transformation, intentional communities, Kashi and Auroville specifically, and the role of social critique in mediating societal, environmental, and personal change.

Appendices

Auroville's Primary Vision Documents

The three most important documents for Auroville were provided by The Mother and act as reference guides for the community: The Auroville Charter (included in the main text of this thesis), A Dream, and To be a True Aurovilian.

Appendix A

A Dream

“There should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of goodwill, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the supreme Truth; a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his suffering and misery, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the seeking for pleasures and material enjoyments.

In this place, children would be able to grow and develop integrally without losing contact with their soul. Education would be given, not with a view to passing examinations and getting certificates and posts, but for enriching the existing faculties and bringing forth new ones.

In this place titles and positions would be supplanted by opportunities to serve and organise. The needs of the body will be provided for equally in the case of each and everyone. In the general organisation intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority will find expression not in the enhancement of the pleasures and powers of life but in the increase of duties and responsibilities.

Artistic beauty in all forms, painting, sculpture, music, literature, will be available equally to all, the opportunity to share in the joys they bring being limited solely by each one's capacities and not by social or financial position.

For in this ideal place money would be no more the sovereign lord. Individual merit will have a greater importance than the value due to material wealth and social position. Work would not be there as the means of gaining one's livelihood, it would be the means whereby to express oneself, develop one's capacities and possibilities, while doing at the same time service to the whole group, which on its side would provide for each one's subsistence and for the field of his work.

In brief, it would be a place where the relations among human beings, usually based almost exclusively upon competition and strife, would be replaced by relations of emulation for doing better, for collaboration, relations of real brotherhood.”¹⁷

¹⁷ (1) The Mother. 1985. *Mother's Birth Centenary Library*. Vol. XII. All India Books. Pondicherry. pp 91-2. (2) Zwicher, Bob (2006) “A Dream” In *Auroville. Aims and Ideals*. Auroville: Auroville press. (3) Sullivan, W.M. 1994. *The Dawning of Auroville*. Auroville, India: Auroville Press. pp. 43-44.

Appendix B

To Be a True Aurovilian

1. The first necessity is the inner discovery by which one learns who one really is behind the social, moral, cultural, racial and hereditary appearances. At our inmost centre there is a free being, wide and knowing, who awaits our discovery and who ought to become the acting centre of our being and our life in Auroville.
2. One lives in Auroville in order to be free of moral and social conventions; but this liberty must not be a new slavery to the ego, its desires and its ambitions. The fulfilment of desires bars the route to the inner discovery which can only be attained in peace and the transparency of a perfect disinterestedness.
3. The whole earth must prepare itself for the advent of the new species, and Auroville wants to consciously work towards hastening that advent.
4. Little by little it will be revealed to us what this new species should be, and meanwhile the best measure to take is to consecrate oneself entirely to the Divine.
5. Work, even manual work, is an indispensable thing for the inner discovery. If one does not work, if one does not inject his consciousness into matter, the latter will never develop. To let one's consciousness organise a bit of matter by way of one's body is very good. To establish order around oneself, helps to bring order within oneself. One should organise life not according to outer, artificial rules, but according to an organised, inner consciousness, because if one allows life to drift without imposing the control of a higher consciousness, life becomes inexpressive and irresolute. It is to waste one's time in the sense that matter persists without a conscious utilisation.
6. The Aurovilian must lose the proprietary sense of possession. For our passage in the material world, that which is indispensable to our life and to our action is put at our disposal according to the place we should occupy there. The more conscious our contact is with our inner being, the more exact are the means given.¹⁸

¹⁸ The Mother (n.d.), *To be a True Aurovilian: Mother Explains How to Live in the World and - for the Divine - at the Same Time*. Retrieved from: <http://www.auroville.org/contents/526>

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