AN ANALYSIS OF
CONTEMPORARY URBAN COMMUNES
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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Science
at the
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

May, 1972

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Department of Urban Studies and Planning, May 17, 1972

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Communes and communal families are springing up today not only rural environments, but also in a number of cities. This thesis examines and analyzes the various characteristics of these urban communes, as based on a sample of communes in the Boston metropolitan area.

Many issues and problems are discussed, benefits and disbenefits of these communes in comparison to usual formats for the family. It is observed that these communes are viable in economic and practical terms but that their permanence and stability is largely related to interpersonal issues.

Some structures are examined that promote communication and commitment, but it appears that they are neither sufficient nor necessary; if the commune is replacing the nuclear family structure, it is shown that affective ties and trusting relationships are essential to their continued growth and stability. Evidence is examined that indicates possible prospects for the future of these communes, and suggestions are made to favor their permanence and promote such alternatives in life-styles.

The study is primarily based on first-hand experiences of various individuals living in communes in the Boston area.
In my desire to understand the urban environment we live in and to possibly promote changes for the 'betterment' of life in our cities, I have come to realize that if we truly want change, we should not only be interested in changing environments, legislation, economic and political structures, but that we must look at ourselves, at our perception of each other and our ways of relating to each other in all phases of life. I now believe that true change must include change at the level of each and every individual to the extent that is possible. The system is not just a structure, it is the roles that people play when they perform their tasks, their activities. While educational issues are important in this respect, adults must also learn to question their conditioned behavior and attitudes. If we want freedom, creativity, equality and peace, we must transform many of our own inner walls that distort our perception. Changes in environments and structures can favor this also, and alternative family structures are one possible step in this direction.

I share with many the belief that our society and culture is in a slow process of changing its priorities; possibly we are heading towards decentralization, and a society that will promote life and individual growth and fulfillment, such as it is conceived in the various forms of utopian socialism. Many are acting on this belief in our country,
they are cultivating the seeds of a new era within many antagonistic forces that remain in the society. The future seems to be increasingly difficult to predict, and one must increasingly be aware of one's inner motivations as guidelines for action.

This study is intended to contribute in this search for a better future, in the possibility of 'utopia' rather than 'oblivion'.

I wish to thank my 'communal' family and those participants in the Beansprout community of communes for their contribution, and to wish them luck in their endeavors.

I would also like to thank Professor Kevin Lynch for his useful constructive criticisms and suggestions.
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This thesis is about "communes" and new formats for the family that are currently appearing in a number of cities of the United States, and in the Boston metropolitan area in particular.

Experiments in life-styles are taking place in urban environments; while some attention has been given to "rural communes", the "urban commune" is still unrecognized as a phenomenon of enough importance to merit the attention of many individuals interested in social change within our cities.

The hypothesis discussed in this paper is that these "experimental" living situations are creating new basic social units that are potentially viable in an urban environment. Issues and problems faced by these communes will be described, as well as possible consequences that this type of social change could have on some aspects of the urban environment.

The paper will emphasize the importance of these attempts through their relationship to socio-cultural changes in our society in general, and suggest some of the ways in which "urban communes" share some of the aspirations of 'utopian thought' and 'utopian socialism'. 
The phenomenon of 'urban communes' in American cities today is clearly still in its infancy both as to its extent and its form. The participants in communal 'experiments' are initiators, subjects and researchers at once, learning from themselves through their experience and from each other by sharing their experiences: they are experimenting with their way of living in the full sense of the word. For many, it is more than the search for a new life 'style', it includes the search for a better life, a way of being and acting in the world that is different and presumably better from their viewpoint.

These experiments are not sponsored, funded or monitored by any foundations or researchers; their results and outcomes are not compiled, computed and analyzed by outside agencies. These 'new families' are above all environments that provide new experiences within new frameworks. My main intent is in understanding these experiences, not to compare input structures with output results in economic and social terms; thus research is primarily of an experiential or phenomenological nature. Empirical-analytical techniques can and have been used in similar areas of concern, but they often remain 'external' to the phenomenon and will miss maybe some of the important substance of these experiments.

The hypothesis of this thesis is thus difficult to prove or test empirically because of subjective elements involved: were one to question individuals on the viability of their marriage or of their family, one would run into similar
problems. From the fact that a given family exists, it may be considered viable. Viability of a marriage may be measured by the length of time it lasts; yet many marriages last much longer than they are truly viable, livable or maybe more precisely beneficial from the viewpoint of the subjective experience of the individuals involved. Thus the hypothesis of viability of urban communes is largely related not only to their potentialities for continued existence but also to the effects that they might have on the individuals involved.

Lastly, the sheer diversity in structure and composition of the urban communes I am familiar with in the Boston metropolitan area would seriously hinder the potential usefulness of much statistical research.

In this paper, I have tried to avoid the superficiality of a mere description of structural components while not wanting to restrict myself to a deep case-study of one particular situation. The emphasis has been primarily to give a fairly comprehensive overview of the nature and essence of these urban communes, the issues and problems that are encountered within them, and the nature of their relationship to the larger society. At the very least, it is my hope that the work here will help in apprehending the phenomenon in a wiser context and perspective than as a mere "fad" of the american youth culture. In the long run, time will enable us to judge more precisely as to whether or not the phenomenon was ephemeral.
Methodology

In this study, I did not take on the role of outside observer or researcher; I am writing about this topic as a participant. Participant-observation probably qualifies best the nature of the methodology. In this case, however, my status is hardly different than that of other participants in communal experiments: the nature of any experimentation with one's life tends to promote if not compel such self-observation and analysis of one's own participation. Communal life emphasizes this considerably.

As the phenomenon is new, many communal groups are sharing their experiences with each other, learning, comparing and helping each other along these paths that have yet to be explored. This study is largely based on information generated through these mutual learning processes.

Any research that deals with a social system from the point of view of individuals within it will inevitably include considerations from the two main types of science: structural-functional analysis based on empirical-analytical science, and experiential understanding based on phenomenology. This is especially true for social units that are small such as the family, and whose 'raison d'être' is based on the social principle rather than economic or political reasons.

Statistical research could be performed on communes; there are many reasons why I avoided this. Statistics are external, they only reflect observation that is almost al-
ways subjectively influenced by the researcher's attitude; they have the appearance of being objective and can be easily misinterpreted; they never really understand social phenomena but merely describe them; they generate causal relationships that are based on observed relationships between environments and external behavior but they do not understand or describe the experiences of individuals; lastly, statistics are all too easily a weapon in the wrong hands.

Statistics have been just about completely avoided in this study; the emphasis will be on the analysis of a number of structures and on the description and understanding of individual experiences in these living situations.

These characteristics of the methodology make the study not an objective one in the strictly academic sense. While there is considerable debate about the existence of any objective study (objective in its motivation), I will say that I have strived to be objective given that this work is the product of subjective perception and experience. This subjectivity of the study can be valued in its own right however, as it is the subjective bias of a participant in these experiments, and will thus reflect how they can be experienced.

I may add that I was fortunate in finding that my personal experience in the commune I live in has been interesting, stimulating and enjoyable, despite problems, discouragements and intense emotional experiences. My interest in writing on
this topic stems from an overall positive experience; others may not have found this and would not share this enthusiasm.

The methodology has four components:
- compiling information and experiences of individuals participating in the meetings of an inter-communal association described further.
- a number of personal discussions with participants in communes in the Boston metropolitan area (most from this association); these discussions were informal and personal rather than formal interviews that would be more superficial and would not respect the intimacy of these groups.
- my own personal experience in a communal living situation for the past year and a half.
- research into theoretical literature pertaining to commitment, interpersonal processes and the search for self-knowledge; this helped gain analytical and theoretical insight into some of the processes. Also, research into some of the still scarce literature and newsletters published by participants in communes.

While the study is primarily based on the experiences of a number of communes in the Boston area, many of the findings can probably be generalized to other cities in the country where the phenomenon exists. The nature of issues in these groups are most likely the same elsewhere in this country; any differences would appear mainly in the relationship of these experiments to the general urban environment.
Introductory remarks for an investigation of urban communes

When approaching the phenomenon of current 'urban communes' in a city such as Boston, one is immediately impressed with the diversity of living situations that refer to themselves in this manner.

There is diversity in size, composition and internal organization on the one hand, but there is also considerable variety in the ways groups view their purpose, their reason of existence, their relationship to the larger society and their role in various aspects of social, political or economic change. At this stage, almost every commune is unique in some fashion. This is partly due to the newness of the phenomenon but also to the relationship that communes have with other more general movements for change in our society. There are no stereotypes for communes yet, little previous experience to fall back on (the situation is entirely different from the environments where 19th century utopian communities existed), no set ways of organizing the various aspects of life in an urban commune. Much of the learning and experimenting is done through trial and error; our appraisal of the phenomenon must bear this in mind.

urban versus rural communes

The communal movement in cities is in many respects quite different from rural communes and communities. The latter are springing up in a number of areas in the country; (New Mexico,
California, Oregon, New Hampshire, Vermont and western Massachusetts among others); they are generally seriously striving for considerable independence with respect to the larger society, primarily in the area of economic self-sufficiency. Consequently, their relationship with the rest of society is generally easier to identify and analyze in simple terms.

In the urban case however, the interdependencies are far greater, the relationships with the rest of the urban environment are often quite complex; urban communes are obviously not agricultural and are consequently much more directly involved in economic interaction with the 'system'. The urban commune also interacts considerably with the rest of the city at the political, social and cultural levels, comparatively much more than in the rural case. The urban commune exists within an urban environment that is largely generated, influenced and controlled by the American 'system'.

This has led some to suggest that the urban commune can never be a truly 'utopian' experiment in that it does not encompass, in most cases, changes in all phases of life. This investigation should illustrate this point more clearly.

Urban Communes and 'Change'

While urban communes are maybe not attempting global changes in the sense of creating entirely self-sufficient units, they are all in some manner a part of change and concerned with change. Different communes emphasize different
aspects of change, and the emphasis will vary over time within a specific commune in response to changes in the priorities of individuals or to changes in major issues and problems in the larger urban and societal environment.

Through this diversity and complexity, it is possible to lay down some guiding principles that are useful as preliminary steps in relating urban communes to 'change'.

- all current communes in the Boston metropolitan area are in some way consciously related to 'change'.
- this relationship has two analytically distinguishable components:
  
  change within or through the commune itself, which involves changes in life-style, change in the nature of interpersonal relationships, alternatives to the nuclear family or the couple, new methods of parental child-care, consensual decision-making and the internal economics of sharing and cooperation.

  changes that the commune participates in: cooperatives for production and purchasing, collective day-care centers and participation in more general aspects of political and social change.

Although fairly clear, this distinction is often confused in the literature about communes, as most groups tend to incorporate both types of change in varying amounts.

The prime emphasis of this paper is on changes within or inherent in the structure of communal living situations.
definition of a 'commune'

Is a commune defined by its structures, its size and composition or by the experience of the individuals living within it?

Defining what is a commune is an extremely difficult task; there appears to be no way to define it objectively. Viewed externally, groups calling themselves 'communes' appear to span a continuum between what appears to be a good roommate situation to relationships that might be approximating what is referred to as 'group marriage'. Also, individual communes move up and down this continuum over time.

But what is observable often offers little evidence as to what is experienced by the participants. Communes with few structures that explicitly promote cooperation and interaction might conceal a high level of intimate interaction, affective ties and mutual trust. Conversely, a commune with much organization and structures may be badly experienced by some of its members; the structures would conceal much tension and lack of affection and cooperation.*

Additionally, different members will experience the situation differently. I have encountered individuals living in a 'commune' who would explicitly say that for them, it was not a communal situation; these are differences in individual expectations and experiences.

* Note: this is related to the discussion of phenomenology and analytical empiricism in the methodology.
This discussion leads us to realize that the only objective criterion by which to define a commune is essentially of a subjective nature: a group of individuals living together is a commune if they refer to themselves as a 'commune'. This additionally shows us that we are dealing with a phenomenon that will be chiefly understood in experiential terms rather than through structural analysis.
I. Communes in the Boston metropolitan area

A number of individuals living in communes in the Boston metropolitan area contacted each other in the fall of 1970, and decided to start weekly meetings of what was subsequently referred to as "a loose association of communes" for the area. These initial contacts were made essentially through word of mouth and mutual acquaintances.

Through my personal interest in communal living and my participation in a seminar on the topic at that time, I was fortunate in being introduced to this group towards the end of that year. My participation in those meetings significantly contributed in encouraging me to start living in a commune; this occurred a couple of months later, around the beginning of February, 1971.

Although a detailed description of this group is unnecessary in this discussion, it is useful to briefly indicate some of the characteristics of this 'federation', as these groups represent the 'sample' of communes on which the information in this paper is primarily based; additionally, the concerns of the association are reflective of the interests and aspirations of many of the individuals living in these communes.

size and structure

The association involved initially about fifteen communes. Through friends and word of mouth contacts, it grew rapidly over that winter until roughly 35 to 40 communes were connected in this manner; this corresponds to a little over 300 individu-
als. The meetings were unstructured, informal and held weekly on Sunday evenings in different communal 'houses'. Attendance varied considerably from about 20 to over 50 persons. Those present did not represent their communes in the manner of delegates but more often talked as individuals. If decisions were to be made, those present would relay information back to their groups, and opinions discussed the following week; minor decisions were made immediately, presumably based on the trust and consideration of those present with respect to their house. Many houses would be present in larger numbers than single individuals. Decision-making was made consensually among those present.

The tone of the discussions was encouraged to be personal and related to experiences and feelings rather than abstract intellectual generalizations. There were no officers, and no leadership; one commune would be responsible each month for summarizing the meetings in the weekly newsletter. Verbal aggression was rare, polemics absent. The meetings frequently started with 'pot-luck dinners' that contributed to friendly discussions in small groups. There were divergences in opinions but mutual respect.

This association is a little unique in its nature, as it managed to conduct such large meetings without structures. This reflects much of the influence of communal living and its emphasis on trust and respect in discussions. The association was functional in economic, organizational and some political issues but primarily based on the social principle of affinity. It reflects a non-geographically determined community.
areas of interest and projects

There were two main types of concerns expressed in these meetings: first, sharing information and cooperating on projects that would be of practical use to people living in communes; secondly, sharing experiences, personal problems and issues that arose inside the various houses with the purpose of learning from each other and comparing possible structures and strategies that further and help practical and personal life in a commune.

- practical projects and information included: a weekly newsletter containing summaries of the discussions, practical information (events, other meetings, parties, news from communes in other areas, classifieds, openings in houses); and any articles that the commune publishing the newsletter that month felt like including; two food coops each composed of 10 to 12 communes (not all communes participated in this - size was determined so that food could be carried by one car); an acre of land that was cultivated in the summer of 1971 by various interested individuals in these houses; a catalog of individual skills to promote exchanges of services between communes; lastly, a number of special workshops on specific topics (all-women and all-men groups to discuss sexual identities, herb gardening, massage classes, recycling, etc.).

- discussions of personal and communal issues included: ways in which income were earned and shared, and possible alternative strategies; ways in which tasks were shared; usefulness and frequency of house meetings, other techniques
for dealing with interpersonal issues; usefulness and nature of rituals; children and child-care, sharing parental responsibility; age differences; leadership roles and initiative; changing members, choosing new participants; sexual relations inside the house and with people outside; plans for the future; transience versus permanence; legal, fiscal and medical problems.

Many of the practical issues and projects have either started functioning on their own (sub-groups have special meetings) or have been taken into the larger context of other organizations in the area that deal with these topics not only for communes but for other interested individuals as well. Some communes are joining neighborhood food coops, others have started giving courses and talks on the topics listed above in a number of organizations. Thus the meetings of this association have recently emphasized the latter type of concern to a greater extent than previously. The group created many affective ties between various communes; many of the practical projects promoted these relationships between communes. The association is now preferably referred to as a type of "tribe" or community of communes. Although only about 35 or 40 houses ever seriously participated in these meetings over this period of time, this association has set a precedent for this type of communal community that is only recently being developed elsewhere in the country. Many other communes in the Boston area are familiar with the group and
may eventually either participate or start new associations. Also, departing members from some of the houses in the group are participating in other communes in the area or in other areas of the country. One such individual is currently starting to develop a community of communes in Oregon. The association is also creating ties with a number of rural communes, which may possibly develop into exchanges of services and productive activities.

**New Community Projects**

A brief note is necessary to describe New Community Projects (NCP) a fairly recent organization working out of Project Place in Boston, that has been organizing services related to communes. The organization has been funded up till now through Project Place, but might eventually become autonomous.

It main initial concern was coordinating information between individuals interested in communes and communes seeking members. In view of the increasing interest in communes, they have organized meetings between individuals to try to promote new communes in the city; they are trying to coordinate information on available housing, and other areas of interest to those interested in communes and communities of communes such as: cooperatives of various sorts, courses in practical skills (from organic gardening to interpersonal techniques).
They also conduct weekly workshops on the types of topics listed previously; some of the individuals living in communes in the previously described federation act as 'resource people' for these workshops, some actually are volunteers in the NCP organization. While NCP "serves primarily in a passive social service role for those interested in communal living, many of us would like to see NCP create active projects to help foster solutions to the problems in our society."* While the previous association is primarily inter-communal, NCP sees itself more in a role of fostering this movement and contributing to its relationship with the larger society in terms of alternative economic structures, social and political priorities.

Of interest is a fragmentary survey they conducted; it is fragmentary in its coverage of communes in the area.* A questionnaire was attached to a newsletter they send out regularly to various communes in the area and individuals interested in them; a limited written reply was supplemented by telephone calls.

The results indicate that 96 communes were contacted of which only 58 responded. We shall examine the other results in our evaluation of communes towards the end of this paper. The figure of 96 contacts is suggestive of the minimum number of communes in the area; clearly, there is no way in which the exact number of communes can be determined. Many groups that live communally have a special focus in some area.

of social or political change, others are spiritual communes. In these cases, the groups will be less likely to be related to specific commune-related organizations even though their family structure is communal.

NCP has been trying to reach out to individuals that are on first sight less likely to be interested. Results so far have been surprising to some extent; a number of 'suburban' married couples have been attending these workshops and apparently the interest is growing. How long it will take to interest individuals in other communities is impossible to speculate; it is even debatable as to whether organizations such as NCP will be able to interest people in low-income and black communities.

* * *
II. Characteristics of urban communes, an analysis

1. Size and composition

There is a considerable range of differences in the size and composition of these communes. The groups vary from five to fifteen persons with the average between six and nine persons.

Smaller groups of three and four were present at these meetings, but they generally considered themselves parts of previous or future communes. The availability of large dwelling units tends to limit size on the upper end of the scale; it appears however, that most individuals felt that the possibility of face-to-face interaction started to be seriously hindered when size rose above twelve to fourteen. The one household composed of fifteen adults and two children is currently splitting up partially for reasons of size. Size is determined by a consensual optimization process within each household involving factors such as available space, financial situation and rent, desired quality of interpersonal relationships and number of individuals that might be needed for any collective tasks. Communes do vary in size over time; my own situation has grown from five to its present level of seven, which is maximal with respect to space.

While most groups tend to include roughly similar numbers of men and women, it is not always the case. I know of two communes, who were not part of this association, that
are composed of only women: these groups are primarily interested in changing stereotyped sexual roles.

The span of ages is quite impressive. The youngest adult members are in their late teens, but several communes have children and infants.* Older adults in their early fifties are present in a couple of instances. Within each household, the mean and spread of ages varies considerably: some groups are very homogeneous, others much less so. The majority of individuals are in their twenties and early thirties.

The issue of age and sexual composition is important in its influence on the nature of the group, it is not debated as much as one might expect. Unbalanced sexual composition is possibly annoying to some individuals; the participants in situations where this occurred do not feel it is essential. When seeking for new membership, most communes will specify whether they are searching for men or women, the others will not. Similarly, age is viewed as a secondary concern; the ability to accept change and so-called 'mental age', maturity yet not rigidity are valued as more relevant than physical age. While the nature of the group will clearly vary depending on the mean and spread of ages, it appears useless to attempt specifying desirable composition in a general case. Each situation tends to compose and build itself organically according to the wishes and affective ties of the individuals within; the group will choose its composition

* Note: on the average, communes appear as of yet, to have fewer children per adult than other types of families. Whether this is due to the newness of the phenomenon and its experimental nature or not, is questionable. This concern can only be discussed within a few years.
accordingly.

presence of children

The presence of children is viewed by many as a major change in the character of the commune. Child care and education are major responsibilities that will generally add a new dimension to the commitment of the group; it is one of the major issues in communes and frequently a problem. Most houses with children are developing rotations of responsibilities and share tasks between the 'real' mother or parents and the other members; there are instances however when children have been an insolvable problem. This factor is contributing to the disbandment of one house I discussed with.

This house includes two five-year old boys and an infant. Problems started when the mothers of the two boys were unable to reach agreement on a number of issues; an example was whether their son could watch brutality on television. The children appeared to take advantage of this and other disagreements among parents to do as they wished. Tensions between adults resulted from this situation; different child-rearing conceptions could not be brought together.

From this example, we may observe, as the members of this house have done since, that consensus among the adults as to the nature of child-rearing and for the many decisions related to permissibility is an essential prerequisite for having children within a commune.

Communes do not have organized child rearing as in the Israeli Kibbutzim* and many 19th century utopian communities. They thus realize the importance of a situation where commit-

* see B. Bettelheim, Children of the Dream, (2).
ment will be quite stable over time, but also a need for collective affection towards the child, in such a way that he will not feel as a burden to the commune or some of the members. It is generally agreed that the success or failure of raising children in a commune will not only depend on what structures are set up for taking care of the children but also on how close the adults are to each other, how cohesive the group is in terms of intimate and affective ties. While no observations have yet been made as to the results of these situations, the communes who had children said that they felt that their children were possibly more independent, more able to deal with and relate to other adults, possibly more mature in their initiatives that children in the usual family setting. These observations would come from seeing changes in the children when they moved into the commune, or from observing their behavior with other children at school.

These remarks are clearly subjective, and no research has yet been made on the topic in current communes in this country.

A final area of interest with respect to the composition of communes is that of the occupational status and backgrounds of their members.

The large majority of participants in these communes are young working adults, most of them having gone through all or part of college. The popular illusion that communes
are only composed of 'hippies' and students has no support in my experience. There are: students in some houses; my own situation is an exception in that three out of seven are finishing their academic work.

We shall examine the occupations of the members in more detail further, but many individuals are employed in what might be called middle-income jobs, although a generalization is quite incorrect in this respect. Through the relationship between most communes and some aspects of social change, any professionals in communes are generally so-called "radical professionals" with less pay than their usual peers, others frequently do not have specific careers but tend to change jobs quite frequently both in the area of services and in manufacturing.

A majority of individuals living in communes are from middle-class backgrounds that they have generally broken with in terms of values and priorities; this is not always the case. Similarly, a large majority of individuals are white, the exceptions are very few. These characteristics stem largely from the fact that pressures for conformity and the threat of scarcity (in terms of individual material possessions) are much less on young adults with these backgrounds. When apprehending the phenomenon and its considerable growth in a brief time, one may hypothesize without too much risk, that there are fair chances that communes will spread their membership to include individuals from more diversified backgrounds in the future.
2. Economics of the urban commune

Of the possible reasons for the failure of a commune in the city, economic problems are agreed by most to be relatively minor. The appropriate way in which to apprehend the issue is to think of "community as common-wealth".

housing

Most groups live in 'houses' that are rented and in a few cases owned. These are generally two-family home or large houses in such areas as Cambridge, Allston-Brighton, Somerville, Watertown, Arlington and West Roxbury. Other communes that were not in this association on a regular basis were located in Jamaica Plain and in southern suburban areas. The choice of neighborhood is quite important, as some communities are especially sensitive and hostile to this type of 'experimentation'. Changes in life-styles are especially threatening to many people and rumors and reactions do occur frequently, although most groups try to maintain both considerable discretion and constructive rapport with their neighbors, frequently trying to demystify these popular illusions on communal living. Some communes actually involve their neighbors in activities such as food coops, day care and car pooling or exchanges of services. My own experience in Cambridgeport is quite satisfactory in this manner; we were considerably welcomed; food, services and furniture have been exchanged fairly frequently and neighboring children occasionally visit.

Through their use of fairly large dwelling units in which space is intensively used through the sharing of many facilities,
such as kitchen, common rooms, bathrooms, the commune will be paying relatively lower rents per individual than the average family for similar quantity of individually available space. Sharing a house with others is only annoying to the extent that one feels threatened by their proximity; although the issue of privacy does come up, the availability of a large amount of space to circulate in is influential on the perception of a more spacious environment than the average family apartment or dwelling unit; this perception of available space will vary with changes in how comfortable and how threatened one feels with other members of the household - this is true for all environments. Most individuals in communes are quite enthusiastic about the spatial dimensions of their dwelling unit.

Some will argue that communes might be influential in forcing rents upwards; the argument is clearly not related to the issue of communes, but involves an issue of control over landlord profits and real estate market prices. Also, communes can only potentially pay higher rents; one of the pleasant economic aspects of the commune however is a lower rent per individual for greater individual space. Communes attempt to decrease their expenses as they are concerned with spending time and energy primarily on non-material issues if and when possible.

The availability of housing for communes is an issue of practical importance; many groups cannot find adequate housing. Large houses that are not subdivided are often loca-
ted only in high-rent areas that many groups will not wish to live in or cannot afford. Less expensive housing is most often subdivided into apartments if rented or is quite rarely on sale in the real estate market.

Communes are slowly getting interested in the purchase of homes as their desire for permanence increases. This implies establishing structures for multiple ownership and sharing mortgages. The communes that do own their house collectively, (where one member is not owner), develop a system of 'shares' that can potentially be sold by departing individuals.

consumption and expenses

Almost all individuals agree that they are either living less expensively than previously with a similar standard of living or conversely, with a higher standard of living than they could have afforded previously.

Major expenses such as rent, food and household maintenance are shared in all these communes. Many extend this to include such items as products for laundry products, personal toiletries, stationary, art and craft supplies, small medical expenses and household medications, tools and small equipment. Specific large items can often be collectively purchased if they are deemed useful to the collectivity.

No strict generalization can be applied here, as each household has its own customs and norms. The decisions on items to be collectivized are generally based on the following
considerations: whether the item is an essential need, whom will it benefit and whether collective purchasing would be economically advantageous with respect to time or money saved. Also considered are possible abuses that would result from individuals using collective resources to purchase excessive amounts a particular item that are not necessary, (too many books, too many luxury foods, etc.). Some of these decisions are made implicitly as based on trust and an awareness of collective and individual needs; occasionally, individuals will complain about the usefulness of a particular collectively purchased item or excesses that have been made; suggestions for collectivizing other items occur similarly.

In most houses, luxury and special items such as wine, records, books and art work are purchased individually, both to prevent excesses but also so that individuals may offer such items as gifts to the collectivity. The ritual of giving is important to maintain as it is a source of pleasure for a number of individuals; collectively bought items are also occasionally ritualized to be collective gifts, (a special feast, a new piece of furniture, etc).

The structures for purchasing vary from each individual taking the initiative (guided by his consideration of others and awareness of collective and individual needs), to purchasing rotations that are set up, an individual being in charge of the budget each week or month.

Because of their size, most groups belong to food cooperatives that reduce considerably their food expenses. Other
items that are bought in large quantities also contribute to reducing expenses through the way consumer pricing operates on many items.

Some communes will exchange clothing or have 'collective closets'. All communes seem to extensively share transportation resources; gas and other expenses are generally shared unless specific individuals tend to monopolize particular vehicles. Communes often have a relatively low car ownership/adult ratio.

Two communes have reported having managed to take on collective health insurance through a special group plan; insurance companies can thus be convinced of their valid status. Evidence is lacking as to how communes have handled large-scale medical expenses.

Collectivization of expenses frequently increases with time as a feeling of permanence develops. It will be limited by some who wish to maintain a certain amount of financial independency. The emphasis is on items that are necessary and that are less expensive when purchased in quantity. Most individuals feel that their expenses were considerably cut through this collective arrangement; some suggested the figure of at least a third. It appears that expenses are less per individual, for same material standards, relatively to the usual family. Additionally, shared use of possessions is almost inevitable; this increases considerably the availability of resources for each individual.
collective incomes

Most communes in this group appeared to be relying on individual incomes that were partially pooled to meet collective expenses. Many communes have started generating collective income through a number of activities and thus combine both sources of income. Interest is considerable for these possibilities, but their implementation undoubtedly requires a definite feeling of permanence and a tight group. Urban communes emphasize collective production generally less than many rural communes that are primarily agricultural. This can be interpreted as some insecurity, a desire to maintain independence in case of future separation, but it is also largely through convenience: collective production for such a small group is limited in an urban environment and often not very profitable, thus individuals taking jobs is often more practical. There are frequent instances of individuals helping others financially or taking turns at jobs.

The increasing interest in collectively earned income has led some groups to start small activities. One commune is actively participating in a free school, another has opened a small crafts store in Cambridge, others have given talks and courses on the topic of communal living. It is generally felt that the cooperative ownership of means of production in an urban environment generally entails fairly large-scale ventures that would probably include more than one communal family and that belong to more general changes.
3. Legal issues

Legality is an issue for communes, although it does not occupy and important place in daily life.

Massachusetts state law prohibits communes implicitly through condemning cohabitation of more than four unrelated and unmarried adults. Communal living is thus theoretically illegal and may be threatened through these channels.

Landlords occasionally refuse to rent to large groups and almost always insist on having a minimum of individuals sign leases. Three communes have had trouble with utility companies that considered them as 'boarding houses' and demanded industrial rates for services. Other legal areas of concern are taxes, collective incomes and savings, legal responsibilities such as children and wills.

When cooperative ownership is considered, some communes have suggested incorporating as non-profit organizations; none have done this explicitly as of now.

The legal issue can be generalized to the point where the possibility of legalizing collective marriage must be considered. Denmark is currently the only country where this is possible. If communes in America prove to be viable and become increasingly popular, appropriate legislation will have to be instated. Such official recognition might prove beneficial not only to existing communes, but might encourage the quantity and quality of future groups.

* Note: legalizing would mainly include recognizing this unit rather than officially legislating marriage as in the present.
4. Intentionality and commitment

The family, in its many forms and variations, is the basic social unit of society; it is an essential sub-system of our society in social terms*, and also to a lesser extent economically. It also is of considerable psychological importance in that it considerably influences the subjective experiences of individuals and consequently their relationship to the society. The importance of its role in the lives of most individuals makes it an area particularly delicate to change, though it is sometimes there that change is the most necessary; the family can be a stronghold of individual conservatism or an arena for important individual change.

The family can be viewed as a miniature social system with specific structures, relationships, and often sets of defined roles for each member. There is an important difference though, in that it is an intentional social system; it is intentional in that the adults who form it chose to do so.** This is not the case for the children, it should be noted.

An intentional social system involves levels of commitment that do not exist very strongly in our larger society, specifically those related to affective ties.

* Note: It can be argued that the family is essentially the only truly social unit in our society today; i.e., where the association is based on the social principle a priori, rather than the economic or political principles.

** Note: This statement does not apply to all cultures, or types of families. It refers only to families where the adults married out of 'free will'. Whether or not this is the general case even in our society is debatable, but assumed to be the case in this statement.
To clarify the discussion, it appears useful at this point to introduce a conceptual model of commitment as developed by Rosabeth M. Kanter of Brandeis University, in her work on commitment mechanisms in utopian communities of the 19th century.* She defines commitment as the "willingness of social actors to give their energy and loyalty to social systems, the attachment of personality systems to social relations which are seen as self-expressive".**

The conceptual model is summarized in tabular form on the following page. The social system axes of commitment are oriented towards retaining participation. The personality system axes of commitment, based on social action theory, are positively oriented to support a specific social system axis. While the model makes a one-to-one correspondence, the author recognizes that the three types of commitment might be causally related and quite probably "mutually reinforcing and multiply determined". The model mainly attempts to analytically distinguish these three levels of commitment.

In the case of the family as a social system, it appears that the predominant level of commitment should lie generally along the cathetic personality axis, primarily because of the presumably intensive affective relationships. This is possibly a romantic picture of many marriages,

* see R. M. Kanter, Commitment and Social Organization, (1).
** The model is attempting to "join structural-functional considerations with phenomenology." Ibid, p.499.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>SOCIAL SYSTEM AXES OF COMMITMENT</th>
<th>PERSONALITY SYSTEM AXES OF COMMITMENT</th>
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<td><strong>Cohesion</strong></td>
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<td>group generates</td>
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<td>and respects</td>
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<td>certain norms and values</td>
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A conceptual model of personal commitment to social systems.
even today. Nevertheless, the other components of commitment are also present in marriages: common values, norms to uphold, economic and other social benefits that are not related to affective ties.

These remarks are also pertinent to the urban commune. The essential key in understanding communes lies in fact, in the nature of their intentionality and the type of commitment they stress. The term intentionality is broad in this context as it also includes a commitment to change and evolve towards specific objectives; it involves commitment not only to a system, but also to a process. Thus the 'communal social system' is generally not to be viewed as static, but frequently deliberately dynamic. This is a crucial difference that exists between the usual marriage and the intentional commune. Intentionality on the part of commune members implies a more direct conscious awareness of the nature of their commitment, its dynamics and possible directions for growth, than is the case for most couples. Clearly, some couples share this intentionality; however, a couple is a smaller 'social system'. Possibly, as we shall discuss further, the experiential fulfillment resulting from these various levels of commitment is limited in some respects in such a small system; maybe it can be reached but individuals in communes are searching for more of this commitment; this would explain some of the dissatisfactions with the nuclear family.
Throughout our discussion it must be remembered that the three types of commitment are interrelated and thus will often have to be discussed simultaneously in their effects on one area of interest such as child care, income sharing or interpersonal relationships.

The areas in which each level of commitment is particularly stressed in the communal social system are summarized below.*

Cognitive commitment is motivated by the benefits derived from: common 'wealth' and shared possessions, cooperative production and consumption, rotation of tasks and responsibilities (especially for child rearing), shared information on events and experiences in the 'outside' world and the urban environment, shared knowledge and skills learned from other members, new friends and social benefits derived through others in the commune, products and creative works made by others in the house or made collectively, the availability of relatively large amounts of common space and the diversity in the activities taking place in the immediate environment.

Evaluative commitment is motivated by shared ideologies, world views and spiritual beliefs, same interests in societal change, common customs, norms and interests, similar cultural backgrounds and similar tastes for music, food and special diets, entertainment, hobbies, etc.

Cathetic commitment is mainly motivated by mutual affection.

* Note: This list is by no means exhaustive, nor is it typical; it mainly suggests a range of possible motivations for commitment that are often encountered.
trust and respect shared with the other individuals. It may vary for each pair of individuals. It generally appears to be the most important component of commitment, as it has transcending qualities: namely, if affective ties are sufficiently strong, they will make difficulties in the other two levels of commitment easier to solve. Conflicting values or tastes can be considerably affected through interaction generated by love, trust and respect. Conversely, a lack of affection and trust will seriously hinder the other levels of commitment regardless of how many structures are set up to promote them.* In the communal social system, one quickly realizes the importance of the social and affective principle over the the economic and political principles. In this respect, the commune is in many ways a minitiature instance of 'utopian socialism'.**

The other component of intentionality, namely the commitment to possibly change oneself through self-knowledge is quite subtle and difficult to fit in with the preceding conceptual model. The commune is in many ways a learning process: the learning is primarily about oneself, much in the way various forms of therapy, especially in groups, contribute to making individuals aware of problems and issues in their own subjective experience. Commune participants realize they have been socialized in specific ways that are culturally relative and by no means absolute. This socialization generates specific defense mechanisms and conditioned behavior that is not necessarily

* Note: This will be more detailed when discussing interper-sonal processes in a further section.
** see M. Buber, Paths in Utopia, (6).
desirable. Many feel that these defense mechanisms instead of remaining functional (i.e. used only when really necessary in a truly threatening situation), have become permanent and frequently sub-conscious; they tend to become what some refer to as 'layers of armoring' in the individual; this armor that is psychic in its origin has physiological effects.

A typical example would be males in our society who are socialized to minimize their emotional feelings. Crying in particular, is not seen as a 'male' quality; in fact, it is deliberately sanctioned in many male children. Consequently, a conditioned defense mechanism is created against situations that are threatening through their emotional intensity. While this is possibly useful in some cases of unpleasant experiences, it will have repercussions in cases of pleasant experiences. Generally speaking, our socialization and individual experiences produce for each individual a particular state of being-in-the-world, of ontological security, that is felt by many not to be optimal by any means. The intention is to improve one's subjective experience of reality, in particular one's perception of others and one's self-awareness (quite contrary to self-consciousness).

Many communes are deliberately participating in this increased self-knowledge and awareness. The processes for this vary from sources in Eastern philosophies and teachings to techniques of western psychodherapy; (Gurdjieff, F. Perls, C. Rogers, R.D. Laing, W. Reich, A. Watts are among the
increasing number of psychologists and psychiatrists who have elaborated theories and processes that deal with these issues).

While a lengthy discussion of these particular topics is out of the scope of this paper, it is important to realize that these are important interests and concerns for a great majority of communes. Communes are not only creating possibly new structures for the family that will be viable, they are also in most cases participating in a process of self-knowledge and self-actualization; the members of communes are often deliberately redefining their 'selves' through what might be referred to as 're-socialization' or 'de-socialization'. They are consciously searching for living situations that will fulfill these 'higher-order' needs of individual internal growth.

This is another aspect in which communes are 'utopian' in their nature and quite different from the many types of 'extended families' of the past or of other cultures. Many communes are searching for basic social units that reflect in some way a further evolutionary step, a 'higher consciousness': a social unit based on love, trust and respect that is larger than the couple yet more intense than other forms of extended families primarily based on kinship.

These conceptions are clearly quite contradictory to many theories of behavioral determinism; environments are considered influential but not determining. Rather it is assumed that a conscious effort of the will, guided with ap-
propriate knowledge, can result in the 'transcendence' of previously conditioned behavior patterns.* These concepts are the realm of phenomenological science and knowledge.

The literature published by communes frequently refers to these interests and they appear both implicitly and explicitly in many discussions between members of communes.**

**implicit and explicit commitment**

When discussing commitment in the typical commune, I have realized that there are both explicit commitments that are generally supported by a number of organizational structures (rotations of tasks, communal 'kitty' for shared income), and implicit commitments that can only be discovered through personal discussion with individuals living in it. The implicit commitments are internal so to speak, and while they generally include for each individual, the three levels described in Kanter's model, this will vary not only from commune to commune but from individual to individual within each house. In fact, it is felt that a great number of issues and problems arise largely from differences in personal interpretations of these implicit commitments. Each person has certain expectations that vary considerably over time; this was apparent in almost all individuals I have discussed with. Even though most communes have meetings (an explicit structural commitment) to discuss the feelings of expectation and frus-

* see A. Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, Chapters 11 and 13, (14); also R.D. Laing, The Divided Self, Preface and Chapter 1, (12).

** see The Modern Utopian, (9), as an excellent example.
tration of each individual (understanding the nature of the implicit commitment as experienced by the others), there are times when specific interpersonal techniques have to be used when the differences persist. A discussion of these processes will be made further.
5. Interpersonal processes within the commune

The following discussion of interpersonal processes that occur in the setting of a commune is by no means complete, as this would require a fairly lengthy psychological inquiry, nor does it pretend to exhaust the possibilities of experiences that may be encountered even in a fairly typical commune. Each group is composed of individuals each of whom has different expectations, experiences and problems while living in such a situation. The discussion is only intended to offer some insight into the nature of these processes; it is based on exchanges of experiences in the meetings described previously, on subsequent discussions with individuals living in these houses, and on my personal experience in the communal situation I live in. Many of these themes are also discussed in literature and newsletters published by participants in communes.

The interpersonal processes that take place in the typical urban commune are intimately related to the intentionality of each group and the consequent commitments that are generated. We have discussed the intentionality and commitment on a theoretical basis in the preceding section, as well as some of the areas in which these concepts are actualized.

The choice of living in a commune is deliberate, much in the way one chooses to marry. It differs from marriage in that it reflects a desire for commitment towards several individuals, towards realizing one's conception of a 'commune', towards living in a situation that is, and will hopefully remain, a
preferable alternative to marriage, 'concubinage' and celibacy and lastly, towards a process that will possibly increase self-knowledge and self-fulfillment.

The intentionality is a crucial component of life in the commune; the varying emphasis of different communes will determine one's choice of situation to live in. Insight into the specific internal organization is partially helpful in this respect: the distribution of tasks, the type of rituals, the processes that favor communication are among the many explicit indications of the nature of this intentionality for any commune. Also how it is experienced and interpreted as implicit commitments by each individual is of considerable interest, but can only be understood through participating in some of the day-to-day life of the house, meetings that the group has together or through personal discussions. The quality of the relationships and the life in a commune can be apprehended through both these processes. Prospective members and interested individuals generally have to proceed along these guidelines.

The intentionality includes: intellectual expectations, conceptions of what the commune and relationships between members 'should be' like, what the collective purpose should imply; affective and emotional expectations, feeling affinity, a desire to be close, to trust and love the others; lastly, expectations related to the pleasure and benefits of just living with several others, "enjoying ourselves, learning and doing things together".
Explicit intentionality is developed initially in all these communes. Several groups indicated that they had decided to have each individual express in writing his/her expectations: making his internal interpretation of communal commitment explicit to the others. If not done in writing, it is always elaborated through considerable preliminary discussions during the formation of the commune. Thus, the emphasis and nature of the commune will be determined. Subsequent prospective members are generally informed of these explicit intentions through similar discussions.

Collective expectations are recognized to vary over time, often considerably. Apparently, many groups start with excessively high expectations that have to be moderated to fit a more organic growing process, over longer periods of time than were thought necessary. While the initial nearly contractual statement is felt to be quite beneficial, there are no instances in my knowledge of houses that have chosen to renew the process on a regular basis; this function is presumably taken on in house meetings.

Communes will specify their intentionality along the following guidelines (subsequently, individual members will describe their situation in similar terms):*

- general common purpose and emphasis: particular areas of personal change, (learning to share and cooperate, deeper and more extensive relationships); areas of general change, (alternatives to jobs, joining a food-coop, producing cooperatively, anti-war activities); a focal point for the group,

* Note: the examples given in parentheses are suggestive, not complete.
(setting up a free school, radical architecture, producing and selling crafts).

- practical aspects: specific common interests (vegetarianism, yoga, music); rituals (dinners together, excursions to the country on weekends); specific tasks (raising children collectively); economics (rent, mortgages, purchasing of food); structures (income sharing, weekly meetings, task rotations); allocation of space in the house; issues of privacy.

- nature of personal relationships: level of trust and intimacy; frequency of presence together (a couple of hours a day, almost all the time); nature of sexual relationships, attitudes with respect to possessiveness, multiple and ambisexual relations; attitude towards relations with people on the outside.

Not all communes are this explicit in their intentions, especially with respect to personal relationships and sexual issues that can generally not be predicted or defined this precisely. In the communes sampled, the range of variety in the first two categories is very large and cannot be generalized.

With respect to interpersonal relationships, it may be possible to say that at this point, considering that most communes have been formed fairly recently, there are few situations in which there are multiple sexual relationships on a permanent basis. While emotional and intellectual interaction
is frequently fairly developed, sexuality is viewed as a delicate issue. Many communes have what could be called couples within them, that may also have a few other sexual experiences but will generally spend more of their time together relatively to time spent with others. This often varies over time. Members frequently have relationships outside; it is agreed that these are easier to handle in many cases, that those inside the house. The process leading to increased relationships is felt to be slow and organic, if it is desired; if there is too much tension, the situation becomes less enjoyable. Most recognize that the possibility of multiple intimate relationships is very attractive and fairly feasible (it exists in a few cases), but has to be handled with considerable care and mutual sincere affection and trust on the part of those involved. Forcing behavior of this nature is felt to be extremely undesirable; the motivation must come from within and with inner stability and calm.

The interpersonal processes and problems that occur in the commune are in some ways similar to those between any two individuals who are intent on a deep relationship and a fairly high level of interaction. The multiplicity of relationships makes the processes more complex to analyze and understand.
The interpersonal processes that take place in the typical communal situation can be described as stemming from the combined dynamics of two basic desires or motivations:

- on the one hand, there is a motivation and commitment to carry out the intentional aspects of the commune; these imply a need to learn about oneself and change oneself in those aspects that appear problematic, to learn about the others and get closer to them, learn to share possessions and feelings, realize how to remove defensive attitudes that prevent mutual empathy, trust and respect; (this is not a pure learning process; it involves realizing how to be aware of these issues).

- on the other hand, there is a desire to live without tenseness in a comfortably relaxed atmosphere where one is not always being subjected to expectations or judgement; it is a desire to be accepted as one is, in the various moods and internal states that occur through long periods of daily life; it includes the wish to live in a place where the various individual and collective activities and other phases of life can take place smoothly and pleasantly.

It can possibly be said that the interpersonal processes are a type of dialectical interplay between these two types of motivations; each commune will emphasize them differently at various times.

The conflict here is in fact present in any new social
unit or system where there is no stable accepted model for relationships and interaction.

Clearly, a day-to-day living situation that is tense will be rapidly difficult to live in; if the objective is increased trust, mutual respect and care, it cannot be aided by an environment where one feels the pressure of strong expectations from everyone. Empathy rather than judgement is required. However, we are socialized towards agressive individualism, competitiveness and defensiveness with regards to many of our feelings; thus a communal situation where the intentionality has seriously dwindled with the pretext of a desire just to live together in a relaxed manner on a daily basis, will quickly be experienced as stagnating with respect to the initial commitment. Many issues will be present but unresolved; they will cause frustration, aggressiveness or hardened indifference. The situation will become superficial and unfulfilling.

The permanent possibility of communication is essential to the health of the situation and the well-being of the participants. Even if collective agreement exists that the present situation satisfies all and that all is well, the process of communication must continue, as any individual may experience a new issue that has to dealt with or other types of dissatisfaction.

In practice, many communes reach fairly stable states during the general growth process; these could be called 'plateaus' in the dynamic process of interaction. They are periods during which the level of interaction remain fairly
fixed.

There are essentially two types of plateaus. The first type might qualify as a stable equilibrium state, where the components of the intentionality that required continuing growth on the part of individuals in that particular situation, have all been completed; all are satisfied in terms of their emotions, expectations and enjoyment. Unless higher and higher interaction is a permanent objective, (and possibly a very idealistic one), most communes reach this state after a period of a few years, (anywhere from one to three years appears to be the opinion of many individuals), and will maintain it until important new experiences, often external or through changes in members, disturb the equilibrium and require a new synthesis. Some communes do expect to expand quasi-permanently, if not in intensity of interaction then in number of participants (through the addition of extra housing in proximity); their motivation is largely related to a desire to influence the larger society through this expansion. The stable equilibrium reached in the other cases represents an optimal plateau for a particular living situation, given its intentionality.

The other type of plateau may be considered as sub-optimal or possibly only transitory. The period is one of stable interaction, but one or several individuals have higher expectations, they see unresolved issues and more potentialities. They may be holding back their motivation out of respect for others who desired a period of stability. They might be experiencing
stagnation and frustration however, but cannot take the initiative to 'provoke' or generate new changes and communication or interaction at a higher level; possibly, they have lost enthusiasm and are just 'coasting' along on whatever interaction exists.

Such plateaus initiated by mutual respect for a period of stability are not necessarily undesirable. The group having stressed its intentionality may wish to ease off the level of expectations and 'take it easy'; often some individuals will feel this more than others.

A frequent case of this occurs when there is a change in patterns of sexual relationships. As an example, a commune including two couples and a number of 'single' individuals initially, could follow this pattern. One of the couples decides they wish to expand their sexual relationships to include one or other members. This might occur successfully, but the couple might not wish to generalize the practice on a regular basis immediately; they might wish to reassess their own relationship after these initial experiences to fully understand and integrate successfully the various feelings of latent possessiveness and threat to their mutual affection they may have experienced. Once this is done, they will feel they have reached a higher synthesis, that combines both similar intensity in their own relationship and less threat from the other participants in terms of sexual attraction. The group will have experienced a pause for reflexion and integration of new experiences, (a temporary plateau), followed by an increased level of interaction.

This example shows the delicate nature of transcending socialized behavior. It is the experience of all that these changes may be fully realized and justified intellectually before they occur, but that when they are experienced, the feelings and emotions have to be additionally explicitly dealt with in trust and respect. In practice desirable changes
will generally be intellectually conceived initially but can only occur if sufficient mutual trust and especially affection on the part of all involved is experienced by all. Other less intense cases of transitory plateaus do occur also.

There is another case though, of the sub-optimal plateau that is not transitory. These carry in them the possible origins of important problems in some communes; they are related to dimishing potentialities for continued communication and interaction. Such plateaus will sometimes be reached without the participants fully realizing it until major symptoms start appearing, and this is sometimes too tardy. Some of the members may partially realize what is happening, but are afraid to make their realization explicit to the others. The plateau will continue indefinitely: no progression is made, new issues are unresolved, old issues start recurring, patterns of superficial communication and stereotyped interaction become observable. As time wears on, it becomes increasingly difficult for any single individual to take the initiative of breaking these patterns and resuming the intentional components of the household; indifference, lack of enthusiasm, serious decrease in expectations, frustration and aggressiveness are all symptomatic of this.

If this is the case, either serious crises will start occurring, possibly over a minor pretext that will trigger a completely new interaction process, or over a period of time the group will slowly disintegrate and eventually change.
structurally in some manner through the departure of some participants or complete disbandment.

Many of the issues that were discussed here are similar to problems that exist both in the couple and also in group therapy sessions. In the latter case however, there are appointed leaders, specifically chosen and possibly trained to recognize such plateaus. This is not the case in most communes; additionally communes are living daily life together and not encountering; this makes the processes slower and thus sometimes more difficult to recognize.

While communes do not have appointed 'group leaders' in this manner, most communes have a number of structures to avoid such problems. Those groups that do not use these structures optimistically rely on the ability of individuals to take initiative when problems appear to be occurring. This initiative is essentially a leadership quality; while all contemporary communes do not appoint leaders and are opposed to single individuals taking on permanent leadership roles, it is apparent that individuals have varying tendencies and abilities to take this initiative. "We should all be leaders" is recurrent theme, but few houses have structures that would aid in this development.

House meetings is the most common structure for dealing with issues. They are often weekly and scheduled so that all members will be present; other strategies include having meetings only once in a while, when there appears to be a need for
resolving a number of issues, (this strategy requires a minimum of initiative but it can still be difficult in cases of strong procrastination tendencies on the part of all); other houses rely on the 'communal dinner' to resolve most minor issues; if major issues are encountered, the discussion can be continued afterwards if schedules permit.

The major advantage of the house meeting is the presence of all members. Many communes experience the difficulties of having issues discussed by sub-sets of the total commune, which is often unfruitful and can be in fact harmful to the collective trust. It is important to differentiate between collective trust and trust between smaller groups of two, three and four individuals within the house. It is recognized that it is preferable to deal with all issues, not only practical but especially interpersonal issues (even between only two members), collectively as much as possible.

A discussion on the usefulness of house meetings indicated that were generally felt to be quite helpful. There were cases however, where only practical issues would be dealt with through mutual avoidance of trickier problems, or where specific individuals would not really participate fully in the meetings through not taking initiative to express their feelings, their frustration and expectations.

Thus additional techniques are used in some communes. These include: psychodrama, where individuals play the roles of other members; selecting one individual to be the leader of each meeting; selecting one member to be on the 'hot spot'
where the other members can express all their positive and negative feelings towards her/him to which she/he can respond subsequently; one commune has a special "Attitude Committee" composed of two members selected in rotation each week: this committee leaves personal messages, both critical and praising, on the breakfast table every morning.

Some individuals feel that these techniques become less important over time: maintaining good communication becomes easier to do on a continuing basis through the fairly intense affection and trust that may be present at that time. In this case, only special major issues would require meetings or special techniques. These people and many others also agree that house meetings and these techniques are neither sufficient nor necessary to promote the promising benefits of life in a commune; they do not guarantee sincere spontaneous affection and trust but may only be pretending they exist. These ingredients are felt to be the essentials of a 'happy commune'.

The importance of these interpersonal issues indicates again that the essential component of commitment is the affinity with other members, the affective ties that link the individuals together. My own experience and that of almost all individuals I have talked to supports this. Some agree however, that communes will often survive fairly long merely on intellectual expectations and the various perceived advantages of living with several people.
The longevity of communes is consequently related not only to the initial commitment but to the nature and quality of these continuing dynamic interacting processes based on sincere feelings. There is a sort of self-perpetuating mechanism that occurs here: good interaction and communication gives the commune members a considerable feeling of well-being and consequently an inclination to desire permanence. This feeling of permanence in turn will motivate the continuation of good communication to resolve new issues, increase individual growth and promote interaction; this is how the commune reaches its stable equilibrium, its true potentialities as a stable fulfilling family unit, capable of raising children, maintaining itself over time and dealing with all the issues that arise in other families, and possibly even better through the rich social system created by intimate relationships between a number of individuals.

Couples remain close to each other over time in the same manner. Continuing sharing of feelings, trust and mutual respect. Couples, however have the frequently used option of superficial patterns of interaction, often socially-approved, that might be substituted for true constructive relationships.

This leads us to a very interesting hypothesis that would possibly explain the potential that exists and is attractive in a communal living situation, purely on an interpersonal level, (not considering economic and social benefits described previously).

It has been suggested that the risk of falling into quasi-
permanent patterns of unfulfilling interaction in a superficial or limited manner that occurs in couples over time in many cases, does not take place in communes because of the numbers of people and for the following reason.

The theory is that unpleasant patterns of interaction between pairs of individuals in a commune are avoided in two ways: first, they are easily observable by others in the same household who can explicitly indicate them to those involved and thus initiate a re-evaluation of the relationship (an awareness of the pattern and a subsequent conscious and deliberate decision as to its future); secondly, the relationship between any pair of individuals is highly influenced by the changes in relations they each have with the others; there is thus little chance that they will maintain an unfulfilling relationship in a situation that is fairly intimate with the others (in comparison to the usual couple that does not live with other friends); there is a rather good chance of the relationship either changing considerably or of it being solved through the help of others who can uncover concealed problems in their status as observers.

The theory applies to all subsets of the commune; if the global relationship or almost all the members of the house are in an unfulfilling relationship with each other, and if the structured processes fail to solve the problems, the communal situation becomes too unbearable to pursue as we have seen previously and will disintegrate much more rapidly than most couples.
The 'closed quarters' that exist in the couple situation are quite strong in their influence on the flexibility of the relationship. This closedness insures considerable stability it is argued, but will often insure the permanence of undesirable and possibly even unhealthy stability. This does not exist in communes, who are replacing these stable walls with structures that promote dynamic and constructive interaction and that are developing a consciousness of a more dynamic stability that is based on mutual trust and respect, rather than norms to uphold and specific behavior to follow.

A parallel may be made with the way in which many contemporary therapists prefer working with groups, with families of patients or with a patient and at least one individual close to him or her. This avoids possible undesirable patterns or dependencies in the relationship between the therapist and the patient. In the commune, potentially all are 'therapist' and 'patient' in the weak sense of these terms: unhealthy stable equilibriums maintained through dependencies are considerably hindered.

This final discussion was theoretical and not all communes optimize this process by any means. Whether they will do so over time has yet to be examined. There is evidence that supports the theory however. Many couples join communes for two reasons: they feel, subconsciously or consciously, that there relationship is not adequate and are seeking help without having to separate. In this case, the relationship either dissolves if it is apparent that it was truly unworkable, or
more often, problems are worked out through the presence of others; their dependency was constricting them in their relationships with others, their stability was becoming oppressive or possibly one or both partners had personal problems that were preventing fulfillment but could not be resolved through their dependency on mutual patterns of interaction - the communal environment offers the opportunity of opening up these issues in an environment that is more trusting and affective than most marriage counselors, encounter groups and the like.

Other couples join communes even though their relationship was very fulfilling. Their desire is primarily one of expanding this fulfillment to include others and thus create an even richer relationship. In this case, the only risk that the couple will have to examine and watch, is that if the level of interaction in the commune is lower at that time than in their relationship, they will have to maintain the higher level of interaction if possible, and influence the others to increase theirs, rather than having their relationship 'fall' to a lower level. This is a fairly subtle but important issue; the couple will have to maintain its interaction without being exclusive as this would prevent extensions to their relationship. This issue is largely dependent on the intentionality of the various participants.

The counter-argument to these considerations is that the communal situation takes considerably more time to reach higher levels of interaction than most couples, simply
because of the numbers of people involved. The commitment is too time-consuming and requires too much emotional energy in an environment that makes other economic demands on individuals, and where the societal environment is already very tense in terms of emotional stress.

Participants in communes agree with the logic of these arguments but not the premises. The economic demands can be seriously reduced both through collectivity and a decrease in many perceived needs that are conditioned (large numbers of cars and other status symbols) or result from alienation and unfulfillment on a non-material level. They feel additionally in many cases that the priorities of our society related to economic growth, international competitiveness and increased material welfare are possibly not optimal at this time in history, and thus are living their life along the guidelines of their own priorities rather than accepting to follow socially-approved roles and behavior. Lastly, they feel that the increased feeling of security and well-being that results from good relationships with several individuals on a daily basis rather than just one partner seriously contribute to alleviate much of the tenseness generated by our social environment, especially in cities.

This section has shown us many of the ways in which the urban commune can be viewed by many as a viable alternative basic social unit, and a new format for the family.
6. Other issues in the communal situation

Most of the issues that arise have been discussed already. These include both practical issues (practical decisions and setting up structures or other ways of dealing with daily activities) and the interpersonal issues. When practical issues become problematic it is in most cases related to personal problems. Over time, the group will change its emphasis from discussing practical problems to exchanging feelings and experiences. The new decisions that have to be made generally tend to work themselves out well with a minimum of deliberation. The nature of the issues that are discussed is possibly a good indicator of the age of a commune (how long it has existed) or of its maturity. Many communes will get rid of cumbersome structures when the participants are sufficiently aware of their own responsibility in being a participant amongst others, with collective needs to be met and certain tasks to be performed.

A classical example of this is the task of washing dishes. Rotations are frequently set up initially but prove to be very cumbersome with frequent changes in schedules or instances when individuals are in moods particularly antagonistic to washing dishes. Labor credits have been used but are felt to be very institutional in their nature and too easily associated with participation in a 'social system' rather than a family. If structures are removed, specialization often occurs to some extent (cooking preferred to dishes by some and vice-versa). Sometimes unequal share of work will ensue. The only real solution is increased awareness of the problem that will motivate unselfconscious action, and awareness of one's interdependence with the others (if I leave my dishes or never share in the work, someone else has to do it; do I care?) Sincere mutual affection coupled with trusting communication are the essential ingredients for solutions to practical problems of this sort.
There are however two more areas of concern in communes that have not been dealt with.

influence of the urban environment

The rich social environment that exists in the city has considerable potential for diminishing commitment to the 'house'. This is a crucial distinction between the 'urban commune' and those located in rural settings, where they are quite secluded and much turned in onto themselves. The individual in a commune in the city 'goes out' frequently, has friends, entertainment and often a job situation that can distract him from issues within his house. Thus, it will not be that crucially important to his well-being if there are too many problems in his house that he does not want to deal with; although they will inevitably influence him, he can survive in this unsatisfying situation. Some feel this is a serious threat to urban communes, and might compromise their longevity.

The counter argument is that if this occurs, the rest of the group will generally try to discuss the issues with the individual; if this fails, the individual will not want to continue living in such a superficial manner over a period of time and will probably leave. The argument is much the same as it would be for other families: are urban families more threatened in their stability than rural ones? This seems hardly plausible. The advantage of the urban commune is that the individuals are not turned onto themselves as much as in many rural communes: they have outside interests, friends and activities. This is probably quite fruitful in the long run,
as it provides not only socially diverse experiences that are beneficial and may subsequently be shared with the others in one's family (meetings friends of the others is an example), but it also provides communes with opportunities to participate together in activities outside their daily routines; movies, restaurants and other forms of entertainment can be often all the more enjoyable collectively.

The potential threat of the urban environment is also thus a potential medium for increasing or stimulating interaction and an enjoyable social life with the others, much in the way it is the case for other types of family situations.

departing participants

An issue that comes up occasionally and that can cause some difficulty is the departure of a participant. Many communes in Boston have experienced changes in participants. For some the turnover rate is quite high (50%/year); this might indicate problems with the intentionality and commitment in that particular group (how these aspects are actualized), maybe specific personality and personal problems among some of the participants or it might just be individuals who choose to move geographically.

Reasons for departure include dissatisfaction with the commitment (through higher or lower expectations); merely a desire to move geographically; a desire to temporarily live singly again (to redefine one's commitments); interest in joining other communes that will meet other expectations; a desire to live with a specific individual that for some
reason cannot be included with the group.

If and when a participant leaves he or she will feel concerned about suddenly asserting their individuality with respect to the group: deciding what possessions to take along, what to leave for the collectivity, how to settle accounts, how to share responsibilities, (especially children). While these problems should be solved in most cases, as in the case of most separations of couples, without too much difficulty, if the participant is leaving out of dissatisfaction then the situation is bound to be tense. Feelings will be hurt, the departing individual will assert himself very strongly; the group will be hurt at being treated with such inconsideration yet is then apparently a little defensive about the departure. No formal structures such as divorce exist to regulate these departures; it is not certain that they are desirable. On the other hand, many communes have preliminary agreements as to what is deemed personal possessions and what is collective; the collective possessions presumably remain with the household.

new members

The issue of recruiting or rather discovering new participants occurs in two situations: first, if the group is actively seeking a new participant to ease off the financial strain caused by a departure; secondly, if the group does have available space but is waiting to meet someone that all will wish to include as a participant.
Interviewing processes are unanimously agreed to be very uncomfortable both for the group and the prospective members.

Classified advertisements, word of mouth and announcements made at intercommunal meetings are the general methods of active recruitment at large. Subsequent selection becomes difficult and tedious. Many prospective participants take rejection very personally, and thus the proceedings must be done gently.

Most communes prefer waiting to meet a potential member that appears attractive to all, and then take the initiative of proposal. Whatever the case, the serious prospective members are most often invited to live in temporarily for a period of time sufficiently long to familiarize them with the group. In this manner deeper issues and problems are discussed, and final decisions will be made with considerable care. Decision making is always consensual in this case.

It is of interest to point out that many communes seeking members in the area are literally swamped with phone calls if their search is made public. There is a definite excess of individuals interested in finding groups to live with in comparison to the usual rate of openings available in existing houses. The fear of organizing a new commune, the absence of enough potential participants to start a group and the difficulty of finding adequate housing contribute in hindering the formation of new communes. New Community Projects described previously is attempting to remedy this situation.
III. Urban communes: an evaluation

After this discussion of various issues in communal life, of the practicalities and the interpersonal processes, of both problems and sources of enjoyment and fulfillment, we may wonder how to summarize the possible benefits and disbenefits of this new type of family.

The description and analysis of practical issues has shown us that they were largely related to the nature of the commitment in the commune, and to the quality of the interaction between participants. If these are sufficient, cooperativeness and some collectivization can actually increase practical and economic efficiency in comparison to the usual nuclear family.

Our evaluation of communes must therefore be based on the potentialities of developing personal qualities that will favor this type of interaction. We have observed that structures exist to encourage personal communication and commitment; they are very useful but neither sufficient nor necessary in some cases.

Extrapolating these considerations, it can be said that the evolution and growth of the communal movement will largely depend on the priorities of individuals. If values are shifting from material concerns to individual fulfillment and creativity, the commune is an excellent social unit to satisfy these needs: its potential for diminishing individual material needs through sharing, its social diversity, the range of immediate personal resources, the opportunities for creative child-care where responsibilities are shared and its potential beneficial effect on many personal problems can all favor a "better life" in these
terms; this is conditional of course on the willingness of individuals to try and to learn with trust, affection and respect.

What about stability, security and permanence we may ask? It must be remembered that the phenomenon is recent, that it is still growing, that the participants are learning. Values are changing; some individuals are not satisfied with a life spent in meeting conditioned needs, with behavior that is monitored to promote a 'system' rather than their own lives, with jobs that support economic and political principles they do not believe in. In the cities, social life has deteriorated; there is much alienation and boredom. Neighborhoods and communities are political units rather than social ones. Social life that is not economically or politically functional has been 'atomized' down to the nuclear family.*

Many feel confined in the nuclear family; others feel that even this last refuge from the 'system' has been affected, so that respectful, trusting and affective relationships have been submerged under conditioned roles and power structures. In light of these issues, communes are very attractive.

Nevertheless, the intellectual change in values takes time and commitment to influence conditioned attitudes. A commune will not work overnight; one must be patient, humble, gentle with oneself and with others. If the shift in values is sincere, communal life will be increasingly attractive to many.

* Note: Many are attempting change in society through changes in large-scale economic and political structures; environmental designers and planners are doing changes through the environment. Others are starting to change a basic element, the family. The two strategies can be complementary.
Some evidence indicates that communes have a fair turnover; this is possibly true, but reflects again the newness of the phenomenon. Individuals are learning, stopping, trying fresh again. Surely, not all communes will work; neither do many marriages. Many individuals that I have talked to who have left communes, have indicated that they learned a lot but were going to wait till "I meet people I love more". This is quite 'normal'. Others go from one commune to another, changing groups to find suitable partners; some communes split up and generate two new communes.

The survey conducted by New Community Projects and described previously (section I) contained the following results: (out of 58 responding communes)*

- How long has your commune been together?
  - less than 6 months: 13
  - 6 months to a year: 22
  - one to two years: 13
  - 3 to 5 years: 8
  - over five years: 2

- How long do you plan to be together?
  - till January, 1972: 9
  - one year: 2
  - two to three years: 2
  - over five years: 1
  - indefinitely: 44

These results seem to support some of the individual discussions on which the preceding arguments were formulated. This survey was conducted in the fall of 1971, and is probably already partially outdated.

prospects for the future

While it is hypothetical to speculate that the communal movement will continue to grow in a number of american cities,

I believe that the evidence presented in this paper is sufficient to indicate that there is a considerable probability that this will be the case. The main external obstacles to the growth of the movement are:

- availability of suitable housing (for rent and sale)
- misinformation and myths surrounding communal life
- lack of enough positive information on communes that is both useful and encouraging (one generally reads about the problems of communes rather than their benefits; while this is also the case for nuclear families, people still fear taking the mythical 'great step' into communal life).
- lack of recognition of its existence and potentialities on the part of most social scientists (clearly, because of the newness of the phenomenon).

Thus, action can be taken on these levels. Organizations such as NCP are possible models for this type of action. But efforts could be made to mention these possibilities to various communities through other channels that deal with community organizing and social work. Architects can take interest in designing for this type of social unit.

Internal obstacles have been discussed already. Action can be taken to disseminate experiences and what has been learned thus far. Specialists in interpersonal problems can possibly offer help in these areas.

Considerable future research can be done on a variety of issues related to the internal issues: strategies and effectiveness of communal child-rearing, effectiveness of
various structures for promoting communication and commitment, impact of communal living on consumption patterns, on work patterns, on recreation and entertainment, on participation in extra-communal activities and neighborhood life; impact of communal life on mobility, transience and travel patterns; effects on individual creativity, on friendships, on sexuality, on fulfillment. Changes in such a fundamental unit as the family are bound to have considerable repercussions, all of which can be of considerable interest.

Impacts on the urban environment can be speculated upon, if the trend continues to a considerable extent:

- impacts on housing: larger dwelling units, with more intensive use of space - higher person/dwelling unit ratio - higher population per dwelling unit density or similar population and lesser dwelling unit densities or more open space.

- impacts on services: less individual or small unit oriented services. Cooperative community services and facilities.

- transportation: definite decrease in car ownership/person. Increase in ridership/automobile. Increase in small vans and minibuses to transport a large family. Street grid pattern probably dependent on other changes in city planning.

- impacts on urban economics: purchasing cooperatives, influential on local retail outlets at the least. Trend towards purchasing homes rather than renting possible.

These impacts are purely speculative as a matter of interest and cannot be taken seriously without further research and evidence.
These considerations conclude this study. The arguments presented in this paper have shown that many communes are currently functioning in the Boston area, that they are potentially very viable in urban environments and that there is some evidence that can be support speculations as to probable growth of the communal movement. The phenomenon is recent, and many of the issues and problems that were discussed largely stem from this; it has been suggested that the phenomenon is producing a number of changes very close to individuals and that these take time and patience before their effect can be fully apprehended and appreciated. The commune has thus been viewed both as a learning environment and an opportunity for creating alternative family situations. A number of comments have been made in addition, to illustrate the relationship of the communal movement to change in the larger society in the context of an urban environment.

I wish to conclude by saying that the only way I could have studied urban communes was by living in such a situation, and that this research was fruitful in my increased understanding of the phenomenon. This study has strengthened my intent in continuing to participate in these living situations; hopefully, it might encourage interest and constructive support for communal families.

"My utopia is ideal life, here or anywhere, pushed to the limits of its ideal possibilities."

Lewis Mumford
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