

Terapolva

Utopian Dreams and Urban Realities In an Ecovillage in Buenos Aires

Catharina Bjerke Sletner

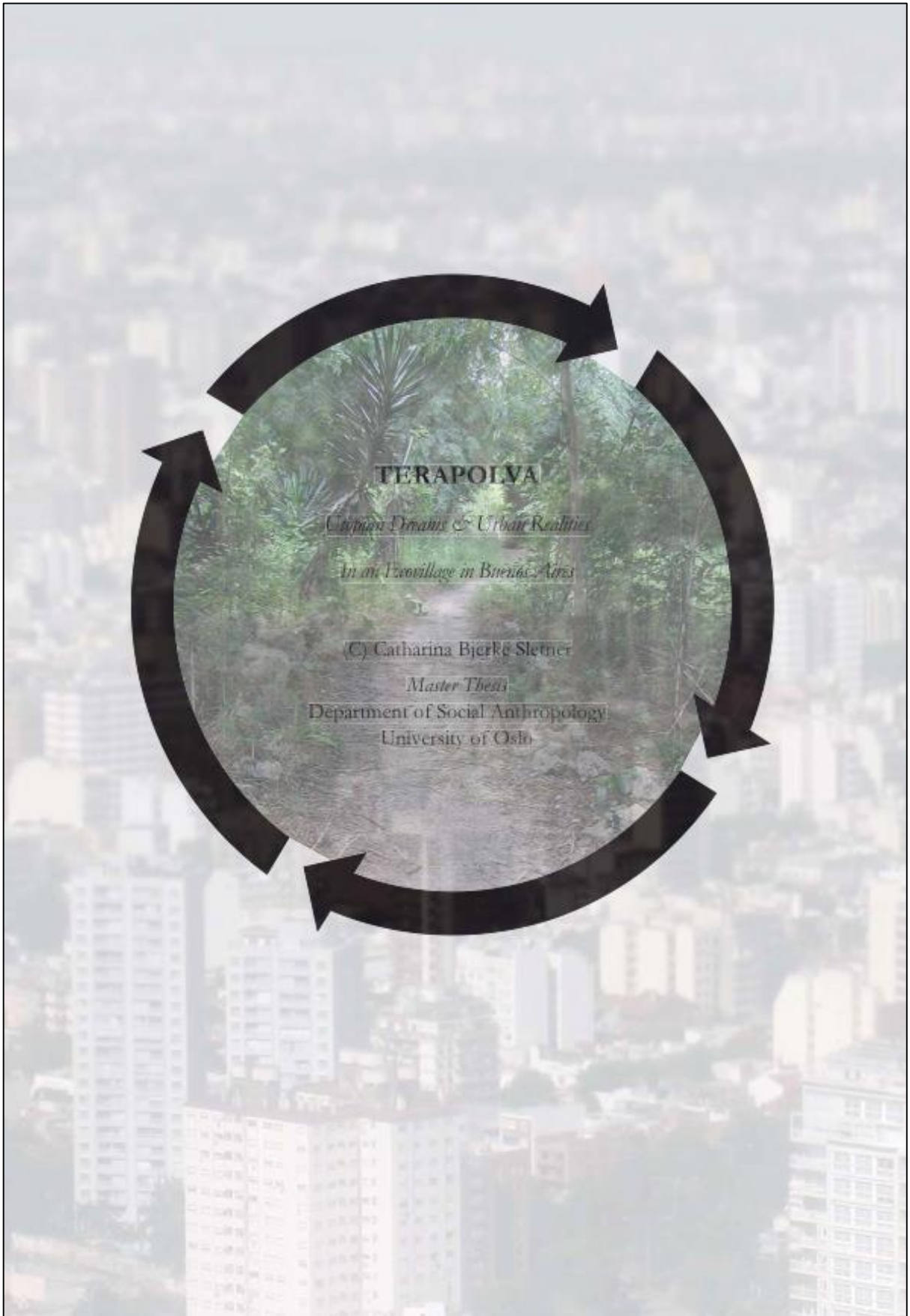


Master Thesis

Department of Social Anthropology

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

2015



TERAPOLVA

Classroom Dynamics & Urban Realities

An an-Preovillage in Buenos Aires

(C) Catharina Bjerke Sletner

Master Thesis

Department of Social Anthropology
University of Oslo

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2015

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Abstract

Terapolva is a settlement geographically located within the inner city borders of Buenos Aires. Characterized as an ecovillage, its members seek away from an urban lifestyle and opt for a life in closer contact with nature. Its main practice is *reciclaje* (recycling) where vegetables that are to be trashed by stores in the closest urban *barrio* are given new purpose by being rinsed and cooked to serve the community's members and visitors. Terapolva's ideological worldview is based on "The three R's": Recycle, Reutilize and Reduce.

Terapolva's organizational structure draws on anarchistic principles where visible borders and officially regulated commitment is absent. Members, who call themselves *aldeanos* (villagers), are in theory free to come and go as they please, and the community has no legal claim to the terrain it occupies – which in fact belongs to the University College and the government of Buenos Aires. Next to Terapolva's main territory lies a state owned bioreserve with an overgrown river and a rich wildlife. *Aldeanos* claim themselves to be protectors of the zone, seeking to maintain the flora and fauna by removing contaminating material and keeping the area free of trash.

My main question throughout this thesis is: **How is community identity and individual needs connected to Terapolva's aim to be an ecovillage, and how can the place be seen as a generator of meaning and livelihood for its inhabitants?**

I seek to understand how a community that has a very high frequency of changing members and which lacks clear borders and regulations still manages to maintain a unity and to reproduce itself. Ideologically Terapolva is though to be an ecovillage, and there is an overall notion that Terapolva is a place very much distinguished from the rest of Buenos Aires. I investigate what kind of mechanisms exist in the creation and maintaining of boundaries, where differentiation between inside and outside are confirmed both by *aldeanos* themselves and groups in its near surroundings. Since the open structure and anarchistic organization allow members to operate based on voluntarism I ask how the community's common ideals and goals are kept alive and how these are reflected, or not, in the actions of the individuals and their strategies for satisfying daily needs.

Acknowledgements

Firstly I would like to thank the people of Terapolva for seeing me as an *aldeano*, showing me a new side of Buenos Aires and opening my eyes to how someone's trash can become someone else's treasure. May the place continue in its becoming of what you want it to be.

To my academic advisor Marianne E. Lien: Thank you for encouraging me to go away on fieldwork. You were right, what a life changing experience it has been! You have supported my choices and listened from near and far to my frustrations, and your brilliant manner of criticizing while encouraging has helped me keep faith in both the project and myself.

Thanks to family and friends who have believed in me when I doubted. A special thanks to my mom for her unconditional love and support. To my fellow students on the 6th and 7th floor: Let's make the world see that they need us!

Lastly I thank my intellectual challenger, my patient research assistant and my emotional support. Thank you for being there, and for guiding me towards insight when I was too busy lost in translation. Truly, I couldn't have done this without you. *Israel, esto es para ti.*

C.B.S.

Dictionary

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| <i>Aldeano</i> | “Villager” - A person who lives or has lived in Terapolva and/or has contributed significantly to the project over time. |
| <i>Aldea</i> | Village. E.g.: <i>Que linda la aldea ahora!</i> (How beautiful the village is now) |
| <i>Almuerzo</i> | The biggest meal of the day, usually eaten between afternoon and night |
| <i>Barrio</i> | Hood, borough, city part |
| <i>Cu-cu</i> | Shouting animal sounds to announce one’s presence or gather <i>aldeanos</i> |
| <i>Faso</i> | Cigarette, smoke, butt (used mostly about marijuana or <i>porro</i>) |
| <i>Hermanx</i> | “Brother or Sister” (the “x” indicates neutralization of sex). Used among <i>aldeanos</i> . E.g. “ <i>Como estas, hermanx?</i> ” (How are you, sister?) |
| <i>Huerta</i> | Herb garden. In Terapolva this refers to the area above the <i>circulo</i> , where herbs and fruit-trees grow. |
| <i>Hacer Manitos</i> | Connect hands to form a circle, usually followed by group meditation. |
| <i>Leña</i> | Fire wood |
| <i>Porro</i> | Non-pure weed. Used about everything that is not pure <i>flor</i> (marijuana flower) |
| <i>Porteña/-o</i> | A person from Buenos Aires. Derives from the word <i>Puerto</i> (port). |
| <i>Quilombo</i> | Mess, chaos |
| <i>Taller</i> | Activity: Workshop. Place: Workroom, atelier. |

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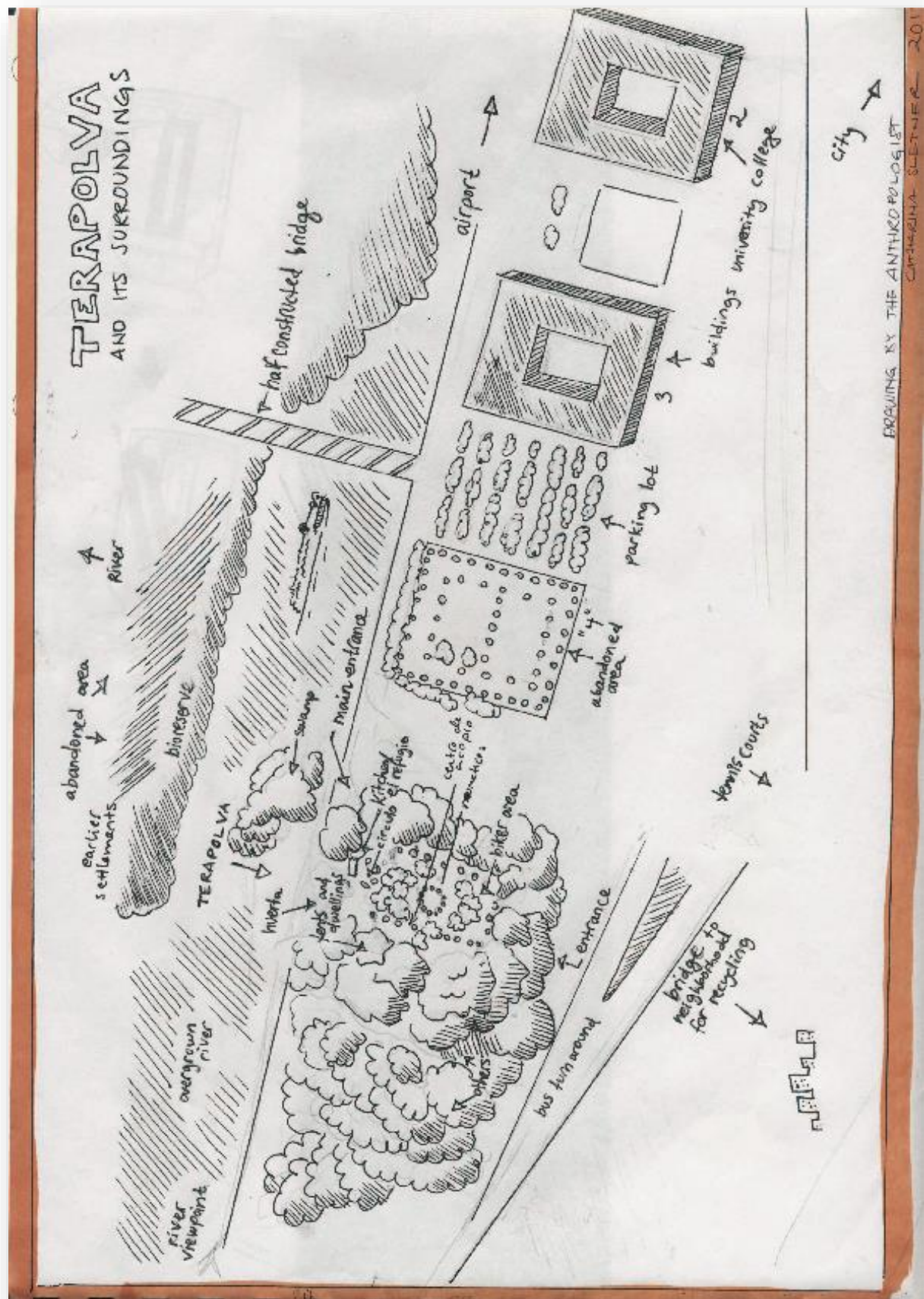


Figure 1: Map of Terapolva and its surrounding areas.

Reflections on Field, Concepts and Methods

Indeed, I do not forget that my voice is but one voice,
My experience a mere drop in the sea,
My knowledge no greater than the visual field in a microscope,
My minds eye a mirror that reflects a small corner of the world,
And my ideas – a subjective confession

- Carl Jung (Epigraph in Wikan 1990: VII)

This thesis is not the six months I spent in Buenos Aires. The following pages are not the lives of the people I met. For that to be transferred to text, I would have needed more time, more pages and a whole lot more adjectives – if it were ever a feasible task to translate life into academic text. What you are about to read springs from the process of doing first-time fieldwork in a city of three million souls, helped by a method of following lines of interactions that ultimately lead to a place so far from what I had first imagined, that I had to rethink the whole project. I am grateful to the people that have allowed me to extract fragments of their lives to create this piece of ethnography. The journey has resulted in so much more than empirical data for academic use. All names and places have been anonymized, and the name Terapolva is my own creation.

Multi-Sited to Single-Sited and Back Again – Looking for Fieldwork

From my first day in Buenos Aires I embarked on the task of doing multi-sited fieldwork. I kept George E. Marcus' (1995) thought on the subject in mind as I sat out to explore the idea of veganism¹ in various places. Marcus presents ways of making fieldwork in “world systems” such as a city, and argues that a certain “following the road as it unravels” can be useful, and that a static image of “field” must be challenged when operating within complex cultural contexts (Marcus 1995). In conversations with my supervisor, we had decided that I would start out as broad as possible. My aim was to study vegetarian food choices in a country where meat stands strong as a cultural symbol, and Argentina appealed to me for various reasons. I had already written my bachelor's thesis on the Vegan Movement in Oslo, but I was unsure if a similar

¹ Veganism is the ideology of not consuming products that implies the suffering or death of other sentient species (Aboglio 2011: 73).

movement existed in the Argentinean capital, where *asados* (barbeques) with large bloody beefs of free-range cattle seemed to lie at the heart of the nation's cultural pride. So I expanded my research question to embed all kinds of activities that implied a vegetarian based diet and a move away from the norm of meat eating. I didn't want to rule out anything. Restaurants, shops and vegetarian/organic food markets became natural starting-places.

The first couple of months I rented an apartment in the *barrio* Palermo, a wealthy and hip part of the city, where the probability of finding trendy vegetarian restaurants seemed within reach. And I was right. On my first day as I sat out to buy groceries, I noticed several organic "whole foods"-stores that sold vegan fast food, and prided themselves with "natural", "organic" or "raw" ingredients. As I spoke to people who worked in these places, they all kept telling me how the trend had exploded during the last couple of years. Five or ten years ago, asking for a vegetarian option in a restaurant would have quickly labeled you an "alternative". I was told I had come in just the right time. Perhaps I should have been happy about this, but the overwhelming array of choices left me rather paralyzed. Where could I possibly start? It became clear that my broad approach to vegetarianism in Buenos Aires would have to be narrowed down to some very precise research questions.

For four weeks I also attended Spanish classes in *microcentro*. This meant that I every day took a crowded Subte² along with thousands of other *porteños* in the morning, and ate at lunch-bars packed with people from office jobs. In what I figured the least likely place to encounter any vegans, I one day discovered a restaurant named Verde, just on the corner of the busiest street in downtown. Verde was a place driven by a Swede, where most of the staff was vegan and where the food was 100 % organic and plant-based. I started coming there in my lunch-break, until employees greeted me when I entered the door, asking me if I wanted "the usual". Then, I initiated a round of interviews. I wanted to know what a bunch of vegans did here, in the middle of the commercial district. With their loose hemp-garments and dreadlocks selling tofu-salads to stiff businessmen in suit and tie, it made up a quite interesting picture. I had a talk with Mina, a thirty-something vegan and *Porteña*, with a fierce appearance and colorful clothes.

Mina told me she was vegan because she couldn't see any reason not to. She went on telling me that she was no activist. She wasn't fond of how some vegans looked down on people who eat meat. "People should do what they want", she said. I asked her if she found it difficult to maintain a vegan lifestyle in Buenos Aires. "If you're vegan you'll never go hungry. There's always the possibility of finding fruit. Try starving after eating six bananas!" she told me laughingly. On the other hand she felt like she was in her own world when moving about

² The Buenos Aires' subway system.

Buenos Aires with her bicycle. “My world within the world.” she said. Mina had certain patterns of movement inside the city. Browsing for vegan food and hanging out with equal minded friends took up most of her time besides work. She went on, telling me that she recently returned from years of traveling in South America and that she only would be in the city for short time. She was planning to become part of a place called Isla Paraiso. This was an ecovillage located in the Misiones region. “There, one can lead a simpler life. That’s what I want”, she said.

Mina recommended I’d go visit if I had an opportunity. It *is* paradise, she said. A co-operative of alternative minded people had moved out of urbanity to lead a life closer to nature. I thought about taking her advise and travel out there to see for myself, but decided not to. I wanted to get to know Mina and her urban vegan life better, and finally I was invited to hang out with her and her vegan friends. Happy about the invitation I kept contact with her by text messages, until suddenly, when I proposed a day to meet up, she stopped answering.

I continued my search for vegan informants in Buenos Aires, and as with Mina, they were always friendly upon approach, eager to speak about veganism, but seemed to slip through my fingers as soon as further contact was suggested. Revising my field notes I saw a whole lot of data about how to be a vegan that I knew from before.

I decided to join a running group, to take my mind off the daily “search for fieldwork”. My newly acquired friend and vegetarian informant Adele (that I had been in contact with previous to my arrival in Buenos Aires) proposed that I join hers. In addition one of the guys there was an anthropologist. Adele thought he might give me some tips about how to do fieldwork in the city. So I went, and was introduced to José. As a part of his studies he had done a couple of weeks fieldwork visiting an *aldea* (village) not far from the University College. I told him about my pursuit of vegans and he suggested I'd look there; their food was all vegetarian. Keeping Mina’s dream about the ecovillage in the back of my mind, I decided to check this place out, maybe there was someone there who could send me in the direction of vegan networks. As will become clear, I sought out the place, which I have given the anagram Terapolva, and for the rest of my time in Buenos Aires I focused on it as my main source for data. For a while I wanted to combine my participant observation there with my interviews in the city, but as the time passed and I became more and more integrated in the daily life of Terapolva, the place stood out to me as such a complex microcosm that it deserved all my attention, and all the following pages of this thesis.

Change of Field – Change of Method

As I had moved from a multi-sited investigation of a sub-culture movement to a situated group of people living within a defined area, my methods changed automatically. I experienced a “going ashore” type of encounter with the field, rather than the “following the idea” type of field as explained by Marcus (1995). Here was a village that had (at least at first glance) a defined inside and outside, and whose people lived together 24 hours a day. My first approach to Terapolva was as a visitor. The village offered various *talleres* (workshops) to visitors for free, and I saw it as a good way to come closer and show my enthusiasm for the village. After a while I felt I had established enough contact with the *aldeanos* (villagers) to ask them if I could stay with them for a while. Since the group had no leader, I based the answer on the general impression I had that I was welcome. My interest and positivity seemed to be enough, so one day about a month after my first visit to the village I arrived with a backpack and a tent. I embarrassingly admit my great excitement about this; *now* I felt like an anthropologist.

Throughout my stay in Terapolva I experienced the process of going from being a visitor and outsider, to eventually obtain a certain insider-status. In practice, and I assume in many of my informants' eyes, I was no less of an *aldeano* than they were, and I was named as such on some occasions. Several times I even felt *more* of an *aldeano* than others, being continuously engaged with the project and taking on all the various daily tasks that is expected of an *aldeano*. This awareness especially occurred when visitors arrived and I ended up showing them around as if it was my own home. Being a researcher in Terapolva seemed paradoxical. The fact that whoever obtains the acceptance of the group to live there, and who engages themselves in community life, can become an *aldeano* - made it somewhat impossible to see myself, or more importantly, for others to see me as a researcher. Regularly, at common gatherings, I reminded people that I was there to learn about life in an ecovillage and that I was to write a thesis for my studies in anthropology when I got back to Norway. This did not seem to engage the others much. How I could contribute to everyday life and the common project was much more important. I had to figure out a way to make myself useful in the village, and I evaluated what a good position for me could be. Eventually I found myself engaged with various projects in Terapolva, and took on a certain “all over”-role, because I felt I could miss out on interesting stuff if I just kept to one activity. However, the daily food preparation became a natural task, and every day I contributed to this. Participating in the acquiring, preparation and consumption of food was a great opportunity to talk with all the *aldeanos* and to learn how daily life functioned. My initial interest in food was obviously connected to this. But the fact that the food was vegetarian seemed to be so obvious to the *aldeanos* that I had to rule out vegetarianism in itself as an object of study. There was more to Terapolvian life than maintaining a vegetarian diet, and

gradually I became more interested in questions of survival, commitment and the complex idealism that seemed to permeate the village's dynamics.

The Human Observer - Emotional Fieldwork and an Ethical Dilemma

I came across as less of a “fieldworker”, and more of a person, for better and worse.
(Wikan 2012: 19)

As anthropologists we enter social contexts that in varying degrees are alien to us. It is a well-known truth within the discipline that ethnographic fieldwork can be unpleasant and, as the method in fact indicates, it is hard *work*. The latter word, I will argue, cannot be understood in its traditional form. I am arguing that one of the most important aspects of fieldwork, based on my experience as first time in “the field”, is the emotional work we do, within ourselves and through interacting with other human beings. The emotional work is what makes us something more than mere researchers, and it is what creates rich data as well as intimate challenges. As the quote from Unni Wikan (2012) indicates, we are first and foremost human beings interacting with other human beings. To deny this is to shut the door to valuable experiences, and accepting it is opening up to possible troublesome situations and unpleasant dilemmas. During my time in Terapolva I faced some challenges, as well as some nice surprises.

As I settled in the village and worked on finding a suitable role among the *aldeanos*, I also developed a close relationship with one *aldeano*. He approached me early on, curious about my research from an academic perspective and in me personally. He had gotten his license as a Community Psychologist the previous year, and was eager to share with me his own reflections about life in Terapolva. As he had arrived in the village a month before myself, he had developed theories about the group dynamics and gotten to know the *aldeanos* well, as he himself became one. Being Chilean, he had the obvious advantage of speaking the language fluently, and besides being my conversation partner he also became my language teacher. Although I kept the scribbling of field notes and gathering data to myself, I could always turn to him about things I didn't understand or needed more explanation to make sense of, and he became a sort of “partner in crime” during the rest of my fieldwork. He has continued as my main moral and intellectual support throughout the writing of this thesis.

A slightly unpleasant incident occurred when one *aldeano*, who was pregnant and also had a small child, asked me if I still kept a place in the city. Since I was spending so much time in the village, she figured she and her daughter could borrow my apartment to escape Terapolva. I knew her birth date was getting closer, and having no money she was getting more and more

distressed about having a safe place for her children. Terapolva was no place for a newborn baby. I sometimes left the village for a couple of days, to write out my field notes and appreciate the comfort of the apartment that I had already paid for. This gave me a flexibility that some *aldeanos* for many reasons did not have, and it made me see how life in Terapolva could be seen as a precarious one. I approach this subject in Chapter 3. Eventually, after pondering on what I found to be a tough ethical dilemma, I declined her proposal. I needed my writing space, and letting her into my private sphere would perhaps have gotten me trapped in a tangle it could be hard to get out of. I was after all only there for a limited period of time.

I believe that “being human” in the field is what leads to our most interesting findings, as well as being the source of our deepest ethical challenges. As with anything in life, one cannot expect to get something without giving, and through our engagement in the people we meet, we are bound to give of ourselves to be worthy of the information that we write down and call ethnography. Embedded in this is a risk of being vulnerable and to be seen as no more than human beings, both by our informants and our fellow academics. We can only hope that this makes us better researchers, and that the material we are left with come closer to the reality of life than any other social science will ever get.

Permaculture and the South American Ecovillage

“*La ecoaldea Latinoamericano*” is a concept that spans all over Latin America, but the idea of an ecovillage is not restricted to this region, and is rather a global phenomenon. Organizations such as the world spanning GEN³ present the mission of the *ecoaldea*: “Ecovillages are one solution to the major problems of our time - the planet is experiencing the limits to growth, and our lives are often lacking meaningful content” (GEN 2014). As will become clear, different notions of Terapolva as an ecovillage existed. Some *aldeanos* would characterize Terapolva as an ecovillage due to its goal to create an alternative and sustainable community separated from the city. Others would say: “We are not an ecovillage – we are only people living together”. To what degree Terapolva is an ecovillage is not a question I directly seek to answer. Rather I approach the possibility as one of the ideas that Terapolva was measured against, and also as an opportunity for situating Terapolva within a broader ethnographic field. The fact that Terapolva can be found on lists of ecovillages of Latin America makes it viable to compare it to other communities of the sort. Many of the practices and ideas that I encountered in Terapolva, I was told, stemmed from other South American *ecoaldeas*.

³ Global Ecovillage Network (2014)

A term that is closely connected to ecovillages is permaculture. Permaculture can be seen as a method for establishing livelihoods based on principles of taking what's at hand instead of buying new stuff and acquiring skills and knowledge about how materials and natural resources can be used and reused in an infinite cycle. In general permaculture offers a cyclical view of the world where one experiments with nature to develop locally determined solutions (permanent) that may serve humans without 'taking from nature more than one gives back' (Mollison 1997). Terapolva can be found on international lists of "permacultural ecovillages" (Taringa 2015) around the world, and a few of the *aldeanos* I got to know had arrived because they wanted to live according to permacultural ideals. Permaculture offers mechanisms and techniques for living in harmony with nature.

A key dimension of the South American *ecoaldea* is to combine elements of permaculture's holistic worldview with inspiration from the region's indigenous cultures. The idea of humans uniting with nature springs from the idea of the *pacha mama* or mother earth, and has roots in the Mapuche culture, amongst others. Following the cycles of the moon and celebrating the changing of seasons through festivals are practices that can be found in, to what I understand, all ecovillages of South America. In this view Terapolva is an ecovillage. However we shall see that Terapolva operates with other principles and organizational structures that challenge this definition. Nevertheless, the idea of living with nature and the search for a meaningful way of life remains as a common ideal.

Lockyer and Veteto discuss how the ecovillage can be seen as way to demonstrate values of sustainability and ecology for the future. They stress the importance of anthropological knowledge in this case, opting for an understanding of 'ecotopia' as a strategy to make the human condition better – to make the world a better place, so to speak (Lockyer and Veteto 2013). Catherine Ergas sees the ecovillage in relation to social movements, and states "The culture of social movements is shaped by the institutions the movements confront (Ergas 2010: 33). Ergas also acknowledge (her case having several similarities with my own) that ecovillagers seek to create an alternative society, and that "the ecovillage is embedded within a city and the larger culture (Ergas 2010: 33).

Considering community

Even though *aldeanos* refer to Terapolva as *la aldea* (the village), I felt that this did not open up enough possibilities for analysis. Commonly one associates "village" with a place far from a big city, where one imagines dusty roads and a stable population in humble dwellings. I wanted to show that Terapolva could be seen as this, but *more*, and that it in fact embeds urban life as well

as elements commonly found in rural villages. In this thesis I therefore use the term “community” as an analytical tool for understanding Terapolva, in spite of the fact that *aldeanos* never used this term themselves. I have chosen the term as a way of distinguishing the place from its surroundings, and to make way for a discussion that contains elements of identity, notions of place and symbolic value. I encountered various emic terms throughout my fieldwork, uttered by both *aldeanos* and outsiders. The most common ones were: *aldea* (village), *espacio* (space) and *lugar* (place). I use these too throughout the thesis, wishing to show how Terapolva can be perceived in different ways, while contributing to my argument that Terapolva can mean different things to different people. I am inspired by various theorists on the subject of community, yet at the same time I wish to show how Terapolva must be seen as standing for itself, and in light of itself.

Anthropology and sociology offer an infinite specter of interpretations as to what a community can be. Perhaps it is even viable to state that there are as many definitions of community as there are communities. And the term has been subject to some serious critique by anthropologists themselves, especially between the 1950s and 1970s, when world system models became important (Creed 2006). However “community” seems always to be used in a positive manner, and in spite of its critique it remains a very potent tool for anthropological analysis.

Anthony P. Cohen’s (1985) view on community as a symbol becomes important in my analysis of Terapolva as a generator of meaning. I argue that the dichotomization of Terapolva and wider community helps create community identity, and as Cohen argues the word *community* expresses a relational idea that implies similarity within its borders and difference with the outside (Cohen 1985: 12). By questioning how we grasp boundaries, I wish to show that there are various ways of defining inside and outside, and that these – in the case of Terapolva – are created by processes and mindsets rather than by drawing sharp lines on a map.

Gerald W. Creed opts for an increased consciousness and discussion around the term “community”, and represents a more up to date critique of how anthropologists have used it. I base my definition of Terapolva as a community according to his three suggested criteria: a group of people, a quality of relationship and a place/location (Creed 2006: 4), and I wish to use this relativistic approach to the term in itself to reflect on whether Terapolva can be seen as a community.

Supplying to this discussion I will draw on Lucy Sargisson’s (2007) use of “estrangement” as a mechanism for creating group identity in intentional communities. Defining the latter as “Strange places, full of dreams, hopes and disappointments” where “groups of individuals work collectively to realize a better life” (Sargisson 2007: 396, see also Kanter 1972)

she goes on to argue that estrangement (defining “the stranger/outside” as a criteria for creating group coherence) is deeply connected to the idea of the utopian community. Utopian communities make “good places in which to explore dreams” (Sargisson 2007: 396), she states, and I follow this view in my characterization of Terapolva as a place where utopian dreams are given room to grow.

When discussing the making of boundaries in Chapter 5, I am also inspired by Fredrik Barth’s (1982) point of view that “it is the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses (Barth 1982: 15) – and I apply his use of “ethnic group” to my understanding of community. His argument that interaction, and not isolation, between groups can strengthen group identity works well with how I view Terapolva and the wider community in a relationship of dependence.

Towards the end of the thesis I touch upon the possible dangers of applying the term “community” to a group of people who do not explicitly present themselves as such. This becomes interwoven with my choice of going from a multi-sited to a specific and situated single-sited fieldwork, and leads up to the disciplinary topic that has sprung out of my fieldwork method, “The Terapolva Effect”, which I discuss in the final remarks.

Choosing Concepts - Economy, Anarchism and Boundaries

In addition to “community” I have chosen a handful of concepts to develop the discussion and understanding of Terapolva. In Chapter 3 I look at practices for survival that include the obtaining of food and other goods, and I see them as economical activities that take on varying degrees of informality, depending on the viewpoint. I use Keith Hart’s definition of informal economy in this part. Economy is a core concept in anthropology, and I lean on a few key authors and explanations to show how economy can be understood in the case of Terapolva, or rather how Terapolva can be understood from an economic perspective. The core element of Terapolva’s economical practices is Recycling, and I am preoccupied with transactions between Terapolva and the outside, as well as internal and individual strategies for survival. The Recycling, I suggest, can be viewed as a “total social fact” as explained by Marcel Mauss because it seems to create movement within all aspects of the community (Mauss 1995: 210). The movement of objects and goods become spheres where individual survival strategies and community ideology are coexisting motivations. I form a discussion where short- and long-term cycles as explained by Bloch and Parry (2001) are seen together with the Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1972) concepts of self-interest versus group-interest.

These concepts are again connected with Chapter 4, where I seek to understand how anarchistic principles for organization make way for certain patterns of action, and where individual freedom and group commitment are virtues that *aldeanos* seek to follow. In this I also use George Crowder's (1991) introduction to classical anarchism, and Randall Amster's (2009) more recent contribution to the literature on utopian anarchist communities.

In Chapter 5 I step out of Terapolva for a moment, in an attempt to situate the place within its surrounding areas, and I discuss how notions of inside and outside contribute to the reinforcement of the community's identity through the creation of boundaries. Again I am inspired by the works of Barth (1982) and Sargisson (2007), amongst others.

Research Question

In this thesis I explore Terapolva's place in the context of Buenos Aires, and I ask: **How is community identity and individual needs connected to Terapolva's aim to be an ecovillage, and how can the place be seen as a generator of meaning and livelihood for its inhabitants?** In the search for living out a common dream of a life closer to nature *aldeanos* present themselves to the outside world as an ecovillage that strives to live sustainable and natural, within what is defined as inner Buenos Aires. How do these dreams become visible, and how does an open anarchistic community structure keep their members somehow attached and committed? I explore the notion of identity connected to place, and the processes that seem to "keep it all together". In the first part of this thesis I introduce Terapolva as I perceived it myself when I first arrived, and I continue to map out the daily practices to hopefully paint a vivid picture for the reader. From Chapter 3 I analyze how individual and common practices for survival contribute to the possibility of Terapolva, and I continue to describe the form of anarchism that is lived out in the village. In Chapter 5 I look at how boundaries can be studied and how they become visible - in a community that lacks physical borders and administrative contracts of commitment.

Cycles of Life

Introduction to Terapolva

In this chapter I seek to paint a vivid picture of Terapolva and start with a short account of my first arrival. This because I want to show the reader how walking into its territory provokes a strong sensation of being “somewhere else” than in the city of Buenos Aires - in spite of its geographical closeness. I continue with a description of how the village is formed, to show the space in which *aldeanos* live out their daily practices. By discussing various



Figure 1: Pillars of the past. Entering Terapolva.

motivations and intentions that *aldeanos* bring with them or develop through life in the village I seek to give the reader an impression of what kind of group – and thereby place – Terapolva is. An important part of this understanding is Terapolva’s presentation of itself to the outside. I map out the various elements that constitute daily, as well as monthly and yearly cycles in Terapolva to show how the place is in constant movement in relation to what it seeks to become. I also take a look at the historical background and the foundation, which gives way for understanding the place’s distinctiveness.

To communicate its existence to the outside, the community has its own online homepage as well as profiles on large social media. Terapolva presents itself online as follows:

Terapolva is a natural park and an interdisciplinary experimental center located on the property of the University College. It is a center for developing alternatives forms of confronting our role as inhabitants of the planet Earth. From the daily to the practical, technical and philosophical one approaches the spheres of knowledge in the search for a sustainable, social and didactic development. Our goal is to be an example and a hinge between the global and urban life, and the local and rural. Without becoming the one or the other, we offer the possibility to participate in the construction of a more just future with nature and its residents. We are more than anything a center open to all types of constructive knowledge. The place's central areas are e.g. the organic educative herb garden and the seed bank, the self-sustaining bakery as an example of nutrition, the natural construction with recycled materials, recycling as overarching a consciousness for nature and the rational use of natural resources, and lastly the education of our children working together with schools and other educative institutions. Terapolva, who incorporate a large green area, is alive because we are expecting you. Any moment of any day you can come and get to know the space, the group and the activities. L@s esperamos (We're waiting for you) (Terapolva Homepage 2015⁴, my translation)

Terapolva at first sight

The anthropology student I met in the running group had told me to take a bus to the last stop and continue walking until I had passed the main area, towards the fifth building. I got off the bus, blending in with the students rushing to classes in the hot midday sun. On my right hand was the third and last building in sight, and in front of me I saw only vegetation and what seemed to look like a resting area for bus drivers. I kept on walking and for each step I became more insecure. I must have gotten it wrong, I thought. I didn't see any signs of a village. When I noticed that the road ended I decided to turn around and give up, quickly filing the experience as just another failed shot at doing fieldwork. Then I noticed a pair of students behind me, and I turned to ask them if they knew where the fifth building was. They shook their heads, politely telling me that there existed no such thing. I mumbled "*gracias*" and added that I was looking for an "*aldea alternativa*" (alternative village). The guy lit up. "You're looking for the hippies! They're behind those trees over there" he said pointing at some large oaks I had just passed. "Do you know anyone there? I wouldn't go in alone, it can be dangerous", he added.

⁴ All sources in connection with Terapolva's real name and whereabouts have been anonymized or left out for ethical reasons.

When I reached the trees I was feeling nervous, disappointed and intrigued. Dangerous? I started thinking about all kinds of scary stuff that might be hidden behind the dense trees and bushes. I couldn't see much signs of a village, but for some reason my feet started moving and I noticed a dirt road opening up behind the trees. I made my way down a muddy hill and passed something that looked like an abandoned skate park and about thirty car tires placed in a large circle. The tires were stuffed with old clothing or seemed to function as flowerbeds. I was later to learn that this was a way of compacting non-degradable material.⁵ I noticed some small stones laid out in a pattern followed by signs that marked large piles of scrap metal and electric wires. The ground I was standing on seemed to be some kind of mix between old cement and dried mud. I followed the path further, now with a bushy hill on my left and some gigantic square shaped pillars on my right, all of them decorated with washed out graffiti and drawings. One of the pillars was painted like a giant head, and its one eye stared straight at me. I felt like I was trespassing in on someone's property. The path led to an open circular space, and just when I was about to sort out some human silhouettes next to a mud house with a metal roof, I noticed something popping out of the bushes on my left. In front of me stood a woman, tattooed on her legs and neck, wearing shorts and a worn out tube top. She greeted me, asking me if it was my first time here. She offered to show we around, and I lowered my shoulders. I started walking with her while she pointed out the different areas of the place - the piles of scrap metal were collected for recycling.

The house I had seen was connected to an open air kitchen, where a couple of young men with long hair and tattoos were making fire with sticks inside a cooking hearth. The kitchen shed also consisted of worn down wooden furniture that I could see had once been painted in bright colors. I had only recently begun to adjust to Argentinean greeting habits (kiss on the cheek), so when the guys started hugging me, holding on for what felt like two minutes, my heart pounded and I felt very uncomfortable. One of the guys started breathing heavily and I could feel his whole body moving while he encouraged me to breathe with him. Afterwards he looked me deep in the eyes and uttered in a low voice "*Bienvenido, un gusto*" (Welcome, nice to meet you).

⁵ I was told that the circle bus tires (there must have been about fifty) had been placed there by visitors from another alternative community (also called tribe or sect) called *Las Doce Tribus de Israel*. In practices they had some similarities with Terapolva, but their ideology is connected to the Bible (See Las Doce Tribus Online, 2015).



Figure 2: Meditating in *el círculo* before every eating.

Occupied space – The village behind the bushes

As one might understand from the map (Figure 1), Terapolva occupies a territory close to a University College in the periphery of what is loosely defined as inner Buenos Aires. It has no legal claim to the area, which is seen as part of the University's campus, thereby belonging to the municipality. The river surrounds it with an expanding Bioreserve on the eastern side, the University's main buildings on the southern, and the large *carretera* (interstate highway) runs only some hundred meters away from the village's center. Crossing this highway is a large concrete bridge that leads to the closest urban *barrio* (neighborhood). Some hundred meters away from the third University building, just where the Bioreserve starts, one finds Terapolva's main entrance. Here one encounters a map (Page 80, Figure 8) and a small hut made of adobe that is called *recepción*. With this is on your left, you have the *pantano* on your right; a large swamp area inhabited by a large amount of cats that separates Terapolva from the Bioreserve, where loud noises of birds, crickets and the occasional splash of a *caimanes* (small crocodiles) can be heard. Next to the *recepción* one finds a path in between the foliage leading down to the center of *la aldea* Terapolva.

A plane space makes out the center of the village and overall Terapolva occupies an area the size of a bit larger than a football field. In *La Cocina*, an outdoor kitchen covered by a plastic

roof with old wooden furniture and a cooking hearth the pots and pans are everywhere. The faded paint hints to something that once has been vibrant and colorful. A couple of hens wobble around, picking on rotten vegetables in dirty white plastic buckets beneath a big wooden dining table without chairs. Fruit peel and flies hover around, while a scruffy cat and a couple of kittens doze of in the shade. In connection with *La Cocina* is Terapolva's main building, *El refugio*. It functions as the village's heart, and is perhaps the only construction that can be called a house. It serves as a place of refuge during rough weather and for group gatherings such as *Reunión de la luna llena* (Full Moon Gathering), which I will come back to later in this chapter. Translated to English as "the shelter" *El Refugio* has connotations such as "where you run to" or "place to take refuge in". It is a house constructed of *barro* (mud/adobe), wooden pillars, shattered glass for decoration and a hard plastic roof. Large trees, which can be found throughout the village, hang over the building and provide shade. Outside the house stands a stack of old bicycles used for trips to the city, and a sign points up a hill behind the building reading *Baño Seco* (dry toilet). There are two of the sort in the village, which are sheds made of bamboo sticks where filled up buckets are emptied into holes in the ground and covered with dirt and dry leaves. Across the courtyard in front of the house is a small construction with a sign reading *Gratíferia*. The cube-formed shack contains clothes and shoes free of charge. Visitors occasionally make donations. In between a cluster of bushes one finds the *Permaducha* (understood as "permaculture shower), a construction of bamboo-sticks a cloth where two of the village's three water taps are located. This is the village's "bathroom" where one can shower under the open sky in water hacked from the neighboring University's water system. The same hacking-method has been used to obtain the weak, yet occasionally functioning electricity that gives light to three lamps, two inside *El Refugio* and one in the kitchen. The main gathering point, in front of *La Cocina*, is called *El Circulo*, a circle created by wooden logs and low benches made of pallets and a space for making fire in the middle.



Figure 3: *La Cocina*

Taking a steep and muddy path up to the left of *La Cocina* leads you to Terapolva's herb garden, affectionately called *La Huerta*. Here one finds a small closed off patch filled with basil, thyme and mint plants, as well as some fruit trees, mostly lemon and peach. Passing a straw hut with a sign that read *Compost* one can take a path to the left where some tents are hidden behind bushes on the right hand, and a patch of soil for planting (during my time in Terapolva this spot still lacked cultivation). A network of footpaths lead to different spots around what is defined as Terapolva, amongst these are the *Plaza de Los Niños* (Play lot for children) and the *Bosque del Silencio* (Forest of Silence) where one finds hammocks high up in the trees and perhaps Terapolva's most renown construction for outsiders, *El Nido* (The Nest) - a straw hut made and inhabited by an *aldeano*, some fifteen meters above ground. *El Nido* is can only be accessed by a large line, which demands excellent climbing skills to access.

Most *aldeanos* however sleep in tents that to varying degrees have been domesticated and made permanent. There is no designated spot for putting up tents, but as one arrives one can either occupy a tent that has been left by a sloppy former *aldeano* (abandoned tents were a frequent element of frustration among *aldeanos*) or one could seek out a fitting patch to inhabit. The most attractive spots were withdrawn from the paths and well covered by bushes and trees so that one would gain a sense of privacy. Others sleep in small adobe constructions made from recycled materials, referred to as *duomos* or *casitas*.

Passing *Plaza de Los Niños* one can take a path down again to the “ground level” towards the *Centro de Acopio* (Supply center) where all kinds of material are gathered in crates, sorted by signs reading *metal, plastico, vidrio* (glass) and so on. Entering the village from the eastern side (the unofficial entrance) this supply center is the first one sees. Between the *Centro de Acopio* and the exit to the bus turnaround is an open space called *Zona Bikers* where ramps for skating and biking take up most of the space. Entering the forest on the right hand one reaches what in the map is defined as *Inaccesible*. Another settlement occupies this area, as I will elaborate on in Chapter 5.

Aldeanos – Who are they?

Aldeanos, as one might have understood by now, are the inhabitants of Terapolva. Meaning “villager”, an *aldeano* is a person that eats, sleeps and to varying degrees lives their life inside the framework of Terapolva. There is no exact number of *aldeanos* and during my time in Terapolva the group lost and gained several members, although a core of about ten people seemed to remain. The inhabitants have a high degree of exchange, and during a year one can expect nearly all *aldeanos* to change.⁶ A few *aldeanos* also went and came back after going traveling.

Aldeanos are mostly young people between 18 and 40 years old. Miriam, however, was about 15 years old and only occasionally did she sleep in the village, as she attended school in the city and lived with her parents (who were not especially fond of her hanging with the “hippies”). One man, who did not live in Terapolva but visited about once a week, was about 60 years old. Only two of the *aldeanos* during this period were related, namely Olivia and her daughter Ronia who was five years old. Apart from this most *aldeanos* get to know each other in Terapolva, although some have met before while traveling, or have friends in common.

Aldeanos form to some extent an international group, and during my fieldwork Terapolva was inhabited by around six Argentineans, three Uruguayans, one Columbian, four Chileans, one German, one Dutch, one Cuban, and one Norwegian (myself). The group was also visited by a few *gringos*⁷ who had found Terapolva on lists of ecovillages.

Even though *aldeanos* come in many forms, some appearance characteristics must be mentioned. Many *aldeanos* had dreadlocks, and a few had tattoos. All *aldeanos* I met during fieldwork were thin, which might be connected to the simple plant-based diet and high level of physical activity that daily life in Terapolva implies. Furthermore a certain dress code seemed to exist as well, even though the idea of being oneself and coming as you are was a virtue. Loose

⁶ For instance, the group of *aldeanos* I lived with has now, a year later, changed. Only three or four of my informants remain. This is based on pictures posted on Terapolva’s social media profile during the last months.

⁷ Term used to describe about everyone from the USA or Northern Europe, which also implies more money.

fitting garments of linen or cotton were typical, and none of the females wore bras or makeup. Jewelry was not common, and body hair remained untouched by razors and scissors. Most *aldeanos* walked barefoot. This had both practical and symbolic reasons. After heavy rain the village would be flooded with water, and shoes would only make it harder to move around the village. I was also told how walking barefoot helped connect with the earth.

Being an *aldeano* means dedicating oneself to the community by contributing to the daily routines as well as being present during important occasions such as the season festivals or community gatherings. It is expected that *aldeanos* contribute as much as they can by initiating or participating in what is called *talleres* (workshops), which are also communicated as activities open to the public. Each *taller* usually have a *focalizador* (initiator) which is an *aldeano* that has special interest and/or skill in the subject of the *taller*. For example, the *Taller de Bioconstrucción* was lead by Jorge and/or Franco, two Argentineans who lived and operated in Terapolva, and they were one of the few I got to know who had lived there for more than a year. They were both former students of architecture.

Inhabitants of Terapolva arrive with various motivations and backgrounds. There is no "one reason" for people to come to Terapolva, but there are some recurring stories and motivations that makes it possible to draw up patterns of how and why one gets there, and how long one stays. One common element is that those who find themselves in Terapolva have at some point been travelers. Terapolva can be characterized as a stop on your way through South America. The intention of arriving exactly in Terapolva varies from being very random, to being part of a specific mission (e.g. visiting *ecoaldeas* and doing permaculture work). However, most people arrive in Terapolva because they heard about it from other travelers. By staying in Terapolva a while, the place gradually becomes your home, or base if you will.

All *aldeanos* are, in a way, travelers. In conversations with *aldeanos* who had been on the road, I learned about the *Arcoiris* (rainbow) festival. This is a recurring event that has occurred in the recent years in South America, mostly in Chile and Argentina.⁸ The festival is based on values extracted from Mayan traditions, where the moon and its cycles play a big part. It is a festival where one gathers to celebrate the connection between human and nature. There were various people in Terapolva who spoke about the *Arcoiris* and there were murmurs on how to get there, with whom, and if a group of festival pilgrims would stop by Terapolva on their way.

⁸ It is viable to suggest that the *Arcoiris* Festival as it is known in South America is related to what is known as "National Gatherings of The Rainbow Family of Living Light", an anarchistic utopian moving community/movement that has its origin in the United States in 1972 (See Niman 1997).

Terapolva's ideological foundation was based on many of the same elements of the Arco Iris festival, I was told.

Obtaining the status as *aldeano* depends of two significant factors: time and commitment. The longer one lives in Terapolva, and the more dedicated one is to the daily practices as well the development and improvement of the village, the more likely one is to be called *aldeanos* by the others. During my fieldwork I observed various ways of becoming permanent resident in Terapolva, and my own experience as explained in the first chapter is likely a very common one. Since there is no leader or voting practices to decide who can stay, one depends on the general acceptance of the group. I will argue that gaining trust and showing genuine motivation and enthusiasm is the safest key to become resident in Terapolva. An incident where a student from the University College wanted to put up a tent, but was ostracized because his lack of engagement proves this.

A day in the life of Terapolva

A couple of kilometers south of Terapolva lies an airstrip. Landing planes sweep over the heads of the *aldeanos* every half an hour or so, and these 'metal birds' as they were called, makes one of the elements of daily life in Terapolva. Sometimes the planes pass so close over the heads of the *aldeanos* that it is almost as if the belly of the plane makes a temporary roof on the village. It creates a sensation of being inside a jar when someone suddenly puts the lid on. The whole plane is illuminated from below by the landing lights as it swishes passed and makes a sound that drown out all others - such as birds singing, wood being chopped and dogs barking. Lying in a tent at night the whole forest suddenly lights up followed by a sound so loud that you would think the whole thing was about to crash right into the village. *Aldeanos* know that trying to keep a conversation while an airplane passes is impossible. When it happens, the village halts, as if someone would push "pause" and everyone just "exist" for the seconds it takes for the plane to pass.⁹ With this in mind, let us imagine a "normal day" in Terapolva (even though an *aldeanos* stated that no such thing exists).

After a night in your respective tent or dwelling, you wake to the intense sound of birds singing. If you are lucky you have (perhaps if you have managed to obtain some kind of insect repellent) been able to sleep through the night without the torture of a mosquito hovering around. Nature, I will argue, was for many reasons a very important concept for *aldeanos*, as every day incorporated tasks that were carried out in nature. Ideologically this was stressed as a virtue,

⁹ The symbolism of the airplanes is striking to me, yet amongst the *aldeanos* it was only shrugged off as a detail; it was part of the surroundings. The planes, in spite the accepted and "natural" presence in *la aldea*, literally reminded us of the urban world.

especially when put in contrast to the neighboring city. The opportunity to climb a tree, feel the soil between ones fingers, hear the singing of the birds etc. were always spoken of in a romantic manner. The mosquitoes, cockroaches and rats that lived in Terapolva, however, were not subject to positive review in the same way. Nevertheless they formed part of the existence. The mosquitoes especially became an undeniable fact as the legs and backs of *aldeanos* (myself included) were swollen by the constant bloodsucking.¹⁰

If you awake early you will find the forest and the village in a dozy and quiet state, where only the rooster's cry and the emerging sun indicates a new day. There is no indicated wakeup-hour in Terapolva, and every *aldeano* follows her own rhythm. By 10 AM however, you are likely to hear the sound of hammers or an electric saw from one of Jorge and Franco's construction-projects. As the dwellings are spread out all over the area, one can easily lie snoozing for as long as one wishes, no one will come running to wake you up. However, morning is always a time for eating.

Depending on when enough *aldeanos* have awoken and dragged themselves down to *La Cocina*, they will start preparing *desayuno* (breakfast). Breakfast is usually made up of recycled fruit, which have been brought in from the recycling trip the previous night, mixed with *avena* (oatmeal) cooked in a pot on the fire. Halfway into the cooking process the *aldeanos* usually does what is called *primer aplauso* (first applause) to notify the still sleeping ones that breakfast is in the making. The *aplausos* is done by applauding loudly, accompanied by animal sounds that are referred to as *cu-cu*. Minutes after *primer aplauso* one is likely to see more *aldeanos* emerge from their respective tents. *Aldeanos* greet each other every morning with *abrazos* – long hugs than can last up to several minutes. A *Segundo aplauso* is done when breakfast is ready, a bit louder this time to be sure that the message is delivered to all corners of the village. As the group gathers in *La Cocina*, the food is placed on a small table in the center of *El Circulo* and *aldeanos* form a circle by connecting hands. This is called *Hacer Manitos*, which translates (poorly) to something like: making little hands. Peace sweeps over the village as the *aldeanos* lower their heads in a silent meditation that usually last between five to ten minutes (See Figure 3). After a while some start to make small sounds or *cu-cu's*, and gradually all hands are raised towards the sky before the grip is loosened and eyes are opened. *Aldeanos* look at each other with peaceful smiles; thankful for the food they are about to eat.

Food is usually served by two *aldeanos*, one putting food from the pan onto plates and another serving the rest who take seat on the benches in *El Circulo*. If you are one of the first to

¹⁰ Being constantly under attack by mosquitoes force you to accept your environment, as you gradually understand the low potency of expensive insect sprays etc. In a way this too, however involuntary, was a way of embodying nature.

receive a plate you are expected to pass it on to the person beside you. This continues until everyone is served and seated. If there is food left in the pan or pot, you are free to serve yourself again. When people are finishing up their plates, there opens up an opportunity to speak about topics that involve everyone or ask questions. For example this could be information about a *taller* that is to happen later in the day, or suggesting that people remove clothes from the drying lines so that others can dry their clothes.

When this is over, the circle dissolves and each *aldeano* is expected to wash their given plate and fork in the washing basins under the roof of *La Cocina*. Since the kitchen in Terapolva has no water tap (the nearest one is some fifty meters away) two large aluminum basins with water, a bowl with fine grained ash (collected from the hearth) and a dish rack make out the washing station. The ash serves as soap, and when you have washed your plate in the first basin you clean off the ash in the second before the plate is put to dry.

After *desayuno* people spread across the village again, some engaging in Jorge's construction project of making a *casita* out of adobe, wood and empty glass bottles or other activities such as practicing *malabarista*¹¹ tricks or cutting *leña* (fire wood). However, the *talleres* form the most important part of the day, as one is expecting visitors to drop by. *Talleres* change with the *aldeanos* who currently inhabit the village, as they depend on having a *focalizador* ("focalizer"). During my fieldwork I heard of, and participated in, the following: *Taller de Bioconstrucción* (making houses of adobe and by using recycled material such as stuffed plastic bottles, glass bottles, pallets or metal), *Taller de Anarquitectura Arborea* (learning how to climb trees and creating huts and hammocks high above ground level), *Taller de Danza* (dancing to connect oneself to the spirit of nature), *Taller de Arcilla* (the process of making clay out of mud and creating sculptures and pottery), *Taller de Huerta* (acquiring knowledge about plants and cultivation in the herb garden) and *Taller de Literatura* (discussion of a book selected from the small library in *El Refugio*) Apart from these there are some other activities as well where visitors sometimes are invited to join in. These are *Circulo de Mujeres* (women's debate circle), *Circulo de Hombre* (men's debate circle) as well as the four seasonal festivals called *Equinoccios de Otoño* (Autumn - 21st of March), *Primavera* (Spring - 21st of September), *Solsticios de Verano* (Summer - 21st of December), *Invierno* (Winter - 21st of June). The *Cumpleaños de la Aldea* (Terapolva's birthday) is also celebrated in June.

An important element in the daily life of Terapolva is the smoking of *marijuana*. Smoking is usually done in a designated spot (see Chapter 4) and the *aldeano* who has something to share

¹¹ Many of the *aldeanos* were also *malabaristas* (street jugglers) who made small amounts of money by doing tricks in front of cars stuck in the Buenos Aires traffic. See Chapter 3 for more on individual strategies.

notifies the others by making a *cu-cu*. That Terapolva is a place where *marijuana* is smoked is not communicated to the outside. Rather the smoking was done discretely, and I seldom heard conversations about *marijuana*. It was an accepted and ordinary part of daily life. I reflect on the symbolic importance and physical effect of the *marijuana* in Chapter 3. Alcohol and manufactured cigarettes (except loose tobacco) were in general condemned by the *aldeanos*, mostly because of chemicals. Alcohol was seen as damaging, while the effect of *marijuana* was natural and harmless. However wine and beer were consumed on special occasions (Chapter 3). Equally, as I had brought with me cigarettes to the field, I was often asked to bum cigarettes by two male *aldeanos* who had noticed this.

When afternoon comes it is time to think about the day's *almuerzo*. *Almuerzo* is a large meal eaten sometime between 3 PM and evening. As with the *desayuno* there are no sharp routines to when *almuerzo* is made and eaten, nor is there an indicated person in charge of the cooking. Who, what and when a meal is cooked varies from day to day, but perhaps most importantly it depends on what ingredients are available. As the best time for going recycling, which is done by crossing the bridge over the highway and collecting unsellable vegetables from the shops in the nearest *barrio*, is around 9 PM in the evening (when the shops are about to close and throw away bad food they won't sell the next day) the day's *almuerzo* usually depends on what was recycled the previous night. If there is not enough food to cook, *almuerzo* is postponed until someone has gone recycling and brought back goods.

Usually the *almuerzo* is cooked by one or two *aldeanos*, and the dish is never the same – always varying with what have been recycled that day and who is cooking. However, a vegetable *salsa* together with a staple such as pasta or rice is a common Terapolvian dish. The meal is, as the *desayuno*, notified by *aplausos* and initiated by *Hacer Manitos* and meditation.

After *almuerzo*, and as darkness falls *aldeanos* gather in *El Circulo* around the *el fuego* (the fire) sharing philosophical reflections. Someone has perhaps taken out the guitar and/or a drum or a flute, and soft tones blend in with the crackling sounds of the fire. Gradually *aldeanos* retreat to their dwellings, until only a faint glow remains in *El Circulo*.¹²

The three R's

Terapolva was founded and its territory occupied in 2007 by an ecological activist named Neo. The vision of Terapolva builds on what is specified as the Three R's: *Reciclar* (Recycle), *Reutilizar* (Reutilize) and *Reducir* (Reduce). The first years of the community, the *aldeanos* were more than

¹² I saw *el Fuego* as a potent symbol in Terapolva, as it served as a light in the darkness and a heat in the cold. I often imagined how it must have looked from above, that only kilometers away from the billions of city lights there was a dark area where a sole fire sent sparks towards the sky.

anything dedicated to living a zero waste-lifestyle¹³, receiving trash from the city and making new stuff of it. Still, a daily practice in Terapolva is to compress all plastic into containers. These containers are later used for constructing and can serve as insulation in for example a house. As inhabitant of Terapolva you are not supposed to produce any waste. All waste is of possible use in another form or area. Apart from recycling plastic and transforming materials, things in Terapolva are also recycled and reused in a more direct way. For example are newcomers likely to inherit old mattresses and plastic coverings for use in their tents. A walk around *la aldea* can provide you with various materials if you just keep your eyes open. For example might an old canvas serve you well for protecting the tent during rainy periods, and pallets are high valued objects because it can be used as about anything from making a platform for tents, to constructing houses and signs or just turned into *leña*. The word *reciclaje*, then, can be said to have a rather broad and flexible definition in Terapolva. It might mean the re-utilization of a thing, the practice of reducing own waste or to bring in to the *aldea* what the city would define as trash.

However, the most important type of recycling is the practice of “*ir y reciclar*” (to go recycling), which I will elaborate on in Chapter 3. Recycling of food means, in short, to leave the village and collect vegetables from the *verdulerías* in the closest neighborhood. This is the *aldeanos*' main source of nutrition, and is then crucial to the survival of Terapolva as a community.

El Proceso

Now I want to draw up some historical lines that help situate Terapolva within a historical context. Terapolva is directly connected to the history of Buenos Aires, and the remembrance of what had once been was important to the community's identity. This again is connected to stories that can be viewed as origin myths. As the nation's history seemed to blend in with *aldeano*'s conscience about the terrain they lived on, one could not rule out the possibility of ghosts lurking about.

For Argentines the history of the military regime is very much alive today, as the continuing search for answers to what happened during *El Proceso* (the “process of national reorganization”) occupies much of the public picture. The military coup in 1976 led by Jorge Videla, as the deceased president Juan Perón's wife Isabel Perón had taken office, happened during a time of great confusion in Argentina. The new military government initiated what in the aftermath is best known as “*La Guerra Sucia*” (The Dirty War). Tens of thousands of people who did not explicitly support the regime were abducted, tortured and/or killed, and young children

¹³ “Zero Waste is a goal that is ethical, economical, efficient and visionary, to guide people in changing their lifestyles and practices to emulate sustainable natural cycles, where all discarded materials are designed to become resources for others to use. (ZWIA 2015)

were taken away to grow up in families with connection to the military (Schneider 2000). These people (the numbers vary between ten to thirty thousand) are now famously known as *Los Desaparecidos* (The Disappeared) and the continuing fight by organizations such as “Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo” to resolve the cases remains very active today. *Los Desaparecidos* is very much present in today's Argentina, and every time the word is mentioned a shiver goes down one spine. If you ask a *Porteño* you will notice that the majority has some kind of direct relation to what happened; a relative or a friend of the family who was "lost" while resisting the regime. So what connects Argentina's bloody past to the barefoot people of Terapolva?

Pillars of the past

Origin stories make up a big part of how the inhabitants of Terapolva view the community. Throughout my fieldwork I was constantly reminded of the past and how the place was founded. Stories about the ground we walked on, and how important it was to see Terapolva in light of history, appeared on many occasions.

The constructing of a new University College campus was initiated in 1961, and by 1971 three buildings were finished. Plans for a fourth and fifth building were laid, and as the third building was taken in use, the ground level and first pillars of two additional buildings were constructed. When Jorge Videla and his military government took control many construction projects all over the country were halted. Especially academic institutions that offered free education suffered under this. The construction of the two remaining buildings of the University was consequentially abandoned. The surrounding area, which had once been a *basural* (landfill) and was literally constructed on top of the river, slowly grew over caused by the stream that brought with it flora and fauna from the southern Natural Reserve. This created what was later to be named a Bioreserve¹⁴, and from the concrete ground and between the massive pillars, plants and decay started to dominate the area (Clarín 2012). The relics of the once initiated building projects became the skeleton of something of an undefined space. For years the area functioned as a free space for various social groups. At one time during the 1990's the area behind the first university building became occupied by homosexuals who were later joined by other marginal groups stigmatized by the wider community. They survived by collecting plastic bottles and selling them to companies in the city, but in 1998 the about 100 people were evicted and “relocated” by the government, their compounds burned to the ground (Página12 1998).¹⁵

¹⁴ With approximately 400 species of plants and animals (Clarín 2012).

¹⁵ An article in the newspaper Página12 tells of the evicting of the “gays” inhabiting the area around the University.

There are no exact sources to the background of Terapolva, and because of the areas complex and to some extent messy history it is difficult to draw up clear lines about what happened after the military coup and the abandonment of the construction. I choose to see the history from a 'Terapolvian point of view'.

Bad Dirt

One day, as we were three *aldeanos* sitting around the tall table in the *Taller de Arcilla* a 60-something guy called showed up. He had a spotless shirt, business-like trousers and his glasses hanging in a strap. It was the kind of appearance you wouldn't expect to come wandering into an ecovillage in the middle of the day. He stopped at once when he saw us, approaching with an authoritative smirk on his face. He presented himself as Arnold - in charge of another *Centro Experimental*, just on the opposite side of the University College. They held animals, produced honey and functioned as a kind of green laboratory for the students from the department of Natural Sciences, he told us. "It is closed to visitors, and not like here in Terapolva where you just let anyone wander in and out all the time", he explained. He was obviously very familiar with Terapolva, and he constantly compared it with his own project, making it clear that the "hippie" way of thinking would never lead to any serious production or self-sustainability. He told us how he was self-sustained with both vegetables and animal food, and that a *huerta* (herb garden) that could feed his family would never be possible if he didn't get up at five o'clock in the morning every day. Arnold had been in charge of this centre since the 1980s, and had followed Terapolva from its very beginning. He mentioned Neo and how he had wanted to create an ecovillage within the city. Without our encouragement, he went on about the history of Terapolva and the terrain we stood on, and it was then he started making connections between *Los Desaparecidos*, the former landfill and the abandonment of the constructions. The clay we were working with was of no use, he said, because it was contaminated; "and you'd never know what one might find if one started digging the earth of what today is Terapolva." I was intrigued. He said it was very likely that the clay we held in our hands, which we had dug out and filtered, contained remains of human bodies from the military regime. The place had once been a landfill, and these were commonly used by the former regime to "get rid of unwanted people". It seemed like Terapolva's ground embodied the history of Argentina in a very direct manner.

Erving the Messenger – Neo the Myth

Throughout my fieldwork there was frequent talk about Neo and the way he had founded Terapolva. Although the story seemed to come in different versions depending on who told it, some elements were repeated. In short the story went something like this:

Neo had been a student at the University College in 2007 when he one day took place in front of his class, grabbing the opportunity when the professor had still not arrived. He is supposed to have taken over the class, starting to teach his fellow students about ecological values and how one must rebel against the neoliberal society. The capitalist driven economy would slowly lead to destruction of the planet, he said. He stood up in front of the class, proclaiming that one must escape the barriers of the controlled society, indicating that they should join him in creating the “*nueva sociedad*” (new society). As the professor entered the auditorium, asking what was going on, Neo declared to the class how they should not listen to her – she was only robbing the students of their time and money. After this, it was said that Neo wandered out of the room and headed towards the outskirts of campus to establish Terapolva. It was unclear how many (if any) followed him at this point, but soon more individuals teamed up with him and contributed in the development of the village.

Myth is an extensive subject within anthropology, and I have chosen not to let myth in itself become a big part of my analysis¹⁶. However, the idea of what Terapolva is and thereby what it once was thought to be, becomes important when we try to grasp the possibility of its existence. If we look at the story of Neo in relation with theories of myth we might begin to grasp how Terapolva functions as a place generating meaning for its inhabitants. James F. Weiner explains various takes on myths throughout the history of the discipline, emphasizing Levi-Strauss’ (and others) view that myths must seen together with “reality” if we are to grasp their function in society (Weiner 1994: 602). Malinowski also found that myths confirmed, supported and maintained the social state of affairs (Weiner 1994: 592), and I will argue that something similar happens when *aldeanos* re-tell the stories of Neo as well as the speculations of what happened during the military government (the landfill and the *Desaparecidos* etc.).

To some extent the verifiability of the history of Terapolva is less important, because the repetition of a certain background story continued to affirm the social “we”. As Terapolva is a community whose members are in constant change, very few of those I got to know had *been there* from the very start. One person however stated that he was there during the founding of Terapolva. His name was Erving. The first time I met him was during a *taller* he gave in Terapolva where he gave a guided tour of the area, stressing the importance of knowing the

¹⁶ ...as this would have demanded at least another fifty pages.

vegetation and nature in which we lived. He had brought with him seeds from *plantas nativas*, plants that grew in the area before the industrialization of Argentina which were used by the *indigenas* (native peoples). I noticed at his way of speaking to those who lived in Terapolva. He was authoritative and seemed to have a mission to educate us. He had been there from the beginning, he said, and seemed to drop by once in a while to remind us what kind of place this was thought to be.

In the following section I will elaborate on the monthly ritual where Terapolva looks in on itself to revise and confirm its own existence.¹⁷ It was on these occasions that stories about Terapolva's past were told and will come back to Erving, and how he served as a sort of 'messenger of Neo'. This monthly group activity is important in the keeping together and confirming of Terapolva as a community with a distinct vision.

Full Moon Gatherings

In order to negotiate and resolve problems, the community needs to present a space into which the members can retreat and inside which they can reflect, debate and negotiate challenge (Sargisson 2007: 398).

With this quote from sociologist Lucy Sargisson I would like to introduce the element of Terapolva that I consider crucial regarding how the community confirms, develops and challenges itself. I am referring to what the *aldeanos* calls *La Reunion de la Luna Llana (Reunión* henceforth). Translated to English, the title means "Full Moon Gathering". The moon, in itself, was an important factor in Terapolva. Even though Terapolva lacks connection to any specific religion or philosophy, it is by no means non-spiritual. Rather, a mix of various inspirations constitutes Terapolva's spiritual cosmology. Closeness to nature stands out as the most important idea, and with that comes inspiration from pre-Columbian groups. The view of earth as "*pacha mama*" (the image of "mother earth") was often repeated, referring to feminine energy and a connection between humans and earth as one organism. Apart from a general, and somewhat eclectic, interest in the native cultures, *aldeanos* uses the Maya calendar to navigate, and follows its cycle during the year. This implies certain periods of planting seeds and harvesting crops as well as social gatherings and cosmic awareness. The latter two becomes relevant when looking into the mentioned ritual in Terapolva, as the moon is of special significance. The moon is also connected to fertility and female menstruation cycles, and female *aldeanos* often connected

¹⁷ I characterize the Full Moon Gathering as a ritual with full awareness of the extensive anthropological literature on the subject. However I have chosen to leave analysis of rituals in itself out of this thesis, as it would demand more space and time than I have to spare. Durkheim, Malinowski as well as Turner and Leach would have been obvious choices of literature in this matter, and I might take up the subject on a later occasion.

their bodily processes with the phases of the moon. During my fieldwork I got to participate in five *reuniones*, all taking different forms, yet some elements reoccurred.

It's mid-April and the moon over Buenos Aires has turned in to a giant glowing silver ball. In the city center the *porteños* continue their busy urban life, and the moon blends in with the city lamps, barely noticed. In Terapolva on the other hand, the moon is our only source of light. The hacked electric system has broken down, and since none of the current *aldeanos* know how to connect it again, we remain in the illumination of the moon and the occasional plane that every half hour light up the sky. Wax candles, lighters and flashlights are high valued objects in Terapolva, and for some reason the darkness always falls too quickly and you are left with your head inside your tent, searching for a lighter you were sure you left there earlier. But on this specific night there was almost no light needed when wandering outside. The moon shone intensely bright and left the open spaces bathed in a milky shadow-less light that seemed to emerge more from the ground than falling from the sky. It is on nights like these, when the moon is full, that *la aldea* illuminates itself, turning the focus inwards and asking questions about its own existence.

We had gathered in front of the *inipi* in the *Bosque de silencio* (see map). The *inipi* was seldom used during my stay in Terapolva, but on my first day Franco showed it to me, telling me that this was the place used for rituals. Olivia had prepared *chapati*¹⁸ and crushed apples with cinnamon. Making snacks was seldom a priority in the village, but this was a special occasion. Everyone finally gathered on the wooden trunks and brick stones that were scattered around the bonfire. I looked over at Omar who looked like he had emptied the *gratifieria* and was covered in a layered outfit made up of blankets and hats. Autumn was coming. We did *Manitos*. *Reunión* is an intimate gathering where everyone is supposed to speak their heart and share a moment of honesty. We were about seven people gathered, and only one of the present was not living with us at the moment, namely Erving. Not being present at a *Reunión* is serious. I noticed several faces missing from the circle, and there were murmurs about why they weren't there.¹⁹

After doing *manitos* we passed around the *chapatis* and a couple of jars with herb tea. Jana, a loud spoken Uruguayan with long dreadlocks, had announced herself responsible of *el libro*, a

¹⁸ Chapati is flat bread made from whatever ingredients available. It is primarily "traveler's food" and can be made wherever as long as there is a fire to bake them on.

¹⁹ I made the grand mistake during my first month in Terapolva and missed out on a Full Moon Meeting. That is, I arrived late when all had been spoken and the *Reunión* was about to finish. When I entered *el refugio* where the meeting was held, I was met by strict comments and questions about why I hadn't been participating, and how this was offensive to the group as a whole. There and then I felt I had committed a big mistake. In retrospect this might have been just what I needed to understand the importance of *la Reunión* for Terapolva. The skeptical comments and cold shoulder I was met with showed what was at stake. I was considered an important part of *la aldea* at this point, and not participating in *la Reunión* signaled disengagement with the project of "making Terapolva". I made sure never to miss a *Reunión* again.

big black leather covered book that was used for logging the meetings. She began to collect subjects for discussion. Every *Reunión* starts with a round of presentations of individuals, even if there are no newly arrived. This is done to remind the group of what ones purpose for staying in Terapolva is, and how one is willing to contribute. When it is your turn you are also given the opportunity to "*hablar tu corazón*" (speak your heart), about just how you feel at this moment. This, though, was only practiced by a few.

During a previous *Reunión* Valerie, took a moment to explain that she hadn't been feeling well lately, and that she was going through an inner cleansing process. She was obviously upset, but without telling if something in particular had happened, she shared some thoughts about how she wanted to eat cleaner and listen more to her inner voice than the needs of *la aldea* for a while. Valerie was also one who often criticized how things were done, obviously having a vision of Terapolva being more of an ecovillage and less of a hippie camping. Sometimes, though, she would leave for days without announcing it and then suddenly show up again. I found her several times busy in *La Huerta* where she often commented to me about the lack of knowledge the current *aldeanos* had about how to treat the garden. She uttered during this *Reunión* that *la huerta* needed regular watering and that when she was away somebody else has to know how to take care of the garden. It was decided that Andres, Cindy and I was going to meet Valerie early the following morning in *La Huerta* to learn. When I got up the next day however, there was no one there. This was not the only time things were planned but never completed in Terapolva.

It didn't take long before Erving was the center of attention and had "couped" the democracy of the group. In my field notes I characterized him as a kind of "voice from the past" because he always spoke of Terapolva's initial purpose and the ideology that had been the inspiration for the making of the community in the first place. As soon as he had the chance, he started to speak. Coming from "the outside" as he did (not sharing the daily life with the current *aldeanos*), it was surprising how he spoke about what we all should be doing, without him actually being part of the group. The days previous to this *Reunión* there had not been much food to eat and the autumn temperature had made a change in the activity level in the community. Many were busy making their tents and huts ready for winter, thinking perhaps more about their own well-being than the ideological vision of the community. Erving reminded us of Neo, of what he had wanted from Terapolva and why he had started up. Erving made the project of Terapolva sound very important. We could offer the city of Buenos Aires something unique and we could show the world how it was possible to live sustainable and in connection with nature. But he stressed the responsibility of each *aldeano*, and how new inhabitants needed to learn how to help further development. He said he wanted Terapolva to become more like an *ecoaldea*.

One day as I was washing clothes together with Olivia, I asked her if she had visited other *ecoaldeas*. She answered in a grim voice, as if stating something obvious: "*no somos una ecoaldea*" (We are not an ecovillage). She explained how other ecovillages were strictly organized, where people got up early in the morning to work all day. "We are more like a group of people living together", she added. "We do things based on impulse and fancy, not on obligation and structure." Was it this idea Erving wanted to change? He had been visiting *la aldea* for years, obviously observing how the place changed according to the people who live there, and how things did not always function according to the "ecovillage vision". Erving was not alone in his frustration, and by stating elements that were not functioning according to the ideal in everyday life; he confirmed also the daily frustration of the *aldeanos*. Hence his ideas were heard and listened to attentively. Yes, didn't we also want to strive towards becoming that green, flourishing and vital ecovillage? Didn't we all want to contribute to and be part of such a meaningful thing?

Erving stressed the importance of *la huerta*. The herb garden was where the first changes could be made. He stated that *la huerta* today probably was the only thing in Terapolva that reminded him of an ecovillage. Through intensifying the garden, planting trees and spreading the knowledge of how to be self-sufficient, Terapolva would be able to strengthen its status as ecovillage. Some of those who were present at the *Reunión* listened with skepticism to what the former insider had to say. Some started to exchange glances, roll their eyes, or show impatience through body language. Some were more focused on the *chapatis* and the warmth of the bonfire than on how we could work harder to make Terapolva more presentable to the outside world.

I'm not sure if it was the sole presence of Erving that affected the group, but the rest of the *Reunión* most of the *aldeanos* uttered a growing disappointment with *la aldea*, various people pointing out elements for improvement. Jorge, who had noted "cleaning" as one of the night's topics, started talking about the dirtiness of the village, and how the general impression of Terapolva was chaotic and neglected. The recycling station was not in good shape, people didn't seem to compact the plastic as they were supposed to, and the *Centro de Acopio* was a *quilombo* ("a mess"). Omar agreed. He was perhaps the most physically active *aldeano* at the time, along with Jorge with his house-building project. Omar got up early in the mornings, working hard both in *la huerta* and on making a shed for *leña* for the winter. The other *aldeanos* used to say he could do a five-man job all alone, and in half the time. He stressed the importance of physical activity and how hard work is the only way to go. Saying this, he was also degrading the importance of the sculpture workshop, activated by Andres. This was an indirect critique of Andres's activities. Art was not important enough, and it wasn't "improving anything". In this way Omar both

questioned Andres' degree of commitment as well as pointing out how Terapolva was not what he wanted it to be.

The *Taller de arcilla* (clay workplace/workshop) was often challenged by the *aldeanos*. Was making art "permacultural enough"? How did it contribute to the community as a whole? However, when we reached the point on the list of topics that said *Taller de Arcilla*, Erving noted that making sculptures from the soil of Terapolva could be symbolically important as well. The enduring process of making mud to modeling clay by using recycled materials could in many ways be seen as permaculture. We made art from the earth through the work of our own hands. Perhaps sculpturing wasn't so insignificant after all; perhaps it even could bring us into contact with the *pacha mama*. The conversation continued, and we discussed, more thoroughly this time, what could be a better location for the workshop. The *Reunión* that evening gradually dissolved as people started to get cold and withdrew to their dwellings.

*

In this chapter I have wished to outline some of the fundamental elements of life in Terapolva, where both daily practices and ideological as well as historical aspects play a part. The following chapters are thought as suggestions for analysis and further investigations of the mentioned aspects. I will in greater ethnographic detail show how the practices and ideas are lived out by *aldeanos* as I move towards an understanding of how community life coexists with individual motivations and strategies.

Terapolva Economics

Common Goals – Individual Strategies

Cada uno da lo que recibe

Everyone give what they receive

Y luego recibe lo que da

Afterwards receive what they give

Nada es mas simple

Nothing is simpler

No hay otra norma

There is no other norm

Nada se pierde, todo se transforma

Nothing is lost, all is transformed

- Jorge Drexler (From the album “Eco”, 2004)

The lines above are from the chorus of a song that has been very popular in Argentina since its release in 2004. Everyday it was on the radio, and sometimes an *aldeano* with a guitar would play it in *El Circulo*. I find it to resonate well the ideological aspect of Terapolva. I let it serve as a poetic inspiration to this chapter. In the following I will describe various economical activities connected to Terapolva. By economical activities I mean actions that involves ways of obtaining food, goods or money. I wish to show how individual needs and wishes are fulfilled (or not) in the context of Terapolva’s overarching ideologies. My motivation for writing a chapter on economy derives from the idea that, as introduced Polanyi, the economy cannot be separated from the community in general (Polanyi 1957 [1944]). I shall argue that economic activities in Terapolva are embedded in all aspects of life, and these are what generate movement and continuation in Terapolva as a community. I wish to show how individual strategies are important for the continuation of Terapolva. In this I use Bloch and Parry (2001) to discuss how short-term cycles such as individually motivates economic actions are inseparably linked to mechanisms that maintain the ‘cosmic order’ (Bloch and Parry 2001: 484).

Reciprocity is a term *aldeanos* used, and I see this as one of the fundamental principles of Terapolva’s ideology, following Marcel Mauss when he states that the circulation of goods is only one aspect of a far more general and permanent social contract (Mauss 1995 [1924]: 15).

Ambiguity, dilemmas and individual incentives are elements that arise from this, and all work together to create what can be seen as ‘Terapolva economics’. Ideals about taking and giving back, both in direct and a more ideological form permeate the daily life. While discussing the individual strategies, seen as informal economic activities in relation to the surrounding city, I

touch upon questions of precariousness and survival within an urban context. The nearness of the city becomes a key element in *aldeanos* economical strategies.

Money and goods in Terapolva

Within Terapolva there are certain small objects that play important roles in the daily life of the *aldeanos*. Some make practical life in *la aldea* easier and more comfortable such as toilet paper (taken from the restrooms of the University or restaurants nearby), lighters and candles. Lighters are essential for making up a fire for cooking or lighting your *faso*. Lighters had the irritating ability to always disappear, making it a sought-after commodity that was being passed between *aldeanos*. Candles are crucial whenever you need light outside the kitchen and *Refugio* (where two lamps occasionally function). Honey is another commodity that many *aldeanos* keeps in their respective tents or huts. It is normally bought for 20 *pesos* from the local farmer nearby. It tastes sweet and sugary, and the *aldeanos* eat it one spoon at the time, keeping the jar in a safe place. The last commodity, *marijuana*, I will describe below. The symbolic value of *marijuana* made it perhaps the most important informal commodity within Terapolva. The fact that smoking was an everyday practice was never communicated to the outside. *Marijuana* was the secret luxury, connecting *aldeanos* to nature through embodiment of a plant.

Next to *El refugio* stand a small cage-looking structure made of metal and cloth. It's called "*La Caja de Abundancia*" (The Box of Abundance). It is meant for depositing money for the village, but I never saw anything being dropped into or taken out of it. Terapolva functions to a wide extent without money. Food is recycled, and clothes and other necessities are occasionally provided through the mercy of visitors or gathered from the city. However, it became clear to me after a while that some *aldeanos* possessed money and/or valuable objects and that this was not spoken of explicitly. It was subtle and almost undetectable if people possessed means or not, yet if one suddenly showed up with a shiny new object, the whole group would notice. Then majority of the *aldeanos* I got to know, however, did not seem to possess anything additional to what goods the community could bring. These *aldeanos* are easily spotted and most likely hang a lot around the kitchen, asking to borrow stuff such as lighters or candles. Those who, for various reasons, keep an amount of private capital are usually very quiet about it. Buying stuff with money is not part of Terapolva's three R's.

I reflected on whether having money indicated a higher status in the group because of higher flexibility and capability to contribute, and found it to be somewhat the opposite of this. Having money is no status symbol in Terapolva, and flashy electronic equipment is more a

source for mockery than admiration amongst the *aldeanos*.²⁰ To be seen fully dedicated to community life, and to be observed as dependant of the meals and recycling routines, made you a more credible *aldeano*.

Terapolvian Reciprocity

Rosabeth Moss Kanter speaks of reciprocity and dependence in intentional utopian communities. She writes: "...what the person is willing to give to the group, behaviorally and emotionally, and what in turn is expected of her, must be coordinated and mutually reinforcing" (Kanter 1972: 65). When *aldeanos* gather in the *Reunión* to express intentions and convince the group of their dedication to the community, it is also to be able to "take" from the community what they might need. The word *reciprocidad* was often used in Terapolva. We know the definition from classical anthropology as the obligation to give, receive and to give back (Mauss 1995). Indirectly this was true of the economy of Terapolva. The equation would be like this: The less one contributes and engages in the less you can extract. Likewise one is obliged to contribute if one is to extract the goods, or gifts if you will, that Terapolva can offer. An *aldeano* would say that it doesn't matter if you come empty handed to Terapolva. When publishing events on social media, for *talleres* or festivals, the caption would always read something like "It will be needed tools for working in the garden. One can bring seeds and plants for cultivation. You can contribute with food and money, but your presence is enough". Visiting Terapolva and participating in *talleres* does not require material payment. Your will to participate and thereby help develop the *aldea* is more than enough, and very much welcome. It is often the days when many non-*aldeanos* show up that things get done. This shows that gifts can come in material forms as well as by will to help out and contribute. However, in daily life the notion of reciprocity is more prominent.

A concrete example of this is the *gratifieria*. If you find something you like or need in *la gratifieria* no one will notice. Hence you feel in a way obligated to reciprocate in other manners, for example by engaging in activities that help the community in general. You cannot, in principle, just put up a tent in the village without defining your role as participant and contributor only to extract goods such as food, shower and clothes without giving back, in one way or another. I say in principle, because during my stay in Terapolva there was more than one occasion when I noticed people eating and hanging around for long periods without contributing

²⁰ Luuk, the Dutch, fully equipped for outdoor living as he was, often became victim of friendly bullying when showing up with his professional macro-lens camera or professional backpacker-stash. People like Luuk would sometimes be called *Viajeros "North Face"* ("North Face" travelers) referring to the expensive North American clothing and camping gear brand.

in essential practices such as recycling or food preparation. This would sometimes be noticed and treated in *Reuniones* and sometimes not.

Informal Economy

To understand the functioning of Terapolva we need to look deeper into the processes that have to do with obtaining goods. These practices locate Terapolva inside what I will characterize as the informal sphere of Buenos Aires.

Keith Hart explains informal economy as follows: "...a term that covers all economic activities that are not state regulated". The most common use of the term is related to the economical activities of urban poor in the Third World (Hart 2010: 142). Following this, I characterize the city of Buenos Aires as a type of "state" in which waged labor and money-driven consumerism keep the wheel going. This sphere is where most *porteños* operate. Terapolva belongs to the informal sphere for various reasons: Its occupying of territory is not confirmed nor accepted by the government, and can therefore be seen as a form of occupied dwelling or settlement whose way of obtaining food goes 'under the radar' of the formal economy. Terapolva collects food without money-exchange, and other goods and necessities are similarly obtained in ways that can be said to follow Harts definition of informality. One could state that Terapolva escapes the hierarchical wage-patterns of the city, while managing to extract goods without contributing with e.g. labor force. However, activities for obtaining goods move frequently across the lines of the formal/informal dichotomy, as I wish to show throughout this chapter.

Urban recycling in Buenos Aires – The *cartoneros*

It is important to take into consideration the fact that *aldeanos* are not the only ones giving new life to the city's trash. The history of the urban waste recyclers of Buenos Aires is long, and *cartoneros* have existed almost from the very start of this city's urbanization – representing therefore the informal economy of the city. In short, a *cartonero* is a person who makes a living by collecting waste (mostly carton) and delivering it to private waste management companies who pay the *cartoneros* by the weight they bring in. After the economical crisis of 2001 millions of people were left without work and the amount of *cartoneros* rose significantly. The *cartoneros* of the streets of Buenos Aires have been subject to harsh discrimination by *porteños* and the government yet this "strategy" can also be seen as the country's way of coping with the financial crisis (Sternberg 2013: 190). The *cartonero* have gone from being a discriminated (even criminalized during the military regime) group, to gaining a certain respect as "*Recuperadores urbanos*" (urban

“recoverers”) when the local government in 2002 legalized the waste recycling (*cartoneros* were given identity cards, work clothes etc.) – an obvious effort to take an informal activity and turn it into a formal, regulated one (Sternberg 2013: 191). Even though *aldeanos*’ recycling takes a different form, I will argue that the city’s history of urban recyclers may play a factor in the possibility of Terapolva’s recycling practices.

Reciclaje - Recycling in Terapolva

Homegrown food is not Terapolva’s main source of nutrition. *La Huerta* provide the *aldeanos* with no more than an emblematic amount of food. The importance of the crops, however, is not to be underestimated. I witnessed the harvesting of a dozen corncobs, which caused great enthusiasm amongst the *aldeanos*. The sporadically cooking with vegetables from the garden always provoked comments like "such rich taste" or “one can taste the sun in this”.

Since *La Huerta* seldom bares enough crops to feed the entire group, the *aldeanos* depend on the mercy of the city's vegetable venders. Or, as implied by one of the three R's *reducir*, Terapolva helps the local *barrio* diminish and recycle their food waste. Hence it exists a relationship between the village and its close-by urbanity when it comes to food. To clarify, the word *reciclaje* in Terapolva is used in a slightly different way than in Norway, where recycling indicates delivering your waste so that it can be transformed and reused. For *aldeanos* on the other hand, "*ir y reciclar*" (to go recycling) usually means getting on a bicycle and head for the nearest *barrio* for a big round of food collecting.

The most profitable hour to go recycling is around 9 PM when the supermarkets, *verdulerias* (vegetable stores) and *panaderias* (bakeries) are closing for the day and starts throwing away unsellable stock. An *aldeano* can go alone, but the best result one will have with a fellow "recycler". Not everyone does *reciclaje*, however. In fact I only observed about five *aldeanos* who used to undertake that responsibility. Being such an essential thing as making sure there was food in the village, I was surprised how little structure for recycling there was in the daily routines.²¹ Although *reciclaje* was meant to be done twice a day, it seemed rather random who went and when (and if) it was done. Nevertheless, I observed that the consequences manifested itself in the level of energy among the *aldeanos*, and if no one went recycling the group tended to slow down, as if in need of fuel. As stated in Chapter 2, *aldeanos* come to Terapolva with different motivations. Some have Terapolva as their only home while some come and go for various reasons. *Aldeanos* who perhaps have been traveling and got short of money are more

²¹ "Routine" is really not a good word to describe anything going on in Terapolva, although *aldeanos* depended on regular recycling.

likely to be engaged in the community's food recycling. Many *aldeanos* spent most of their days inside the village and thereby the community's way of getting food became their way too. The following is from a time I went with Jorge, an experienced "recycler", to get food for the community.



Figure 5: Recycled Food

Recycling with Jorge

It was around 8:30 PM and Jorge led the way as the two of us lifted our bikes through the mud at the western entrance, and entered the light of the streetlamps. Jorge's bike had a wooden crate on the back, and we had brought empty backpacks. I had trouble keeping up, Jorge being very determined to get through the *recycling* fast, and the chain of my bike kept unhooking. We pedaled our way across the bridge, crossing the eight-field motorway and entered the nearest *barrio*, a wealthy upper middle class neighborhood. Jorge obviously had a specific route he

wanted to follow. We started at a small *verduleria* on a corner. I waited outside with the bikes while Jorge went in and talked with the owners²². The conversation between Jorge and the shop owner seemed friendly, and I reckoned they were used to him passing by like this. Seconds later he came out with a sack of bananas and peppers. We continued a couple of blocks, until Jorge wanted me to go in by myself. He waited outside while I entered a *verduleria*, timidly asking the question I had heard Jorge use earlier: Do you have anything to give away that don't *serve* (serve) for tomorrow? I was nervous, and I noticed the surprise of the vendor, probably thinking: "Why is this *gringa* begging for food?" Finally he reached for a sack of overly ripe tomatoes and passed them to me.

My impression of recycling was not very pleasant, and I felt like a beggar. Sometimes the *verdulerias* would tell us that someone already had picked up what they had to give away. Knowing there wasn't any other "recycling community" nearby, the people who had been before us were probably of the many poor who live in the streets of Buenos Aires.²³ I felt I was playing a role I shouldn't be playing, and taking food from people who might need it more than me. Jorge was obviously used to it, but I also sensed a concentration from him, as if he just wanted to get it done – unpleasant or not.

We continued, passing by various stores. The biggest luck we had was from a big supermarket that had decided to trash two cardboard boxes filled with flawless apples. We were thrilled, and filled our backpacks. On several occasions we were met by skepticism, while sometimes storeowners would pluck perfectly sellable fruits from the shelves and pass them to us. We also browsed through trash containers outside the stores, and for that Jorge had brought gloves. He made it clear that we should hide, not all storeowners were happy to give away food or have people going through their trashcans. So we covered for each other while our heads went down plastic bags looking for edible fruits among the many rotten ones. Jorge had a clinical eye, quickly telling me "*esto sirve*" (this works) or "*no sirve*" as I ducked my head up from the trash holding out possible candidates for recycling.

The night had a ritual, Jorge told me. If he had money (although I was not sure where he had gotten them, since he spent every day inside Terapolva), he usually stopped by a kiosk for a beer. We sat down on a street corner sharing a bottle of the local Quilmes.²⁴ It was a warm night, and after all the struggle of recycling it was good to sit down and just hang out with Jorge. I

²² A *verduleria* in Buenos Aires is usually a small "hole in the wall" that only sells vegetables, and is owned by a family, usually Peruvian or Bolivian.

²³ It proved difficult to obtain updated statistics about poverty and unemployment in Buenos Aires, as the numbers vary. However INDEC (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos) figures from 2012 show a national poverty rate of 5,4, and unemployment of 7.9. (Valente 2013). The newspaper Clarín reports that numbers of *cartoneros* are hard to obtain, but an approximate of more than 8000 is suggested (Sanchez 2014).

²⁴ Alcohol is in principle not allowed inside Terapolva (See Chapter 5).

seldom went into the city with other *aldeanos* so this was a nice opportunity to get to know Jorge a bit more, and I noticed a better ground for trust and understanding now that we were "outside" the community. We sat there for half an hour, exchanging experiences from Terapolva and joking around about people and stuff that had happened lately. As we finished the beer, Jorge asked me if I had been to *La Calesita* yet. I shook my head unknowingly. He motioned me to get back on the bike and follow him. Now our backpacks were loaded heavy.

Recycling Cakes – In line with the city's poor

We arrived at the corner of a plaza. "*Calesita*", Jorge told me, literally means "carousel" and I soon understood how the place had gotten its name. Some twenty to thirty people had lined up in the night outside the closed bakery, forming a line that went from the entrance and around the corner of the *cuadra* (block). They had ragged clothes and worn faces. Compared with the wealthy *porteños* with their "European elegance" in the rest of this *barrio*, this crowd stood out. The act of hanging on a corner, waiting for a bakery to throw their leftovers is not common "*porteño* behavior".²⁵ Some kids were jumping up and down, obviously excited about the event. We got in line after a large man with a t-shirt that once might have been white. He had been waiting for an hour, he told us.

After a while the line started moving around the street corner. From the back exit of the bakery two employees in white frocks were giving away sugary cakes and creamy pastries to the people in line, a couple of pieces for each. It was all done systematically. People received what the baker gave them, and headed for the back of the line to go again. This merry-go-round continued until everyone had received some and the bakery was all out of giveaways. People did not waste their time, and ate their pastry as they stood in line - second time, third time. Jorge and I, who both were starving after the long round of recycling, sat down on the sidewalk chewing away the sweets we had been given. The appreciation of free food is incredible when you are hungry. I soon discovered that Jorge had not meant the stop by *La Calesita* as a *recicle* for the community, but just for the two of us. We managed to eat up almost all the sweet bread we had received before arriving in *la aldea*. This was our payment for going recycling, and no one expected us to share it.

Bloch and Parry (2001) discuss cycles of exchange in moral economic activities. What they call short-term exchange encompasses the individual activity, while a long-term exchange

²⁵ In general, *porteños* are fairly preoccupied with appearance, which is literally reflected in the high amount of plastic surgeons per capita and beauty parlors on every corner. David J. Keeling points out: "*Porteños* are hard-working (...) and extremely conscious of their public image. The achievement of public respectability is the Holy Grail of *porteño* life" (Keeling 1996: 209).

cycle has to do with the reproduction of the social and cosmic order (Block and Parry 2001: 456). I find this model useful when looking at *aldeanos* individual strategies for obtaining food and other goods in relation to Terapolva's recycling. Recycling, as I have shown, is an activity that is done for the community as a whole, and is connected to Terapolva's ideology of being an ecovillage and maintaining a zero-waste lifestyle. It became clear, however, that because of the open characteristic of the community, *aldeanos* were also free to carry out other economical activities that did not serve the community directly but rather function to satisfy the need of the individual. These strategies were sometimes contradictory to the ideals of Terapolva, and sometimes not. When Jorge and I sat down on the corner to drink beer, as went against what was normal and accepted behavior inside Terapolva, we functioned as individuals carrying out an individual strategy. But this did not provoke consequences inside the community. Informal and individual strategies that might go against the wider community's acceptance do not necessarily destroy the 'social order', as Bloch and Parry (2001) suggest. The informal, if we call the recycling the main formal economic practice of Terapolva, strategies for survival that individuals carry out may help Terapolva function as a community. Because of the scarcity of money, the lack of stability in obtaining food, individuals tend to seek out alternative practices besides the "official" practice of recycling. In the following I will show various examples of these kinds of alternative strategies.

City temptations

Being a community so close to a big city, it can be challenging to accept the community's strategies as the only ones. Just a stone throw away from Terapolva's entrance there is a kiosk. Ronia, the five year old, was especially enthusiastic about this, telling me how her mother sometimes took her there to buy ice cream or chocolates. She arrived one day from a trip out of *la aldea*, thrilled and unmistakably high on sugar. She came running towards *el circulo* offering chocolate that her mother had bought for her. She obviously knew that it was not only her that was excited about sweets, and the piece of chocolate was eagerly passed between the ones present. It was at this point that I became aware of the seemingly paradoxical situation of being an idealistic non-consuming community with a physical closeness to the big city. An *aldeano* who is hungry where there is no food, and has five *pesos* in their pocket, will probably walk those two hundred meters to the nearest kiosk to buy a sandwich or a chocolate.

During my time in Terapolva I observed several incidents confirming this. It could be visitants bringing processed food, which in theory was frowned upon amongst the majority of the *aldeanos*, even though food donations always were encouraged. Principles aside, I would see

the raw vegan Igor munch on sweet bread even though he always pointed out the importance of eating only uncooked food because they had most nutritional value. When I moved Terapolva to stay there I brought with me what was left in the apartment I rented. I had stock cubes, instant soup and crackers as well as some vegetables and raisins. I unpacked when I arrived, surrounded by Jana, Igor and a couple more. Knowing that bringing gifts to ones field site might be problematic, I was happy to observe the enthusiasm for the vegetables and *yerbas*²⁶. The processed foods, on the other hand, were less welcome. Jana quickly started reading the ingredients at the back of the instant soup and stock cubes out loud. “This is produced to make you an addict. It’s just salt and chemicals, not real food”, she proclaimed. I thought the stock cubes might serve to make vegetable soups, but in general the *aldeanos* were negative to these products. However, the groceries were stored in the kitchen next to the pasta and cereals, and when a week had passed the stuff had vanished without a trace. I assumed someone had succumbed to the temptation and made him or herself a late night snack.

Reciclaje as work

Reciclaje seemed to be a term that could take on various significations, depending on the context. The thoughts of Paco give further insight: Being Italian, he was living in Terapolva after years of traveling. He had a strong presence and an uncontrollable temper, occasionally causing both conflict and tension in the village. A firm believer in individual freedom and anarchistic values, he was everywhere and nowhere during my stay in Terapolva. His role in the village was flexible, but being a street artist he was usually seen painting, and sometimes he left for the whole day to work on a graffiti wall in downtown. I discovered a video he had made, where he is walking around in Terapolva talking to the camera about the various virtues of recycling. This was of course a thing I had heard before, both from him and the other *aldeanos*. But in the video he explicitly points out the flexibility and benefits of recycling, characterizing it as work. During my fieldwork in Terapolva I saw the recycling of materials (e.g. metal, glass etc) as a practice that first and foremost served the internal logic of the community. The *aldeanos*, as far as I heard, never characterized their community practices as work, because the main focus always was to maintain and develop the community itself and create a harmonic space for its inhabitants. Paco, on the other hand, saw recycling as something he not only did for the community and the environment, but also to make money for himself. He was not alone in this. Olivia used most of

²⁶ *Yerbas* (or *Yerba Mate*) is a type of tea, well known in South America. The importance of *mate* for Argentineans is impossible to overestimate, being a big part of every social gathering and the daily rituals. In Terapolva as well, the *mate* had a similar function, although *yerbas* were not possible to recycle, hence not always available. Visitors usually brought *Yerbas* to the *aldea* as a gift/donation.

her time (when she was not cooking or tending to her daughter) making handcraft to sell on the markets downtown. She would sit for days sewing bags and belts made out of tires from old bicycles and leave for a whole day to make money in the city. Cindy did something similar, she made vegan sweets from recycled fruit that she would sell to students at the University campus. The money she made from this was hers personal.

In the video Paco proclaims:

“People want to live a little bit in nature and a little bit in the city. Therefore the idea is to recycle the city to paint it nicely, and to make dough to go to the beach or the country. I’m from Italy. When I was there I made quite a mess actually.” (Paco had spent time in jail after street riots, he once told me, and showed a strong hate towards his own country) “In Europe there is a lot of abundance, people don’t have conscience. They prefer to pay someone to clean their own backyard. And there is a lot of depression as well, in Europe. Here, in Latin America, people are alive. People of Latin America don’t have any money, so they do recycling first and foremost for the money. Afterwards they become aware that they also are taking care of the environment. If you see, for example, a *cartonero* in the street you say “*el no tiene futuro*” (he has no future), but the truth is that this dude is actually cleaning up the planet while he’s making money, so he is living a freer life that you are.”

Mostly the inhabitants of Terapolva were preoccupied with letting the world know the environmental and ecological benefits of recycling, and that the “payment” for these practices were a higher connectedness with nature and the *pacha mama*. Paco, it seemed, did not see how the one was excluding the other, and had therefore a strategy that allowed him to stay true to Terapolva’s own values while at the same time making some *pesos* for himself.

Urban strategies in precarious contexts

A recent branch in urban anthropology is the investigation on ‘precariousness’. The word, which I find useful when defined as something unstable, fragile and/or crucial, is often used in relation to informal economies and urban poor. It is useful when looking into mechanisms for creating meaning and gaining autonomy, even under extreme conditions and in challenging environments where possibilities for economical growth are limited. Kathleen M. Millar (2014) writes about the “*catadores*” – waste recyclers in a large dump in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. They risk their health and lives collecting metals, paper and reusable materials to sell to scrap dealers, and in this way making a sort of stable income. Waged labor in Brazil implies a strict work rhythm and obligations to schedules that creates a rigid everyday life, where the workers experience less

freedom and control over own life. In spite notions that waged labor is elevated above informal ways of making money, Millar shows that recycling waste for the *catadores* of Rio de Janeiro enables people more flexibility as to when and how to work, hence increasing autonomy and creating a sense of empowerment. Compared with a job whose working hours are regulated, the garbage dump is accessible day and night. With increased control over ones own life, the *catadores*, then, are able to engage in social life as well as being more available to their families and loves ones (Millar 2014: 39).

When Paco spoke of the benefits of recycling it is in a similar way as with the *catadores* of Rio de Janeiro. He describes recycling as a virtue, a way to do two things at once: taking care of the environment and at the same time makes some money for himself. Millar finds that autonomy for the *catadores* of Rio de Janeiro is a "...way to distance themselves from certain forms of power" and that waste scavenging is "...a withdrawal from capitalist markets and modes of consumption, and to the carving out of spaces in which other forms of sociality and co-existence can flourish" (Millar 2014: 47).

Individually, the *aldeanos* of Terapolva had several ways of making money for themselves without doing waged labor. Pablo had spent the years after finishing his studies in Chile selling musical instruments in the street. After having worked as a waiter to be able to study, he felt liberated by the fast cash one could make by buying cheap stuff and selling in the street, without having a boss standing over him. Street vending was also what had made it possible for him to cross the border to Argentina. With his backpack full of stamped t-shirts to sell and his accordion strapped to his back, he managed to pay the hostel in downtown Buenos Aires before he discovered Terapolva, where he didn't have to pay anyone to stay. Paco and Olivia's way of recycling materials and selling them can be seen as a way of empowerment, a strategy to create autonomy and independence while still answering to the ideals of Terapolva – thereby still belonging to community and maintaining their status as *aldeanos*.

Acquiring Staples – Recycling with money

Even though money is scarce in Terapolva, and the ideal is to not consume, there are some occasions where goods for the community are bought with money. The practice for this is "*Hacer una vaca*"²⁷. Doing a *vaca* means collecting money from the *aldeanos* and current visitors, to buy something for the common good. It might be wine for special occasions such as birthdays or goodbye-parties, *porro* from the local dealers or for buying staple food such as pasta. By taking

²⁷ In a conversation with Andres we reflected on the origin of the expression *vaca*. The word means "cow" in English, is a Chilean expression that might derive from life in the country where the community comes together to buy a cow that will provide food and milk. Doing *vaca* in Terapolva was always for food, alcohol or marihuana.

the bus across half the city, to the *barrio* Liniers, one can buy big quantities of dry foods for a low cost.²⁸ In making *vaca* one contributes what one can. If you're all out, you are not excluded from enjoying the goods, but I observed how some seemed more depending by these common practices than others. The activity level in the village usually depends on the amount of food available, and if there are no vegetables left, pasta or rice is a good alternative. The latter type of food is always bought, and not recycled. The following is a sequence from a trip to the *barrio* Liniers, which I took part of twice during my time in Terapolva.

Jana had suggested a trip because the kitchen had recently been emptied of all staples. Before leaving *la aldea* we sat down making a list of what was needed. Jana did the *vaca*, walking around the area asking people if they had something to drop in the pouch. Sometimes the *vaca* would be big and we could buy food for a month ahead, and sometimes it hardly covered the bus tickets to get there. Eating only vegetables for weeks could make the energy level in *la aldea* low, so this was an important task to do. The trips to Liniers were of the few occasions that I left *la aldea* with other *aldeanos*, in addition to the recycling trips. With our scruffy clothes, messy hair and empty backpacks we didn't exactly blend in with the student crowd on the bus. I sensed the glances of the students, some perhaps recognizing where we came from.

When we got off at the station I felt as though I had arrived in a medium sized Bolivian city. The streets were so crowded we had to push our way towards the designated wholesale *Juansita*. I did my best to keep up with the others, Jana confidently thrusting her way through the crowd. When we got there, she pulled out the list. It said about fifteen different things, from pasta and rice to chickpeas and raisins. *Señoras* with matching aprons ran back and forth between the giant dispensers and crates of seeds and cereals, measuring kilos and grams on large industrial scales. After getting your groceries in plastic bags you had to get in line for the *caja* where four equally busy *señoras* were hastily plotting in and calculating prices on old cash registers. Jana suddenly called out to the *señora* who had just spent three minutes measuring our three kilos of *pasas* (raisins), that she had gotten the wrong kind. We needed the cheapest one, of course. We couldn't afford to spend a cent extra of the *aldeanos*. The *señora* rolled her eyes from the extra work. We decided to split up, and two of us waited outside. When Jana and Lucy had reached the *caja* they noticed another problem, they had given us five kilos of *almendras* (almonds) instead of four, and we didn't have the money to pay for it. Another hassle started and we had to go back to the already short-tempered *señoras* and ask them to measure again, before we finally could pay and get out of there. Afterwards we sat down on the sidewalk eating Peruvian *humitas* that we

²⁸ Going to Liniers is seeing different side of the Argentinean capital. Peruvians, Bolivians and Argentineans with indigenous decent hurried about doing shopping for months ahead. The stereotypical Italian-Argentinean elegance is non-existent; and it is also called *Pequeño Bolivia*.

bought from whatever coins was left from the *vaca*. We returned to Terapolva with backpacks filled to the brim with peas, beans, pasta and seeds.

This incident shows how money is used by *aldeanos* to contribute to the welfare of the group as a whole. Even though the use of money is somewhat stigmatized in Terapolva, the act of collecting in a *vaca* and traveling to the cheapest *barrio* of Buenos Aires show how *aldeanos* also work together creating an alternative strategy for keeping the community in good shape. Under precarious conditions, where money is scarce, the community is able to provide *aldeanos* with safety through e.g. making a *vaca*. As most *aldeanos* had very little money, if any, belonging to Terapolva provides a security through group coherence that one might not find living inside the city.



Figure 6: Getting staples

A significant plant: The Secret Smoking Circle

Given the forest and green areas one would perhaps assume that Terapolva grew its own *marijuana*. For some reason this was a scarce commodity, making the act of smoking more mystical and sought after. One could always contact the local dealers of the neighborhood for some lower quality *porro* (mix of the whole plant), but smoking *flores* (pure marijuana flower), I

soon understood, was given far more importance and was seen as pure and natural. Smoking was seldom mentioned explicitly in conversations, and my impression was that it was just “done” as a sort of secret act. However, it always took form of a ritual, and if spoken of it was in a low voice. I argue that the marijuana contributed to giving the daily life a “higher dimension”. By “higher” I mean something elevated from the quotidian life.

One day Pablo took me for a walk, eager to show me something. He had vaguely been talking about a *flor* (marijuana flower) that he had found. We took the path that lead up to *La Huerta* and out of Terapolva’s core, onto the trail that leads to the viewpoint. Here other people (See Chapter 5) occasionally passed by as well. Pablo suddenly made a stop and crouched down to gaze between the foliage of bushes that reached us up to waist level. He pointed into the bushes, “*hay una planta*” (there is a plant). He had found it the other day, when exploring the area. I couldn’t see anything in there, and found it hard to believe he could have stumbled upon anything by accident, the bushes being so thick and out of the main track. We browsed around for a while, but it seemed he had forgotten its exact location. Or, as he suspected for a moment, somebody had taken it. Pablo told me there were only two others who knew about the plant, who recently had blossomed. The flower was always the most desirable part. The others, he told me, were Jorge and his friend Javier, an occasional visitor and former *aldeano*.

One morning, during the Autumn Festival, I had announced myself responsible for preparing breakfast (the meals through the festival period always had one *aldeano* in charge, to be sure it was done). I got up early, around eight o’clock, and went down to the kitchen area. To my surprise I was not the first one to awake, and met a drowsy Jorge and his friend Javier hanging around the kitchen. They had already made up fire and were waiting for the teapot for *mate* to heat up. They seemed a bit surprised to see me, but after the usual *abrazos* they seemed to accept my presence and Javier passed me the *faso* he was holding. Normally, when smoking *marijuana* or *porro*, one would announce it to the rest of the group by a *cu-cu* and head for the *sector fumadores* (See Chapter 4). *La Cocina* was not an accepted place to smoke, but this didn’t seem to bother the two, and being so early (the rooster had barely crowed) the place lacked its usual social regulations. I understood they were smoking from the secret *flor* Pablo and I also knew about. I took a few puffs before sending the *faso* to Jorge who looked at me with red eyes and held up an index finger to his lips, signaling that I should keep what I had observed to myself. This was not to be shared with the rest of the *aldeanos*.

The availability of *marijuana*, and the question of “*quien tiene*” (who has) always seemed a bit mysterious. This might of course be explained by its non-legal status, but I suspected it had more to do with its symbolical value, along with its limitedness as a “commodity”. *Marijuana*

filled several functions in Terapolva. Firstly, it served to bring the group together to share something pleasant. Secondly, *marijuana* has the welcoming effect of eliminating the sensation of hunger. In Terapolva, as shown, one could often find oneself hungry without money or food or while waiting for someone to come back with today's *recicle*. Smoking tends to eliminate the sensation of hunger and the focus is shifted from bodily needs to reflections about surroundings and more abstract subjects. This is where the "higher meaning" becomes evident. Being high makes the *aldeanos* connect more intensively with their surroundings, and allow them to be more present in nature. Several times when smoking, the conversation would be about nature. Topics would span from observing a flower or an insect at close hold to speaking about how one felt a deep connection to the *pacha mama*. *Marijuana*, I will argue, is one of the highest valued objects in the "economy of Terapolva", perhaps even placed above food, because it has the ability to eliminate the sensation of hunger.

The Special Occasion – Recycling wine and cheese

The words *reciclaje* or *recicle*, the latter referring to the actual obtained good, are used frequently and in various contexts by the *aldeanos*. Recycling can mean to pick up something one have found in the street and bring it to the village, often telling the others by saying "*lo reciclé!*" (I recycled it!) or "*es un recicle*" (it's a recycle). Recycling can also mean receiving a gift, for example the time Jorge had been given a hundred kilos of sand from a construction site to use in his *Taller de Bioconstrucción*. To "shop" from the *gratifieria* or to receive something a fellow *aldeano* no longer needs, for example a tent or a mattress, is also a *recicle*. But on some occasions I learned how the word *recicle* was used to describe things that not necessarily had been obtained in an honest manner. That is things that are still for sale or still belong to someone that equally end up in Terapolva or in the hands of an *aldeano*. In its most innocent form this could be a couple of stone bricks "lent" from a construction site or a roll of paper smuggled out of the University to use in a *taller*. In the following I will show that recycling sometimes even embedded stealing, but only on special occasions.

It was Donna and Anthony's last day before they were going backpacking across the Chilean border. We had eaten a late breakfast and no one seemed to bother to cook *almuerzo*. Tonight they wanted to make a *fiesta de despedida* (good bye party). Donna did a *vaca* to buy wine and I passed her the two-pesos bill I had in my pocket. Day turned into evening, and Anthony, Donna and a couple more had taken the bikes to recycle food for the party and buy the wine. Since none of us had eaten since breakfast, the frustrating hunger slowly begun to affect us. After a long wait they finally showed up in *La Cocina*, Donna with the crate on her bicycle filled

with stuffed plastic bags. The vegetables we recycled were usually stacked directly in the crate, to keep the amount of plastic brought into *la aldea* to a minimum. I wondered what they had been shopping, and where the money had come from. We all gathered, as puppies rushing to the food tray, around the counter when they started loading off the bikes. The sun had gone down, but tonight the one lamp in the kitchen glowed, creating an atmosphere of sharp contrast between light and dark. Laughter spread throughout the group when Anthony told us how Donna had simply put several pieces of cheese in her pockets, and bottles of wine stuffed under her jacket – passing the cashier with a smile. They had *recycled* a bit extra for the party, they admitted humorously. We hadn't seen that much food in a long time, and everyone started eating right away, making sandwiches from bread, cheese and tomatoes and passing the bottles of red wine between us. Joking about how “terrible life is in Terapolva” while sipping the wine and nibbling mozzarella cheese made the group giggly and cheerful. The goodbye-party Donna had wanted was a success!

Not being poor

Kath Weston's book *Traveling Light. On the Road with America's Poor* (2008) offers insight when it comes to alternative living without money. "Rich" and "poor" are misleading terms in this context. They are "...static, homogenizing concepts of the sort that foster misapprehensions" she states when introducing how poor people of the USA seems to have developed alternative ways of living with little money without defining themselves as poor. She is making an effort of describing the people she rides buses with as living *out* poverty, without living *in* poverty (Weston 2008: XIX). I would like to transfer this idea to Terapolva. Poverty was definitely not a word that was uttered amongst the *aldeanos*. The inhabitants of Terapolva see themselves as *outside* the wider community and thereby not operating with the standards of poverty within the city. However, measured by the scarcity of money while living in the periphery of the city stills makes it viable to discuss Terapolva in the light of poverty.

One of Weston's informants, a lady riding a bus across the USA, distinguishes brilliantly between possessions and belongings. The number of possessions loses importance when looking at belonging to family, "my people", and how they belong to her. These factors contribute to her not being poor. This applies to the *aldeanos* of Terapolva as well. They have the community, their *bermanx*; hence they will never be poor. They will always have the overarching idea of the community and the sharing of space, food and practices. Nevertheless, as with the lady on the bus, the *aldeanos* will encounter times of scarcity because there is no monetary income. This would perhaps not have been a problem had the community been situated away from urban

contact, but (as stated earlier) the presence of the city is undeniable in Terapolva. I will argue that the vicinity and nearness of the city forces the community into a type of poverty because their way of living contrasts with that of the surrounding society.

*

In this chapter I have explained practices that can be characterized as economic because they contain the flow of objects and goods that together creates a system of survival. By mixing own incentives and desires with the goals and visions of the community, *aldeanos* create the complex reality in which they live. Scarcity of money mixed with ideologies of zero-consumption open up to a crisscrossing network of individual strategies that exist besides the community's main practice of recycling. I will argue that it is because of individual autonomy and freedom that this is possible, as well as ideas of anarchism and maintaining of boundaries. In the following two chapters I discuss these elements, and I stress the importance of seeing Chapter 4 and 5 in relation Chapter 3.

Commitment, *Consenso* and Modes of Authority

Towards an Anarchist Anthropology

“Anarchism is acting *as if* you are already free.”

- David Graeber (2006)

In this chapter I will look further into what ties Terapolva together as a community. I will discuss how a theoretically egalitarian and open community, based on voluntarism, still answers to certain organizational structures such as power relations and strategies for decision-making. Here I introduce Terapolva's use of anarchistic principles for organization. I look at how norms and rules of the community are perceived and performed by individuals. I will argue that this ideology's basic structure makes it possible for *aldeanos* to live within boundaries that are not physically drawn, but created and regulated through daily practices and formed by the people who currently inhabit the place. These boundaries are further explained in Chapter 5.

Pierre Clastres' points out how societies without a centralized state-power still contain power structures.

“Even in societies in which the political institutions are absent, where for example chiefs do not exist, *even there* the political is present, even there the question of power is posed: not in the misleading sense of wanting to account for an impossible absence, but in the contrary sense whereby, perhaps mysteriously, something exists within the absence” (Clastres 1987: 23).

The interplay between individualism and community life is what broadens the discussion, and which creates Terapolva's interesting organizational structure. In anthropology we know that power is always social. I ask: How can we study power in a society where the inhabitants see structural power as a vice, something unheard of? What I found through participant observation seemed at first like contradictions. In one moment I would observe one *aldeano* take on a leader role, and in the next I would be informed that no one in Terapolva has any more power than another. Keeping two of Weber's ([1958] 2004) modes of power in mind, I seek to understand how authority rises to the surface, even in a community where being equal is an outspoken virtue.

By explaining the basic elements of anarchism I wish to show how the informal economy explained in the previous chapter is connected to ideas about organization. Anarchistic virtues such as individual freedom and action based on voluntarism creates a possibility for *aldeanos* to follow their own needs, and not always stay true to the common and accepted practices of obtaining e.g. food. I will argue that Terapolva's elements of anarchism forms the basis of, and creates the possibility to live as, such a composite and sometimes volatile community. Moreover, the open structures in an anarchistic community make way for alternative mechanisms of power, and I wish to show how these contribute to the changing dynamic of the group. Commitment, as well as questions about property and self-governing are important parts of this discussion.

Misunderstanding Anarchism

One of the most common misunderstandings of anarchism is that the ideology is seen as lacking of moral and being an extreme and unrealistic form of individualism. George Crowder introduces various classical interpretations of anarchism and states: "Far from being ruthlessly individualistic or amoral, the anarchists are, without exception, highly moralistic in temper" (Crowder 1991: 9). Morality, as a type of steering wheel, as opposed to hierarchically organized power, seems to lie at the core of every anarchistic community, Terapolva included. Further, Crowder follows Alan Ritter who states: "The classical anarchist thinkers conceive of the free man as one who governs his (or her) own actions in accordance with a stringent critical rationality (Alan Ritter in Crowder 1991: 9). Anarchists elevate the individual and demands that each actor must take their own moral decisions in regard to the "public censure". In this we see that the ideology does not lack restrictions nor obligations, but that these occurs in a more "bottom-up" manner than what is the case in social systems where laws and norms "flows" from the top and downwards. I experienced in Terapolva that what anarchism might lack in visible systems, it makes up for in unwritten rules, alternative mechanisms for power as well as a strong sense of voluntarism. To understand an anarchistic community one must rid oneself of any conventional idea of governing where a group of people is ranged intentionally according to status and power. However, this is not stating that modes of power do not exist.

Randall Amster introduces the connection between utopianism and anarchism and points at the growing notion of present-day society as non-sustainable and near its historical limits (Amster 2009: 291). Seeing the result of protestant work ethics, the free market and western capitalistic economic systems as culminating in over-dimensional social gaps and environmental crises, one might begin to encourage alternative forms of governing that are freer in structure and less hierarchic in terms of power. At least it is possible to imagine such societies when the

scale is reduced to small communities. This is where the idea of the utopian community comes into being. The anarchist communities that emerged in the USA in the 1960's and 70s were equally based on these ideas, as explained by Laurence Veysey (1973). Urban anarchists from New York, also characterized as ecologists, moved out to rural districts to form communes based on the idea that "...economic decentralization simply must come about if the environment is not to be irretrievably ruined"(Veysey 1973: 182). Veysey also noticed that the urban anarchism that had emerged in the 1960s was a far cry from what he observed in the communes that developed in the 1970's, moving from what he calls "hard-core dropouts" to "liberal college longhairs" (Veysey 1973: 199). This resonates with how the *aldeanos* constantly were characterized as hippies by outsiders²⁹, and is probably also the reason why it took me so long to see Terapolva as an anarchistic community. My former idea of anarchists fitted better with Veysey's "urban dropout"-description.

Amster points out that utopian communities are not static *places*, they are rather dynamic communities that are seen as ongoing experiments (Amster 2009: 292). This fits with the image of Terapolva as a community, who also called themselves a "*Centro Experimental*". With its fluctuating borders, constant changing of inhabitants and activities of an experimental nature, Terapolva can be characterized as a type of "anarcho-utopian community". I base this on their way of reaching common decisions as well as their way of occupying space, and how borders as well as regulation of individuals respond to anarchistic norms.

In a society like Norway, where democracy is closely connected to justice, it is not at first hand graspable (at least for the novice fieldworker) that there can exist a type of social organization that is even *fairer* and truly democratic than letting the majority has its way. We are taught how to be fair, and that the majority of raised hands in a group always generate a fair outcome that the rest has to accept. Learning through participant observation how decisions can be made by anarchistic principles was a new experience for me. One incident was especially enlightening. My first encounter with an anarchistic voting session is explained in the following.

Where to smoke? Anarchist decision-making.

It was *Reunión de Luna Llena* (See Chapter 2), the soft darkness of night had fallen over the village and we had gathered in the *El Refugio*. On this specific *Reunión* the smoking area, *Seccion Fumadores*, was brought up as one of the topics for discussion. At this time the smoking area was concentrated around the swing that hangs from en large tree branch on the left hand when approaching the *Circulo* from the western entrance. A small slope leads up to a shelf of mud and

²⁹ For more on *hippies* and outsiders, see Chapter 5.

forms a type of amphitheater, looking out upon the common area of Terapolva, with the swing dangling in the front. Some chairs are placed in the back, and a worn out artificial lawn can be spotted here and there beneath the dusty mud. *Seccion Fumadores* is where one goes to smoke, primarily *marijuana* or *porro*, but also for whatever tobacco one might have to share. When the item was brought up it became clear that some of the *aldeanos* wanted to move the smokers area. It was too obvious, too easily spotted for “passers-by” and too close to the kitchen. It became clear that most of the *aldeanos* were perfectly fine with the smoke of the *marijuana* plant, while smoke from cigarette and tobacco was more problematic. Everyone was in favor of having all kinds of smoking concentrated in one place. This did not necessarily mean that smoking was prohibited in others parts of *la aldea* but that the important thing was to have a "designated area" for smoking within what can loosely be defined as the common spaces. Some stressed that the *consenso* for drinking alcohol also needed to be revised, but others said that belonged to another discussion. All this talk of *consenso* developed into a complex discussion about whether Terapolva should be honest about its liberal stands towards smoking of marijuana towards the outside world, or if it should be kept "in the shadows" and out of sight for the occasional visitor. It was agreed between everyone that the smoking area was to be moved to a more "private" place. Various spots were suggested. In *La Huerta*, where the moonlight and open space makes a suitable scene for a smoking session, was suggested. Another was *los neumaticos*, the stuffed bus tires placed in a large circle near the western entrance. Passing *el taller* (the workshop) and in front of one of the pillars closest to the recycling station was a third option.

I, who came to this discussion without strong arguments or opinions in the matter, waited patiently for someone to initiate a voting session. We had already been sitting there for over two hours discussing other items on the list, and the complexity of the discussion around the smoking area was beginning to wear me, and I was not alone, out. It seemed like the will to reach a conclusion was quite absent, and that we were now discussing for the discussing itself. My back was starting to hurt from hours sitting at the hard floor, and I noticed how others started mumbling in pairs and impatiently moving their bodies. The discussion went on in spite of the growing restlessness. New thoughts were constantly brought forward. Some expressed strong views in the matter, others seemed to participate just for the heck of participating, and others leaned back while focusing on a book or scratching the belly of one of the dogs. Some were soundlessly making their way out to the kitchen to see if there was anything to nibble on. The *Reunión* came to a halt when two of the boys who had gone recycling came back with the bicycle-crates full of vegetables.

Outside *El Refugio* I grabbed the opportunity to ask Annette, a girl who recently had returned from traveling, how she thought it all would come to a solution, without voting. She told me, as if stating the obvious that voting was not democratic at all, and that the only fair way to make decisions was to make everyone agree. I asked how that could ever be possible since the group did not seem to be even close to a common agreement. She pointed out to me that it is always possible to find something for everyone to agree on. It will only demand a whole lot more time and patience from the participants. This stayed with me as a valuable lesson, and it made me wonder: Was it actually possible to make everyone agree? The nightly meeting continued, but after the break the concentration had faded and the discussion had developed from a passionate argument to a relaxed conversation. As the night came creeping, and yawns were spreading throughout the circle, some *aldeanos* got to their feet and headed for their respective dwellings. Only a small group of about five stayed, and a conclusion had still not been made about where to move the smoking area.

The day after, a small group of *aldeanos* had gathered next to one of the pillars by the recycling area to smoke. Later that day I noticed another small group smoking in a circle up in *La Huerta*. I spent a lot of time pondering over what this incident meant, and how a seemingly unsolvable subject had, in some way, resolved itself through the hours of discussion. The group had not reached a decision, but somehow the day after everyone seemed happy about the outcome. The result being the one option we hadn't discussed during the *Reunión*, namely a movable smoking area! This solution seemed to have emerged from the group together. In my contemplation on the phenomenon I had observed, I developed a theory about how the "everyone has to agree" is possible in decision-making within a group. I found that for a decision to be made, the solution has to become a blend of the various opinions. And for this to be possible everyone's expectation has to be lowered to the level where the differing opinions meet in a sort of "opinion origo". The result, then, is usually that people go out of the discussion satisfied only to a certain point, but still happy that the group came to an agreement. In my world the Terapolvian definition of agreement lies closer to the concept of compromise, and although he does not use the word "compromise, David Graeber too states something similar when speaking of consensus in anarchist decision-making processes. He writes that: "Discussion should focus on concrete questions of action, and coming up with a plan that everyone can live with and no one feels is in fundamental violation of their principles" (Graeber 2004: 8).

We see that the product of such an agreement, or compromise if you will, is the *consenso*. This is the term that is used after a decision is made, and is therefore the rule one must follow.

The discussion had changed the *consenso*. There was still no *consenso* for smoking in the kitchen, apart from that one was free to smoke wherever, depending on each occasion.

Consenso – Agreeing, accepting, challenging

The term *consenso* appeared on various occasions during my stay in Terapolva. *Aldeanos* use the *consenso* to describe dos and don'ts in everyday life, and the *consenso* was usually related to place. By this I mean that *consenso* had to do with where one can or cannot do a certain thing, e.g. smoke. The *consenso* discussed in the previous paragraph told the *aldeanos* where to smoke, before it changed to indicate where not to smoke. In general the kitchen was source of many a *consenso*, and I will argue that *aldeanos* used the term in a negative way. “Negative *consenso*”, then, indicates prohibition and not permission.

When I first came to Terapolva I had the impression that the *consensus* had been voted on and decided by the current *aldeanos*. When I gradually became aware that the inhabitants of Terapolva changed over time, but that most of the *consenso*'s still remained, I discovered a certain unbalance. If *consenso* in its basic form was a result of a decision-making process in which everyone had had their say and which was based on an agreement or compromise – how was it possible to preserve the validity of these *consenso*'s when the group who once had agreed on them had changed? This might be true in democratic society as well, but the fact that the *consenso*'s were unwritten rules that had to be “learned by doing” makes way for the question: What happens to a rule that is agreed on by everyone when the “everyone” in fact is a changeable unit?

The answer to this question is not clear-cut, but through my fieldwork I found that a certain acceptance of “the state of things” is essential for the becoming part of life in Terapolva. The inhabitants constantly shift, perhaps not from day to day, but certainly from week to week and month to month, and during a whole year one can expect that nearly all of the inhabitants will change. This demands a certain acceptance that the group's dynamic is unstable. Jorge, who had spent about a year in *la aldea*, had developed a relaxed attitude towards new inhabitants, never raising an eyebrow when somebody came or went. He just kept on doing his “thing” and was happy if someone occasionally joined him and showed enthusiasm for the common projects. The norms that one group of *aldeanos* agreed on in January may not receive the total support of another set of *aldeanos* in July. But since there is no exact system for when these norms will be renewed, the *consenso* seems to linger and is usually taught and passed on to newcomers. And newcomers are seldom the first ones to speak up and challenge the existing *consenso*'s. As a result we get a dynamic where these *consenso*'s can linger and survive over time and through the swapping of inhabitants. Up until the point when newcomers eventually gain status as *aldeanos*,

and then speak their mind more freely during *Reuniones*. The group dynamic may then have changed, and the possibility of new *consenso*'s opens up.

Food dilemmas – Breaking Consenso

Terapolvas kitchen is mainly vegetarian. It was communicated that vegetables was the source of food, and that meat was not welcome. Recycling meat was out of the question, as was eating the hens that waddled around the *aldea*, even though they seldom laid eggs and more frequently contributed to the constant messiness of the area. They say, however, that the exception confirms the rule, and I would like to discuss an occasions during my fieldwork when the *consenso* was broken.

The question about meat and *consenso* did not occur until one night in March. Kami came riding his bike up to the kitchen counter loading off a huge, heavy and soaking plastic bag. He had recycled a fish. So there we were, hungry after waiting for today's *reciclaje* for hours, with a *consenso* that said "no cooking meat" and a seven-kilo fish before us. My first thought was: Is fish meat? Pablo looked at me with great enthusiasm. We had been talking about how our bodies probably lacked vitamin D and Omega 3, and Pablo started right away thinking about various methods for preparation. Kami, too, saw the fish as a rare opportunity. He had not sought out the *recicle*, but a guy in the store had offered it to him as it still was fresh, but would be unsellable tomorrow.

The general reception of the fish in the kitchen area this evening was confusing. Some proclaimed loud and clear that if someone were to cook the fish in Terapolvas kitchen, they would not be there, and that it would "*ensuciar*" (dirty) the plates and caseroles. Others seemed to be drawn between the *consenso*, own principles and a hungry stomach. As there is no acknowledged leader of Terapolva, situations like these tend to develop slowly, until people figure out ways to carry on – *consenso* or not. (See Chapter 5 for further discussion) Although we were still talking about the fish and whether or not to cook Pablo started gathering vegetables and preparing a fish soup. Lionel, the 50-something hippie with dreads who often visited was enthusiastic about the fish, as was Paco. While we were cooking, more and more people started to gather around. Soon we had cooked fish soup in the largest casserole in the kitchen over the open fire of *el círculo*. We agreed amongst everyone present that if fish were to be cooked, it must at least be done on the fire and not in the cooking hearth that we used every day. It was a dark and chilly night, and the cooking of the soup soon made people gathered around the fire, some sitting further away, seemingly disgusted by the smell of fish, but still close enough to feel the heat. When the soup was finished, we passed around plates. I was surprised to see how many

who tasted it, in spite of the moral discussion we had just had. And gradually, as people seemed to satisfy their hunger, the energy and mood around the kitchen changed from grumpy to merry.

The following day the conflict reappeared when Jana, who had been absent the night before, pointed out that the big casserole we used almost every meal now was reeking of fish and could not be used again. This incident could be a source for many interpretations and understandings of how Terapolva work. Perhaps first and foremost it tells us that the moral and ideological elements of Terapolva are frequently challenged, and that nothing can be taken for granted or depended upon because individual motivations vary.

We have now seen how anarchistic decision-making might take form in Terapolva. However, this way of reaching decisions is not encountered every day. Because of the somewhat loose structure of when people are present for a *circulo* where one can discuss such matters, and because the *Reunión* only occurs once a month (although sometimes a *Reunión de Luna Nueva* was done, but this took on a slightly different form³⁰) - how, then, is daily life structured? In Terapolva there was no common “plan” as to how or when a task was done, or who was to do it. Anarchistic principles for governing are based on what Crowder calls “moral self-governing” and I argue that this characteristic resonates well with how *aldeanos* kept the wheels moving (Crowder 1991).

Commitment and Structuring by Self-Interest

“Si ves una tarea – es tuya” (If you see a task – it’s yours)

This phrase is painted on a piece of wood over the kitchen counter and is visible from the area near *El Circulo* (See Figure 4). It was also one of the few “rules” I was taught when arriving in Terapolva. To me the phrase says something about distribution and organizing of tasks and speaks not to the group, but directly to the individual’s conscience. It does not read: “all tasks belong to everybody” or “we do tasks together”. It speaks to *you* as an individual, encompassing both *aldeanos* and visitors passing by. It shows us that the encouragement to act and do things for the common good should come from within the *aldeano* herself. No one can tell you what to do, so it is you who have to feel that you want to, or need to do something. The phrase also tells us

³⁰ *Reunión de Luna Nueva* was only done once during my stay, although the moon turned “new” about four times. This ceremony was usually connected with the *circulo de mujeres* (woman’s circle) where the women *aldeanos* would gather around a fire to let the feminine energy flow and speak freely about intimate issues. The connection between the moon cycles and the female menstruation cycle was spiritual.

something about the organizing of tasks. There are no written schedule or plan for daily tasks to be followed, and this suggests that tasks are to be done when discovered by each individual.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter writes about the “problem and theory of commitment” in alternative communities. She states that: “...commitment is not only important for the survival of a community, but also part of its essence. It forms the connection between self-interest and group interest” (Kanter 1975: 67). Connecting Crowder’s definition of “moral self-governing” and Kanter’s “self-interest” in contrast to “group-interest” we might be able to grasp the dynamics of governing and organization of tasks in Terapolva. Committing to community life has, as I have shown in Chapter 3, various motivations. Based on this I suggest that commitment in itself can be a premise for the continuation of the community. Commitment can be defined as the will to help maintain the group because it provides what the individual might need, as shown in Chapter 3. Kanter states that “...a participant in a community is “committed to the degree that he can no longer meet his needs elsewhere” (Kanter 1975: 66). I will not state that it is “as simple as that” in the case of Terapolva, as it is important to mention that some *aldeanos* are firstly committed ideologically, and not inhabitants just because the “needs cannot be met elsewhere”. However, if this statement is turned around, we can make it fit Terapolva. *Aldeanos* who are first and foremost committed for ideological reasons, might (even though it can contradict utopian vision) seek to satisfy needs such as hunger outside the boundaries of Terapolva. If the possibilities for “seeking out” are restricted, by e.g. lack of personal means, the *aldeano* is more likely to stay committed and connected with the daily practices. The *reciclaje* demonstrates this, and I also find it useful to see the ideas of self-structuring and group-interest together with Bloch and Parry’s (2001) definition of short-term and long-term cycles.

As argued in the previous chapter, the *aldeanos* who were most committed to Terapolva were also the ones that, seemingly, did not have other options for survival. The most committed *aldeanos* regularly went on recycling-trips, and daily contributed to the preparation of food. I also got the impression that contributing to *reciclaje* was the fastest way to acceptance as an *aldeano*, it showed that you cared not only for yourself but for the community as a whole. An *aldeano* who sees that a recycling trip is necessary is likely to have discovered exactly this because she was browsing around the kitchen for food. She then, due to her own “self-interest” sets out to do a task that eventually will serve both her and the community as a whole, thereby protecting the “group-interest” as well. “If you see a task – it’s yours” becomes then the foundation for action. It is also moralistic, which I take from my own experience in the community. If you have discovered a task and not done it, you are left with a feeling of guilt, or at least a haunting bad

conscience. Leaving an undone task to your next *aldeano* is immoral because it prevents the community from flourishing.

Beans and voluntarism

Another incident from my fieldwork involves Paco. Because of his intimidating honesty, strong opinions and feisty temper, Paco helped me see many things in Terapolva more clearly. Things I might sense from other situations or opinions communicated between the lines from other *aldeanos*, Paco made very clear. Perhaps he also observed that I still hadn't figured out all the codes of action yet, and saw the need for teaching me. This extract from my field notes shows how a well-intentioned, yet badly placed, comment was interpreted as interfering with the individual freedom and self-governing.

It was afternoon and Paco, Olivia, Annette, Antonio and I were preparing today's *almuerzo*. We made a salad of the freshest vegetables, cutting away bad parts on tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers. A big bag of green beans had also been recycled this afternoon. We were speaking loosely about the weather when I noticed Paco putting the green beans into the basin to go wash them in the sink, some twenty meters away from the kitchen area. I had already done that, so I told him that he doesn't have to do it, expecting him to be relieved to have one less task. He seems not to have noticed what I just said, as he keeps putting the beans into the washtub. I tell him again, more directly, that I had just washed them and that there was no need to wash them again. He then suddenly turns towards me with an aggressive look, and he asks: *Eres tu la jefa aqui?* (Are you the boss here?) I was taken aback, and didn't know what to answer until I mumbled something like "of course not, I just wanted to spare you of the trouble of washing them again". He replied that if he wanted to wash the beans, then he'd wash the beans. I shouldn't put my nose in what other people were doing. As his words remained vibrating in the air, he went off with the beans towards the sink. I was left wondering how this was any different from when I earlier had suggested to use the beans raw in a salad, when the others agreed that cooked beans was better, and that I without hesitation accepted the will of the majority. I had interpreted the situation, us five cooking together, as a collaboration. Reaching a goal together and cooking a meal, to me meant communication and conversation while doing it. It became clear that my idea of teamwork did not apply in Terapolva. We were more than a group; we were individuals who, based on our moral self-direction, had come together to prepare food.

This incident made me aware of something I had not really been able to wrap my head around, up until that moment. I started to reflect on every cooking session in Terapolva. I remembered my first visit in Terapolva, when I helped out with the cooking for the first time. I

asked Henrique what we were cooking, so I'd know if I'd chop the tomatoes in small cubes for a *salsa* or in slices for a salad. He just shook his head, said that they didn't know what they were cooking, they were just cooking. And that whatever I felt like doing was good enough. This repeated itself in almost every meal, if no one explicitly pointed out what they wanted to cook. Then there would be one "chef" and people would just help out, asking the "chef" for tasks. But on most occasions, people would just start preparing vegetables, and the result emerged from that process.

The way of cooking in Terapolva has come, for me, to represent the idea of voluntarism and self-governing that the *aldeanos* seek to live by. As we have seen, it is by no means a principle that is followed up all the time. On the contrary, I will argue that this type of open structure and loose patterns of action make way for a social world in which every action, in fact, is legitimate and justifiable, if one knows how to defend it. Even though I sensed that the others present during Paco's attack on my suggestion were affected by the situation, nobody said anything to support me. If Paco felt that way, he was entitled to do and say what he pleased. Interfering would just be to create a storm in a teacup. But the question that emerges from this is consequentially: How is group coherence and unity created within this individualistic social organization? There are of course various answers to this, which I intend to grasp throughout the final chapter. Keeping the "open structure" in mind, I will steer the focus towards power relations.

Authority in Community

I seek to explain that even though Terapolva functions on the basis of anarchistic organization; there are still modes of authority that become visible. Traditional authority is another of Weber's (See Weber in Whimster [1958] 2004) modes that I find useful in the case of Terapolva, and in some cases these two are interwoven in individuals of Terapolva. The legitimization of power, and the increased respect one obtains as *aldeano* when having lived in Terapolva over a long period, makes way for some *aldeanos* to have a bigger "say" in certain aspects of daily life. Jorge, who had lived in Terapolva for over a year, functioned occasionally as a type of decision-maker. He was not especially outspoken, nor had he strong opinions about issues, but because of his longevity as *aldeano* he was listened to and his humble suggestions were always taken very seriously.

Throughout my stay in Terapolva I observed that some individuals stood out and were more visible (and audible) in daily life. Because of the open characteristic one cannot, in theory, control what people say or do. This, I will argue, creates the potential for *aldeanos* to take on roles

and/or positions where authority is legitimized and thereby executed. As an *aldeano* you may gain a certain level authority and respect in the group when you can speak of what happened in the *aldea* long ago. Sergej, however, a Czech who had spent six months in the *aldea* but seldom contributed to e.g. recycling or participating in *talleres*, did not inhabit this respect and this longevity-based authority. On the contrary he was repeatedly questioned during *Reuniones* about his intentions in Terapolva, and why he felt he could occupy a tent without contributing or showing enthusiasm for the common projects. No one could, however, make him leave. He was free to stay, though stigmatized by the group and was thereby deprived of having a say in discussions. Valerie had been living in Terapolva on and off for several years and was a significant part of the village. She also took care of *La Huerta*, which in itself gave her more respect. When she spoke during a *Reunión*, everyone would listen attentively to what she had to say. After having lived as an *aldeano* over a longer period answers, one gains respect in the community. This form of power obtained through seniority is also connected to what we can call the origin story of Terapolva. Erving, as explained in Chapter 2, was “there” when Neo created Terapolva, and automatically gained respect and authority on his visits to the *aldea* to remind the group of existential questions. During bonfires *aldeanos* would often share stories about Terapolva in the past. When Erving visited, or someone who had lived in Terapolva before and came back, current *aldeanos* would lean in to the conversation and ask their predecessors of stories from the past. Like this certain *aldeanos* become “history-reminders”.

Weber defines charismatic authority as an individual’s quality that makes power legitimized (Weber [1947] 2004). Jana, who had not spent more than a few months in Terapolva when I arrived, appeared to be a “natural leader type”. She was always raising her voice in discussions, taking on important tasks for the community, thereby legitimizing her role as a leader. When new people wanted to join the group, for example, she seemed to take on the authority to decide, asking challenging questions to the newcomer, when the rest of the group mostly nodded in silence – well knowing that they did not really have any right to decide who could stay or not.

Veysey observes similar patterns when studying an alternative anarchist community in New Mexico. He points out how a couple of inhabitants seemed to “play the role as leaders”, based on their authority among the other community members and how they set examples for work in the community. The other members however, deny that there is any leadership in the group. Veysey suggests that there exists a subtler form of leadership, that manifests itself through checking in what people are doing each day and setting themselves apart from the rest of the group (Veysey 1978: 199). Is it possible that the absence of clear roles (e.g. leaders with

designated tasks) creates an environment where individual character is given more space to operate and flourish? When self-governing and individual initiative is honored in an egalitarian social context, does it not underline the importance of individual personality as a base for social organization?

During my time in Terapolva I sensed the importance of having someone in the group who would speak up, people who make things happen, who say out loud what everyone was thinking. Jana, even though other *aldeanos* found her both irritating and controlling at times, certainly contributed to the prospering of the village. She initiated projects, encouraged people to go recycling, and she often pointed out issues that had taken form as an “elephant in the room”, issues that people were thinking of but did not communicate, because of the anarchistic principle of not telling people what to do.



Figure 7: Cooking *almuerzo* and reading from the “to do”-list.

Property in Terapolva – Paco’s Desk

As shown in the previous chapter there is a notion of common property and that everything belongs to everyone, yet are still things that are seen as private. This can be an expensive flashlight, honey kept in ones own dwelling, cigarettes and crackers or other “means for survival” such as lighters and wax candles. These objects are seldom questioned, and it is generally accepted that people have certain things that are theirs. In fact, there is a big metal

locker for keeping ones valuable objects. It has a code-lock, thereby making it a place only open for *aldeanos* and not visitors. However, when it comes to the occupying of spaces the question of what can be claimed and not, arises. I will also suggest that this is connected with how Terapova in itself is occupying the ground it lies on. In theory one might characterize Terapova as a “squatter” settlement, claiming the ground while knowing it is not “theirs” (See Chapter 5).

After an *almuerzo* one day certain topics were brought up. Carlos, who at the time always was seen with a book of Nietzsche in his hands, wanted to communicate to the group that he was currently using the hut at the entrance as a study and that he wanted to keep tidy to be able to read in peace. He had been cleaning up in there, and wanted the place free of personal belongings. The group nodded confirmingly to this, and the conversation developed further with opinions about the general cleanliness of the *aldea* and how it seemed as though messiness was accepted and therefore carried on. Things like hanging clothes up to dry wherever suitable and how the *taller* inside *El Refugio* (the room next to the “living room”, with a large desk and material for painting) seemed to have lost all sense of order. I was unsure if it on some point not had been this way. At least the level of cleanliness had not changed much since my arrival. The *aldeanos*, however, seemed to recall a time when the *aldea* in general looked neater. About this Paco had something to add. He took the opportunity to communicate to the *circulo* that even though he spent a lot of time drawing in the *taller*, he did not see it as “his office”. I knew at once that he was secretly referring the conversation he and I had earlier that day. I had decided I wanted to help out with the promotion of the upcoming festival, so I had spent the afternoon at the desk drawing a poster to put up at the university. Normally Paco was the one drawing posters, so when he suddenly entered I jokingly asked him if I was “occupying his office”. He obviously did not acknowledge my joke, and responded gravely that nothing in Terapova belongs to anyone, and that it by no means was “his office”. Clearly, property was no joking matter.

The topic of what was “*espacio común*” (shared space) had occurred repeatedly in the past days. Here, no one seems to be the owner of anything, yet I had the impression that among *aldeanos* there were so many strong personalities that it appears impossible not to, in one way or another, leave a personal mark on things and places. The drawing room for instance bears the mark of Paco and I heard several *aldeanos* referring to the desk as “Paco’s space/desk”. Another example was the house Jorge was constructing through his workshop where he invited visitors and *aldeanos* to learn *bioconstrucción* while constructing a house based on his own architectural plan. By other *aldeanos* the house was referred to as “*la casita de Jorge*” (Jorge’s little house).

The issue of property is much discussed in the field of anarchism. The standard phrase “property is theft” (coined by Proudhon) makes way for many interpretations, its most common perhaps being that claiming property, as in state property or private property, is stealing from what is naturally everyone’s. Amster discusses property, as the original source of inequality. Anarchist’s idea of property is always connected to the well-being of the community (Amster 2009). Anarchists see common property as the fundamental element of equality, and Rosseau indicates that “the earth do not belong to us, but rather we to it” (in Amster 2009: 295). The claim to ownership of land is seen as the first step towards civil society, where structures of inequality can grow. Knowing this, we understand the basis for *aldeanos* renouncement of property. Nevertheless, as people favor certain places in Terapolva, one is associated with these and connections are made between *aldeano* and the place they are seen in.

*

In this chapter I have tried to show, through describing various forms of governing and decision-making processes, that Terapolva continuously strives to be and stretches towards becoming “the change they want to see in the world”. In the former chapter we have seen how economic practices such as obtaining food and individuals strategies for survival, are connected to the higher idea of a free community, a place for these young people to come together and share visions of a better world. One could say that this happens in spite of the conditions that surround them, and that Terapolva breaks through the asphalt as a dandelion in spring, with its green ideas in the decaying urban jungle. Equally one can state that Terapolva is given the possibility to grow, exactly *because* of its surrounding conditions, and that a location such as an abandoned construction project next to a natural reserve is the perfect, and perhaps most likely location for such a community to flourish.

David Graeber stated in an interview that “Anarchism is acting *as if* you are already free” (Graeber with Charlie Rose 2006) and I believe this touches in on something essential in Terapolvian thought. *Aldeanos* come together in Terapolva to create their own version of the world, and for that a large doses of creativity and ideological dedication is required. Creating a community through experimentation, blurring lines of what is seen as inside and outside as well as what is allowed and what’s not, creates a social reality that is very different from the surrounding world. And because Terapolva is constantly in dialogue and dependable on its surroundings to function, a certain “re-imagining” of the world as they know it is crucial for the community’s survival. The bare idea of creating a better place, and to detach oneself ideologically

from the outside (in fact: *creating* an outside) I will state, is the mere 'raison d'être' for Terapolvas survival. Let us now look at Terapolva in relation to its surroundings.

Defining Boundaries

Community Identity and the Notion of Place

“Intentional communities are in no sense sovereign entities, but quite the contrary, they are communities within and upon the land of sovereign states. (Amster 2009: 292)

"...Buenos Aires is the epitome of expansiveness: the city pours itself out like a liquid. A city without boundaries"(Foster 1998: 5).

As the quote from Foster (1998) indicates, Buenos Aires has an expansive character – it is difficult to define an inside and outside because of its way of flooding out over its own borders, having expanded for centuries. To place Terapolva within or outside the city’s limits is difficult if we operate with physical administrative boundaries. A Spanish word I learned during my fieldwork was *orilla* which literally means “shore” or “bay line”, but can be used in a much more abstract way. If something exists in *la orilla* it means it lies between two places, or in a blurry, indefinable zone. In this chapter suggest that boundaries are upheld by the myths and prejudices that exist between the following groups: *aldeanos*, students and “the other” settlement. That is not to say that these groups live separate from each other, without interaction. Rather, I follow Fredrik Barth when he states that: “...it is clear that boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them” and that “categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information”(Barth 1982: 9). This is not to rule out the city’s relationship with Terapolva and vice versa. On the contrary, I am arguing that Terapolva exist because of, *and* in spite of its context. To fully grasp how communities like this can prosper; one cannot see it as a separate entity.

As shown in the previous chapter, Terapolva functions as a community with elements of anarchism as well as experimenting towards becoming an ecological community. We have seen how spheres of food, *marijuana* and objects circulate between *aldeanos* as well as crossing the lines of what is understood as Terapolva’s borders. We might ask: How is Terapolva a community? What is it that makes this place something else than the context it exists within? In this chapter I will take a look at Terapolva’s “outside”, as I wish to throw light on how a common identity is created by defining what it is not. In this I ask: What are boundaries in the case of Terapolva, and how do these become perceptible? How can we grasp boundaries in a community that has no official claim to its territory?

Estrangement

To create an inside, the definition and separation from the outside is essential. This is especially true when it comes to intentional communities that tend to wish themselves away from the wider community, to gather around a common idea and/or intention. Lucy Sargisson investigates characteristics in utopian intentional communities and stresses the importance of *estrangement* in the making of utopia. Defining "the other" is crucial to outlining and defining a group identity.

Estranged relationships are complex and difficult, and a discussion of estrangement also requires contemplation of the ways that we regard and treat the other: the strange and unknown outsider. This aspect of estrangement takes us into dark places, and people who try to realize utopian dreams in intentional communities often find the various effects of estrangement impossible to endure (Sargisson 2007).

Estrangement is the mechanism of defining the extraneous, hence drawing borders between subject and object - the "us" and the "others" (Sargisson 2007). Sargisson's use of the word *estrangement* is advantageous in the understanding of distance and difference in the making of intentional communities. To help show the importance of Terapolva's situation in its surroundings, I would like to embed the work of James Ferguson and his studies of the former nation-state Lesotho, situated in the geographic middle of South Africa. The reality of being an "independent" social unit surrounded by a state-power has obvious consequences when it comes to relations between the micro- and the macro-community. Scale-wise it is perhaps a questionable comparison, yet I still find the relation useful when trying to grasp how Terapolva exist within the borders of Buenos Aires. Ferguson describes the way poverty and powerlessness is experienced in Lesotho. Lesotho gained political independence in the sixties along with the other British colonies. In the eighties there was nonetheless a significant dependence between Lesotho and the surrounding South Africa in terms of labor immigration and market, and the newly established local Lesotho currency was at par with the South African Rand, even though the latter was actively preferred (Ferguson 2006: 55, 52). The relation between the two neighboring states (if one could call it a neighbor when it is located *within* another state) has to be viewed in a historical perspective as well as geographic. I will not go into the complex history of Lesotho, but I wish to see the relations of Lesotho and South Africa as similar to the less political, yet constantly dependent relationship between Terapolva and Buenos Aires. Just as there is no "national economy of Lesotho" separate from an encompassing set of relations with a wider South African

(and ultimately global) system, so, too, there can be no local "cultures" apart from the wider and encompassing relations within which they are defined (Ferguson 2006: 66).

With this statement I wish to underline the importance of viewing Terapolva in a wider context. When the inhabitants of Terapolva each day go food hunting in the closest urban *barrio*, they effectively create a network of places that is connected to Terapolva. Since Terapolva's most important daily practice is the obtaining of food for the group, and that this entails leaving the community to obtain it, one cannot understand Terapolva without its surrounding spaces. So how are Terapolva's boundaries made? In its broadest definition one needs to incorporate the *verdulerias* that each day provides *aldeanos* with food. Equally, the University campus with its students and staff forms part of the context that surrounds and interacts with Terapolva, and, as I will elaborate on below, the neighboring settlement which the *aldeanos* call "Los Otros" (henceforth referred to as The Others) is crucial when drawing up the lines of inside versus outside. The students, The Others and visitors in relation to Terapolva become main components in the discussion that follows. To study boundaries one must exercise mobility and move across lines to get different perspectives. My mobile position in the field made it possible for me to take on various roles and I felt free to explore the people in Terapolva's surroundings.

On the inside looking out - *La Ciudad Te Mata* (The city kills you)

On the community's homepage one finds the following phrase: "It is considered that for a good adaptation, exits to the city should be restricted to a minimum" (my translation). There was a common notion amongst the *aldeanos* that the city exhausts you. One of my first days in Terapolva I sat down with Franco. At the time he worked some days a week in an office and returned to Terapolva to sleep. He told me that on mornings when he had to go to work at 8 AM, he had a terrible time waking up and forcing himself out of the comfort of his tent, putting on his shoes (Franco was always barefoot) and leaving for the bus towards the busy *microcentro*. Getting up, getting dressed and preparing for a long day in an office is almost impossible, he said. "I have to drag myself to do it every time".

Franco's double life as office worker and barefoot *aldeano* was understandably confusing, and his experience resonated well with my own experience of changing from living in the city (taking crowded subways to my Spanish classes) to sleeping in a tent in the bushes. The contrast between the city and Terapolva is strengthened through the embodied experience of going out of the one, and into the other. The experience helps us understand just how different the feeling of being in Terapolva is, when compared to being in Buenos Aires. Being in Terapolva feels like being much further away from a big city than its physical reality. Stepping in behind the large

trees that separates Terapolvas area from the campus has an impact on you. Suddenly the sound of afternoon traffic from the highway nearby is undermined by the sounds of cutting firewood, the shouting of the characteristic animal sounds which notifies a meal coming up or the intense singing of birds or crickets. In conversations with *aldeanos* about traveling to and from the city, it was always spoken of as stressful, if not terrible, and something best to be avoided.

Outside looking in – Interviewing the Students

After a period of living as an *aldeano* I had observed how the students of the University at times appeared in the *aldea* as visitors. *Aldeanos* wished to communicate how Terapolva was to be seen as an extension of the campus, as a free space where one could come to experiment ideas that reached outside the restrictions of academia (See Chapter 2). I decided I needed the students' point of view to complete the picture and I drew up a plan to interview students. I was interested in what the students in fact knew about their alternative neighbors, if they had been to Terapolva and if the notions of the *aldeanos* resonated at all with how the *aldeanos* saw themselves.

The closest university building encompasses a large hall, where hundreds of students hurry about. The various *papelerías*, kiosks and bookstores create a slightly chaotic atmosphere, with good help from the myriad of posters and banners with extra-curricular offers and political statements. From the roof hangs a large stretched canvas depicting students who forms part of the “*Desaparecidos*”. Three floors with balconies face the inner patio, which is the size of a small football-field. Students are smoking cigarettes and drinking espresso from Styrofoam cups in the cantina in the center of the patio, and it all gives a feeling of being inside a giant anthill. This is where I started the interviews.

I decided on a loosely structured interview. I improvised as the conversation developed, and I soon discovered that the question “Do you know the area between the campus and the natural reserve?” engaged broader and more interesting conversations than my first “Do you know Terapolva?” On this latter question almost half of the students I asked (20 in total) would shake their heads, unknowingly. If I pressed on the conversation, about half of these would reveal that they actually had heard of or knew about a “camp” or “settlement” in the “swamp”, and that perhaps they were some kind of “hippie vegetarians”. Of those who had heard of, or knew by personal experience, Terapolva, the majority were second or third year students. Only two of the first year students knew that there was “something” there. In some of the interviews I opened with the question “Do you know about the fifth building?” which made it easy to distinguish between those who knew and those who did not. If you knew that there had been plans to build a fourth and fifth university building, you'd know enough about the history to be

aware that people had been occupying the area for a long time. If not, the question on where to find the fifth building would provoke laughter and answers like “You’re joking, right?” Some conversations were short, and some were longer. Some phrases were repeated by most of the students I interviewed. *Pantano* (swamp), hippies and *campamento* (camping) were the common words to describe what was “over there”. Some would lift a hand, marking out some spot in the air in the direction of the river.

The result of the interviews showed that confusion existed in the students’ notion of Terapolva. One male student speculated if they even had their own language over there. Some had heard that you had to cross a bridge to get there, and that they “lived in the trees”³¹. Everyone who had visited the *aldea* repeated this last remark. The tree hut (*El Nido*, see Chapter 2) seemed to stand out as a symbol of the “otherness” that the students felt towards their alternative neighbors. The rumor that they were “living in the trees” emphasized difference with an easily graspable image. The students I interviewed seemed to have the impression that the *aldea* was very far away. They talked about it as if it was out of reach somehow; naming various obstacles such as bridges, swamps and “dangerous people” you had to cross to get there. Who knew Terapolva by direct experience tended to speak of the *aldeanos* as friendly hippies who bothered no one and just kept to themselves. They thereby knew that Terapolva was not the same as the other settlement nearby, that which the *aldeanos* themselves spoke of as The Others. I expand on this below.

As expected, the answers from the interviews painted a fairly stereotypical picture of Terapolva. An ecological “tribe” that lived in the bushes, was the overall image the students had. None of the students seemed to be aware of Terapolva’s ways of obtaining food, even though *aldeanos* almost every night at 9 PM stopped by the student canteen to pick up today’s leftovers (*recycle*) from the canteen kitchen. I went with Anthony a couple of times, but without luck. It was strange walking into the canteen, where students sat bent over their books eating a sandwich they had paid for, asking the staff if they had something to give us for free. This recycling task was one of the least popular ones, and I figured it had to do with getting so close to the students in the search for food. It surprised me how little communication and awareness existed between Terapolva (that online presented itself as an extension of the university) and the students.

³¹ Terapolva’s entrance is located about 150 from the last of the buildings. A half-constructed bridge (also abandoned in the 70’s) crosses the overgrown river, but crossing it leads to the Bioreserve and where the Gay Village once was.

The Marxist point of view

During the rounds of conversations I came across a group of students who were handing out pamphlets for different political student associations. A talkative young man approached me handing out a flyer for the Marxist Student Association. I asked him if he could be interested in answering some questions, and he leaned in curiously. He was studying industrial design on the fifth year, and was therefore a long run student. He had never been there, but had spoken to some of the people living there. "They are of the middle traitor class", he said. As a true Marxist he saw the world divided into classes, and was quick to place *aldeanos* within the system. "They escape the society, and form a distant and separate community that lacks the implication in the class struggle. By moving away from the society, they are choosing not to fight in what Argentina experiences today on a political level" he proclaimed with the eloquence of a politician. The student tells me that he is aware of how the hippies are using the school's computers because it is an open service and free of charge. He wants me to see how the hippies are feeding of the school for free, without giving anything back. "They are also standing outside the buildings to sell "*cositas*" (small things) that does not have any significant implication in the school campus." Further he describes how they don't seem to accept their class position, how they are escaping the fight. He point out that he haven't got any knowledge of how they maintain themselves, nor does he know what the purpose of functioning is.

Randall Amster (2009) suggests how a Marxian view of anarchist utopian communities could be formulated:

Marx admonished that these purported utopian socialists were ignoring the implicit materialist process contemplated by his 'base-superstructure' model: "The state of productive forces at any given moment in history sets limits on the range of political action that will be viable" (...) Since he even went so far as to term certain utopian initiatives "obsolete verbal rubbish" and "ideological nonsense" (...) it isn't hard to guess what Marx would say about the utopian aspects of anarchism (Amster 2009: 291).

Although extreme and obviously politically situated, the opinions of the activist student pointed out some interesting viewpoints on Terapolva, seen from the outside. One the one hand, Terapolva can be seen as a group of activist (ecologists, anarchists, permaculturalists) who live out their ideals in all its difference. Here was then suddenly another type of activist, with a radically different ideological strategy for "making the world a better place", and whose ideas about how to get there contrasted with how *aldeanos* lived.

The Others

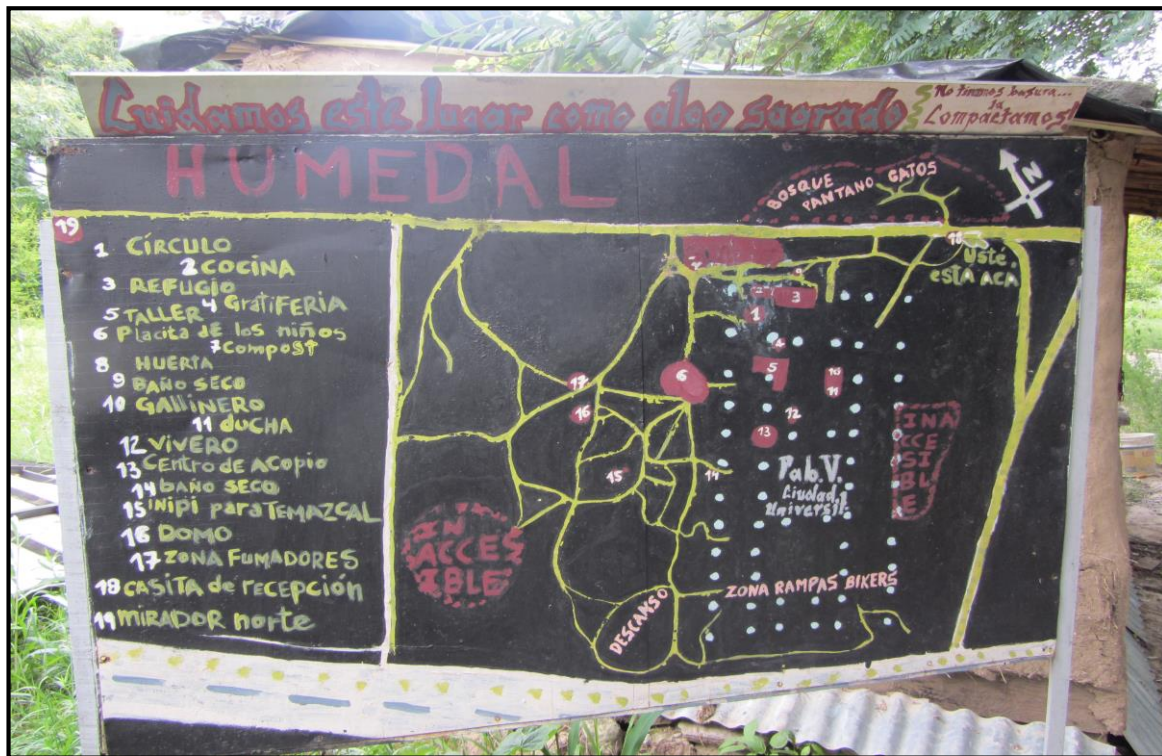


Figure 8: Map of the area at Terapolva's main entrance.

The map that is depicted above can be found next to the *Recepción*, the small adobe house near the main entrance of Terapolva. The dots in two rectangular shapes represent the pillars of the once initiated construction of the fifth building. On the left we see the network of footpaths that leads through the forest that is called *Bosque de Silencio*. The lines come to a stop and meet in an area marked “*Inaccessible*”.³² By the name this would imply a place out of reach, or difficult to enter. However, I discovered that this area was not so much inaccessible; it was rather outside what was defined as Terapolva. The red paint and the word “inaccessible”, indicates a certain “keep out”-message, and it was in this area that The Others receded. The group that *aldeanos* calls The Others is not easily defined, and I suppose I must have conducted fieldwork within *this* group as well, to be able to say anything about the why and how of their existence. However, I explored their territory on a few occasions, and experienced many incidents in Terapolva where The Others was significant. Looking at The Others through the eyes of *aldeanos* helps mapping out the social and territorial context in which Terapolva is embedded.

³² A spot on right side (the southern periphery of Terapolva) is also marked *Inaccessible*. Here lived an old lady in a shack, with two very hostile dogs. I never managed to speak with her, although she sometimes came by *la aldea* – usually with news about things going on at the University College (teacher strike’s, events, etc.)

One afternoon, as I was leaving the area of the *aldea* crossing the large open field that separated the campus from the entrance to Terapolva, an armed police officer appeared from the bushes and stood straight up in front of me some twenty meters away, motioning me to move in his direction. As we approached each other, he asked, almost shouting, if I was coming from the *aldea*. I, very aware of my scruffy and *aldeano*-like appearance (unwashed hair, wide pants and clothes in earth-colors” answered him that yes, I did. He asked me if I had heard shooting or seen someone with an *arma* (weapon). It startled me, and as I had seen nothing of the sort I shook my head, accompanied by a questioning: “No?” He looked at me quickly before he just shooed me off, wanting me to carry on walking. He continued into the bushes where he had come from, as if searching for villains.

It was not the first time I had heard talk of weapons in relation to Terapolva. Omar, who had lived and been in contact with Terapolva for more than three years, told me about a time when people had come to rob the *aldeanos*. They had come late at night with guns and knives, and threatened people that lay in their respective tents and dwellings. I never fully understood if they had managed to get away with anything, and why someone would want to rob the *aldeanos* anyway. If one was looking for objects of value, Terapolva was certainly not the first place one would choose. But Omar told the story with great enthusiasm, how he had stood up for his community and somehow managed to surprise them from up a tree, scaring them back to where they came from.

This was the only story I was told where Terapolva had been explicitly and physically “under attack” by outsiders. However the element of robbery was recurring, and during my time in the community I witnessed incidents where things went missing, and where outsiders was to blame. Pablo’s accordion was one such object. One day, as he had been away from his tent to work in the *taller de arcilla*, he came back only to find that it was gone. He had left it, incautiously, in the zipper opening of his tent. Although some bushes covered the entrance of his tents spot, it was still visible from the path. It was assumed that someone (an outsider) must have picked it up on his or her way through the *aldea*. Since the path went from the northern lookout-spot through the *aldea* and ended in the parking lot, it was natural to think that the thief could be someone from the neighbor settlement, or one of those young boys who had been looking after cars in the parking lot, and had been trespassing Terapolva’s territory several times the past week. Pablo was devastated, and we all gathered in the *Circulo* while Jorge rang the *campana* – a large bell that only was rung in case of emergency, to gather all *aldeanos*. It was decided that some of the guys would go over to The Others to “*Hacer presencia*” (make presence), with a gourd of

mate³³. That *aldeanos* felt this responsibility show how they saw the area as their own territory, that they felt a need to introduce themselves to these strangers and invite them to share a *mate* – make them aware of Terapolva’s existence.

On several occasions this “*Hacer presencia*” was mentioned as a good strategy for coping with the settlement of The Others. It was also brought up during a couple of *Reuniones*. However, I did not see anyone actually taking the responsibility to go over there with a *mate*, so one day I decided I wanted to explore the area for myself, to see how close they really lived and how their life could be distinguished from that of Terapolva. Diego agreed to come with me, as I – having at this point heard all sorts of rumors about The Others being booze-drinking, knife-robbing people – had developed a slight fear of the area myself.

We walked up to *La Huerta* and followed the path towards the viewpoint, but before we reached it we took left onto an even denser and overgrown path that lead through the bushes. A small cluster of constructions with metal roofs came into view, and we noticed a man with a broom, scooping out dust from a low hut made from adobe, the same technique that *aldeanos* used, but without the decorations made from pieces of glass and mirrors. The hut had the form of an igloo, and a couple of meters away stood a large ceramic oven. The man looked up as we peeped out of the bushes. He was wearing denim jeans and a sport t-shirt, and sneakers. With his short-cut hair he looked a far cry from his neighbors with dreadlocks and loose garments. We asked him if it was okay if we had a look around, and to this he nodded absently. We asked him about the hut he was tending to, and he showed us how it had a small hearth inside for warming up the small space. I asked myself why the huts in Terapolva did not have this, as it would come in very handy on cold winter nights.

As we continued on the path an open space covered by a metal roof became visible, where a rusty barbeque, a water boiler and a radio were placed next to a small table with plastic chairs. Electrical chords hung from the ceiling, and the radio spat out a commercial station with the usual noisy Argentinean radio. By a washbasin stood a bottle of soap for dishwashing, and empty bottles of Coke occupied a corner. In Terapolva’s kitchen we used ash and cold water to wash the dishes, and empty bottles were always compacted for recycling in the plastic bin (Chapter 2). It became clear that this settlement, even though they were only some thirty meters away from what would be defined as “Terapolva territory”, did definitely not operate by the three R’s. The man asked if we came from “*la comunidad*” (the community)³⁴. Diego answered

³³ To share a cup of *mate* is always a sign of friendship, acceptance and peace. The fact that one drinks from the same *bombilla* (metal straw) indicates trust and intimacy. When *aldeanos* thought of bringing a *mate* to The Others, this was a clear sign to “make peace”.

³⁴ I remind the reader that *comunidad* was not a term *aldeanos* used about themselves.

that no, we were just passing by. I reckoned he felt we would be welcome to look around if we were mere “passers by”, and not the neighbor community snooping around. In general, the man did not seem very happy to have visitors, but he indifferently permitted us to walk further into the space that opened up between the large trees. The man said he lived there with one more. We walked passed the kitchen and on the left there was a small wooden house and an overgrown garden that was fenced in. This was the only fence I had ever seen in this area. The fence had a tall metal gate, and it looked like the kind of house kids are afraid to pass by. A dog barked at us, held back by a leash tied to the house, as we walked by. A man suddenly peeped out of the house. He must have been in his seventies, had dirty clothes and looked both tired and bothered when he spotted us. Diego shouted out “*Hola, buen día!*” but the man just kept staring back at us and we took it as a sign to get out of there.

This visit helped me understand the main difference between *aldeanos* and The Others. This settlement lacked the ideological dimension that makes Terapolva something more than just “people living together”, as Olivia had stated. I also understood why *aldeanos* did not interact with The Others, and how this settlement apparently wanted to hide away from the wider community, functioning as a home or refuge. Also, having this settlement nearby creates an outside of Terapolva. However, as I have mentioned in the first chapters of this thesis, the ground that Terapolva claim its presence on has throughout the last thirty years been a place for various settlements and social movements. It is difficult to say if Terapolva “came first”, but there is reason to believe that the kind of settlement I have just presented is likely to have been there for longer.

Sense of Otherness

When defined as an ascriptive and exclusive group, the nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear: it depends on the maintenance of boundary. The cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organizational form of the group may change – yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity, and investigate the changing cultural form and content (Barth 1982: 14).

Let us look further into how *aldeanos* define The Others. Barth speaks of common identity as a possible factor for defining an ethnic group, and in this light the *aldeanos* can easily be seen as such, seeing how cultural background, nationalities and ages vary within the group (Barth 1982:

14). I argue that the common identity in Terapolva is created through defining place. Anthony Cohen elaborates on this when he states that boundaries encapsulate the identity of community, and that distinguishing the community from what they wish not to be marks these boundaries. Seeing “community” as a symbol in itself helps create boundaries, while still allowing individuals within the community to have their own interpretation of the symbol (Cohen 1985: 12, 15).

When we try to place Terapolva in its surroundings, the sense of otherness becomes evident in two ways. The first is how Terapolva is seen from the outside almost as an anomaly, as a group of people that both physically and ideologically have stepped out of the wider community to create a separate microcosm. Second is the otherness that is created by the insiders of Terapolva, to draw up boundaries and distance from the context they live in. To be able so persist as an autonomous social entity where physical limits are non-existent, the notion of the group seen as outside defines the community as a whole.

As suggested by Barth, ethnicity may perfectly well persist in situations where a social group is in constant relation and mutual dependence with another group. Examples of stable and persisting ethnic boundaries that are crossed by a flow of personnel are clearly far more common than the ethnographic literature would lead us to believe (Barth 1982: 21). This helps giving answers to my question of “what keeps it all together”, and shows how boundaries exist even though the social structure strives towards individual self-governing and anarchistic principles. It is perhaps not as unlikely as initially assumed, that a community like Terapolva exist within a wider context like this. We can attempt to imagine, and I argue that this is the most explicative manner in which one can understand Terapolva, that it exists both in spite of *and* because of its surroundings. Sargisson confirms this when she argues how intentional communities both stem from and are embedded in the wider community (Sargisson 2007: 411).

Visitors Paradox

Another group of outsiders are crucial to Terapolva’s confirmation of itself as a unique and ideologically separated place. As I have shown, Terapolva is not defined or limited by fences or gates. Nor has it any official claim to its territory, and is thereby, in theory, an open space. Residing within an area that lies between the school campus and a natural reserve, it is a place where people can go for walks and explore as they wish. The numerous pathways that crisscross the area intersect with the paths that by *aldeanos* are seen as “inside Terapolva”, and on many occasions one would see non-*aldeanos* walking along these paths. Mostly these were students, taking a break from lectures, but it could also be families or individuals wanting to explore the nature and escaping the city. When for example a couple of students would enter the main area

of Terapolva, they would be seen as visitors to *la aldea*, and thereby treated by *aldeanos* as such. This implies that *aldeanos* show them Terapolva, informing them of the daily practices, and the ideological motivations for the community. A typical “tour” for a visitor could be walking around the *aldea*, showing how the *baño seco*, the *permaducha* and *La Huerta* functions. It was always mentioned how they sought to recycle and reuse all material, and that they used nature with all its advantages. This way of presenting Terapolva to the outside contributes to the confirmation of the idea of Terapolva is an opportunity to show to the outside *and* to themselves what “we are really here for”. It becomes a daily reminder of the purpose of the project, and a way to connect daily practices to the overall idea. Everyday tasks such as how one would use leafs in *baño seco* is then elevated to the higher ideological level, when showing visitors how this is part of living with nature and not contaminating. Furthermore, the seasonal festivals and *talleres* are always directed towards the outside. These are mainly directed towards students, but through the homepage and social media the activities are announced to the world, and everyone is invited.

Sargisson (2007) calls these kinds of initiatives for “outreach activities”. She explains how intentional communities in New Zealand establish commercial outlets where the values and ideologies are reflected through initiatives such as shops selling “green” products, eco-tours and other activities. She states that “such initiatives are multifunctional and can mediate estrangement in a variety of ways: introducing and explaining the community vision, proselytizing its message, and/or making individual members more familiar” (Sargisson 2007: 413). Activities like these can be seen as serving a dual function. First, it creates a friendly connection with the exterior (e.g. neighbors and visitors) where one shows the open characteristic of the community. Along with this comes also a consequence when the community experience pressure or threats from outside. Terapolva is claiming to protect the zone they are occupying and thereby contributing to the cleanliness of the ecological reserve.

Throughout its seven years of existence (as of 2014) the community has experienced several threats of dislocation. Only the past months, as I was writing the last pages of this thesis, the government along with a committee from the University suggested that a large parking lot should be constructed in what could be seen as Terapolva territory. *Aldeanos* reacted at once, and activities to “*proteger la zona*” were initiated. Slogans such as “*Bosque, ni cemento*” (forest, no cement) were published on social media, and the *aldeanos* formed a “permanent picnic” where they invited student associations to join in the fight to protect Terapolva and the Bioreserve. Also, various *talleres* were activated and a big initiative was done to get people to come to the arrangements, so that the authorities would see how the space was alive and activated. This kind

of encounter between *aldeanos* and outsiders based on a common motivation helps demystifying Terapolva is the eyes of the outside. I cannot say how much this resistance actually reached out to the students, and how big a percentage that actually engaged, as I was not there when it happened. However the incident nevertheless tells us something about what's at stake for the *aldeanos* when Terapolva is threatened from the outside.

The second function of these “outreach activities” is contributing to the community's re-confirmation of itself, and thereby also (perhaps paradoxically) reinforcing the inside contra the outside – estranging those who are not insiders, but inviting them to be visitors. As *aldeanos* explain the purpose of Terapolva to visitors they are also repeating for themselves the intention of being there. When people are passing through *la aldea*, and *aldeanos* are showing them around, these passers-by are ascribed a role as visitors. To be a visitor implies that someone is inviting, and Terapolva becomes the “host”. This is something that occurs in spite of the fact that Terapolva has no claim to its “land”. At least, it shows that lack of legal rights to the territory and the fact that Terapolva nevertheless creates practices an inside/outside dynamic, are two thoughts one must keep in mind at once.

From a distance

As I understood from the interviews and from learning about The Others, the students who had not visited Terapolva themselves had created a picture of “those living over there” that did not separate *aldeano* from their “less idealistic neighbors”. Stories had evolved of the area being a dangerous place where you could meet alcoholics and *ladrones* (thieves or bad-guys). Especially the first-years who had not visited *la aldea* themselves seemed to not being able to distinguish Terapolva from “The Others”³⁵.

Aldeanos themselves had simplified notions of their neighbors as well. They were “*ranchando*” (making a mess) or they were made suspects for the theft that *aldeanos* experienced. Sargisson points out how a strong sense of interior has consequences for how one view the exterior. When the “inside” becomes a place of safety and refuge, the “outside” becomes a place where we identify our fears, and suspicion can grow (Sargisson 2007: 409). I will argue that this kind of estrangement also creates a possibility to simplify the “other” and reduce them to stereotypes. In the case of Terapolva this happens both when students speak of *aldeanos* and when *aldeanos* speak of outsiders, mostly The Others.

When students I interviewed were to characterize and explain what they knew of Terapolva, the image was reduced to a basic hippie stereotype that was merged with rumors

³⁵ Again I refer to the possibility of studying the myths of Terapolva in relation to earlier ethnographic literature.

about alcoholics and *ladrones* who also were living “over there” (I cannot be sure if The Others, whom I visited, is the source of this “alcoholics-rumor”). The view of Terapolva from the outside becomes fluid, perhaps because of its undefined physical characteristic. To first year students, everything that was going on “in that area” was reduced to one group of people, while from the point of view of *aldeanos* these people were separated into two very distinct groups.

*

In this chapter I have wished to show how community identity is confirmed within Terapolva by defining the outside. A sense of group coherence and ‘inside’ is created by sharp differentiation between “us” and “them”. Looking at Terapolva from the point of view of the neighboring groups also helps in the understanding of the place as embedded within the city. We have seen that economical practices such as the *reciclaje* and other ways of extracting goods from the outside (e.g. hacking the water system, buying chocolate from the kiosk or selling handcraft in the city) connect the *aldeanos* to Buenos Aires in many ways. At the same time the notion of the outside as something negative (the exhausting city and the threatening “Others”) contributes to the image of Terapolva as a place of positivity and dreams.

Recycling Ourselves

Final Remarks and Reflections

Acknowledging limits

While finishing up my writing I am gripped by a sense of shortcoming, and I ask myself: Did I get it all? A year after fieldwork I still ask myself: What kind of place is Terapolva *really*? Is it an ecovillage part of a world spanning movement of eco-utopianism? A permanent camping of young outlaw anarchists? Is it an educational center where students and others can experience the liberty of creativity? Is it a shelter away from the hardships of city life? Is it at all a community? I will have to settle with my choices however, trusting I have managed to paint a picture of Terapolva within its context and hopefully been able to advocate for its complexity. For now the potential shortcomings will have to serve as motivation for further investigation, as I acknowledge that I am scratching the surface of something bigger.

I have argued that the common identity of the group is constantly confirmed by the daily practices of recycling, through the *Reunión de la luna llena* and that boundaries between inside and outside are drawn by estrangement – the creation of otherness. But I can't help but ask myself: Am I reducing Terapolva to something graspable for myself? In my search for understanding what meaning the place generates for its inhabitants – am I missing out on the big picture?

The Terapolva Effect

My academic advisor Professor Marianne E. Lien coined this term (with my consent) during the celebration of the Department of Social Anthropology's fiftieth anniversary when she proposed that the future of the discipline should contain a more thorough and up to date training of master students for their first time on fieldwork. As I had changed the aim of my project from a multi-sited to a single-sited one, she asked: What are we missing out on when we select the odd and few in favor of the complex and many? While she fully supported my decision to focus on Terapolva she also asks if there is a tendency in anthropology to 'make small comprehensive villages out of complex urban realities' (Lien 2015: 190), and I can't but humbly agree with her. Considering how keen I was to conduct a multi-sited fieldwork and discover networks of vegan movement in big Buenos Aires, the acknowledgement that I "downscaled" my project to a miniscule group of people who saw themselves as outside the wider community, provokes a

slight disappointment with myself. But, as I pinpointed to my supervisor, the realization that Terapolva would be impossible without its surroundings has made me reconcile with my selection. I have wished to show that Terapolva exist within an urban context, and that by drawing up boundaries one is obliged to say something about what lies outside these. However, I support Professor Lien's call for equipping future students with more tools for doing fieldwork in urban contexts, and I can only speculate on how my thesis would have looked had I brought these with me in my ethnographic toolbox.

The (Re-)Cycle As Symbol

Sustaining a community's core values through recurring practices is crucial to its survival. When these practices and ideals include notions of a cyclical world where discarded materials and food is given renewed purpose, can we then speak of a community that is not only reproducing itself, but also recycling its own reality and turning it into a better one? The inhabitants of Terapolva arrive often in need of refuge (being unemployed, broke or lost in the endless life of backpacking) and thereby seeking purpose in the act of coming together to form a unity around ecological values. Isn't it then also room to look at this as a form of renewal of the individual life through group coherence? To this extent I will suggest that the recycling can be seen as a key symbol where the act of recycling serves as the key scenario (Ortner 1972: 1341), because "...many aspects of experience can be likened to, and illuminated by the comparison with, the symbol itself" (Ortner 1972: 1340). Inside this little community one could perhaps even speak of recycling as a certain 'total social fact' in which all elements of the community in one way or another are, or becomes part of, a cycle (Mauss 1995: 15). Marcel Mauss also wrote of the total social fact that it has the capacity to activate the whole society and its institutions, and that it creates connections between economical, juridical and religious aspects of social life (Mauss 1995: 210).

As *aldeanos* leave the village every day to go recycling on bicycles, they engage in a worldview that is circular and where all objects and living beings are given a place in the grand picture. The center of the village is *El Circulo*. It is where decisions are made, and where food is shared. Before every meal *aldeanos* join hands and meditate in a circle, connecting with *pacha mama* and the spiritual 'cycle of life'. A circular object (the full moon) initiates Terapolva's most important gathering, the *Reunion de Luna Llana*. As permaculture promotes a cyclical relationship with nature, where all species and practices have their place in a cyclical progression, so does the ideas of Mayan spirituality confirm this. Time is not linear, nor is the planet a finite one.

Between pillars of the past, the space in itself is a recycled one – a concrete base of an abandoned building that was given new life and purpose. When things are given new forms through recycling, the people who carry it out also become remade in a way (Alexander and Rino 2012: 3). I ask, then, rhetorically if Terapolva and its inhabitants also live in constant recycle of themselves – and if the act of recycling creates a possibility to reinvent individuals through the practices of community life.

Terapolva as Symbol

As my research question indicates I have sought to answer if the generating of meaning can be seen as a fundamental reason for Terapolva's existence, and if an idea of what the place is, or strive to be, is what connects autonomous individuals to the common project. The symbolic power of Terapolva is potent. Let us look at one last empirical example:

One day I passed by Omar while he was working with a machete in *La Huerta*, sweat dripping from his forehead in the scorching sun. I stopped to chat with him, and he immediately took our conversation to a contemplating level. He shared with me his frustrations about how he felt that most *aldeanos* seemed to slack off, not seeing the value and importance of the hard work he was doing. "This is the future", he said, pointing down to the soil he was standing on. He wanted me to know how Terapolva should be seen as an example of the right way of life for the future. "*Allá, eso es pasado*" (Over there, that is the past) he said, holding out a hand in direction of the city.

Omar's words made me think about the symbolic importance of Terapolva and how it can be characterized as a place with utopian dreams. The invention of a community between pillars of an abandoned university building, in the periphery of a city that have struggled with contamination and overproduction of waste for decades, might just embody the symbolic potency that is required to keep inhabitants coming, staying and (in some cases) returning. I propose to see Terapolva in itself as a symbol - a green lung within a gray metropolis. Terapolva becomes the place where urban realities and precarious situations are answered with dreams of a better life, a utopian reality.

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